

CHAPTER 4

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Nonverbal Communication



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When you have read and thought about this chapter, you will be able to

1. define nonverbal communication.
2. analyze how verbal and nonverbal codes are related.
3. describe types of nonverbal codes.
4. explain two sources of ambiguity in meaning for nonverbal codes.
5. apply strategies for improving your nonverbal communication.

This chapter focuses on the role of nonverbal codes in communication. The chapter first looks at the problems that can occur in interpreting nonverbal codes. Next, some of the major nonverbal codes are identified and defined, including bodily movement and facial expression, bodily appearance, space, time, touching, and vocal cues. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some solutions to the problems you might encounter in interpreting nonverbal codes.

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Steve Stine is a successful entrepreneur in Fargo, North Dakota. In the early

Steve Stine is a successful entrepreneur in Fargo, North Dakota. In the early 1990s, Steve started giving guitar lessons and eventually grew his business to the point of having over 110 students each week. Around 2011, Steve realized that, as a business person, practicing musician, and father, he simply did not have enough time in the day to grow his business more with in-person lessons. Therefore, Steve took his business online and now formally teaches guitar to thousands of students at any given time through his digital company  **GuitarZoom.com**. In addition to his formal lessons, Steve maintains a vibrant social media presence where his free lessons reach millions of guitar students; he recently surpassed more than 20 million views on YouTube and more than 500,000 subscribers to  **GuitarZoom.com**.

Steve does not look like a typical business person or music teacher. He has long hair and tattoos and typically wears some sort of rock-and-roll t-shirt. As Steve described himself during a personal interview with one of your authors, “I look basically the same as I did in high school. I’ve always had long hair. I’ve always been that rock guy. I grew up in the ’80s, and all of those bands were my idols.”

Steve explained how his appearance evolved from his various experiences and passions by stating, “I’m a family man. I love to play on stage and I love to teach, and I think my outer appearance is who I ended up being—its remnants of who I was and who I think I still am.” He went on to discuss the relationship between his physical appearance and the multiple roles he enacts as a business person, father, and teacher: “I have never fit that norm. . . . I’m very recognizable because of the way I look. My kids wouldn’t want me to get a haircut anyway. . . . The exterior of me comes off as this rock and roll guy. I wouldn’t say that person doesn’t exist. . . . I’ve never wanted to change with the norm, because I’m not even sure what that is. I have just always been me, in and out.” When asked if his physical appearance had a relationship to his business success, he responded, “If I wear [my] glasses on video, everyone comments on how weird that looks. If I put my hair in a ponytail, people freak out and ask if I cut it. So, [my appearance] has become part of the norm. . . . I wouldn’t change because it would sell more [lessons].”¹

Nonverbal communication is an important part of the messages we use. Steve’s story illustrates how aspects of nonverbal communication, such as clothing, hairstyle, and ornamentation such as tattoos, are important elements of how we define ourselves and communicate who we are to others. In this chapter you will learn about the broad range of nonverbal communication options available to you as a communicator.

Defining Nonverbal Communication

This chapter focuses on nonverbal communication and the relationship between nonverbal and verbal communication. The chapter should help you make sense of the most frequently seen nonverbal codes, as well as provide you with some suggestions for improving your nonverbal communication. Let us begin with a definition of nonverbal communication and a brief discussion of its significance.

Nonverbal communication is the process of using messages other than words to create meaning with others. Nonverbal communication can include behaviors that you see, such as facial expressions and gestures; things that you hear, such as vocal volume or the speed of talking; and even nonword vocalizations, such as “ahh” and “umm.” You know the importance of nonverbal communication in your own life. Each day you use facial expressions, a light touch or handshake, or even an emoji or animated GIF to express meaning using something other than words. Although it is difficult to estimate precisely how much communication is verbal or nonverbal, researchers estimate that between 60% and 90% of our daily communication behaviors are conducted nonverbally.² In fact, scholars argue that nonverbal communication cues show critical aspects of our personality that are perceived by others as we engage in any type of face-to-face communication.³ Also, recent research shows that nonverbal communication is one of the most important communication behaviors related to successful interpersonal relationships,⁴ strong rapport with customers,⁵ effective leadership,⁶ and successful outcomes in many other types of situations.

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Would you estimate that up to 90% of your own communication is nonverbal? Some have started to question the accuracy of that estimate. David Novak, a communication researcher and consultant, warns that attempting to specify percentages associated with particular communication codes, such as verbal and nonverbal communication, is misleading.⁷ Because he adopts a meaning-centered definition of communication, similar to the one you learned about in [Chapter 1](#), Novak argues that the process of communication prevents simple distinctions between verbal and nonverbal symbols. When you say “hello” to another person, that verbal symbol combines with nonverbal cues to create meaning through the communication process. The verbal and nonverbal symbols create meaning together, not separately, which makes any attempt at specifying a percentage of communication associated with any particular type of symbol unproductive. Novak concludes that the most productive way to understand nonverbal communication is to consider how it works in combination with other symbols, like words, to create meaning.

communicating creatively

Nonverbal Creativity During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Think for a moment about how nonverbal communication was affected by the pandemic. In the initial stages of the pandemic, we were physically isolated from

one another, which meant that something as meaningful as a comforting hug from a friend or family member was not always possible. As the pandemic progressed, face masks were common, which hampered our ability to read facial expressions. Much of our communication took place through remote online technologies, which presented their own challenges for nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication scholar Valarie Manusov argued that COVID-19 has had such an effect on nonverbal communication that we need new understandings of how nonverbal communication plays a role in our behaviors.

Consider some of the creative ways that you adapted your nonverbal behaviors to the pandemic. Did you create a special background for remote video calls? Did you take time to send someone a hand-written letter because you could not physically be with them? Did you use a certain mask to help fill in the lower part of your face, or was solid black or white your approach? As the pandemic abated, did you resume the practice of shaking hands? The pandemic was a contextual factor that dramatically impacted our communication; however, it also resulted in creative ways to compensate, some of which will likely remain with us for decades.



The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to be creative in how we use common nonverbal symbols.

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Source: Manusov, V. (2022). Love in the time of COVID-19: What we can learn about non-verbal behaviour from living with a pandemic. In R. J. Sternberg & A. Kostić (Eds.), *Nonverbal communication in close relationships: What words don't tell us* (pp. 251–275). Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-94492-6_10

How Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Are Related

Both verbal and nonverbal communication are essential for effective interactions with others. How are the two related? Researchers have studied the roles of verbal and nonverbal communication to determine which was more important in a persuasive message. Results showed that the content (verbal portion of the speech) was more important in determining the effect of the speech. However, emphasis and gestures added to some aspects of the presentation and caused the speech to be viewed as lively and powerful.⁸ In other words, both the verbal and the nonverbal elements of the speech were considered important for different reasons.

Verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors work together in the communication process to create meaning. That connectedness between verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors can be described in six ways: to repeat, to emphasize, to complement, to contradict, to substitute, and to regulate. Let us consider each of these briefly.

Repeating occurs when the same message is sent verbally and nonverbally. For example, you say that you are “excited” while also displaying a big smile and using animated hand gestures. Or you point to a paper when saying to your instructor, “I need to turn this assignment in early because I will be away during our next class meeting.” Pointing at the paper nonverbally repeats the words *this assignment*.

Emphasizing is the use of nonverbal cues to strengthen your message. Hugging a friend and telling him that you really care about him is a stronger statement than using either words or bodily movement alone.

Complementing is different from repeating in that it goes beyond duplicating the message in two channels. With complementing, the verbal and nonverbal codes add meaning to each other and expand the meaning of either message alone. For example, during an intense conversation you might hold up your palm to signal “stop” while you are making a point, signaling to the other person to avoid interrupting you. The verbal and nonverbal messages are independent but add meaning to each other for the listener.

Contradicting occurs when your verbal and nonverbal messages conflict. Often this occurs accidentally. If you have ever been angry at a teacher or parent, you may have stated verbally that you were fine—but your bodily movements, facial expression, and use of space may have exposed your actual feelings. Contradiction occurs intentionally in humor and sarcasm. Your words provide one message, but your nonverbal delivery tells how you really feel.

Substituting occurs when nonverbal codes are used instead of verbal codes. You roll your eyes, stick out your tongue, gesture thumbs down, or shrug. In most cases your intended message is fairly clear.

Regulating occurs when nonverbal codes are used to monitor and control interactions with others. For example, you look away when someone else is trying to talk and you are not finished with your thought. You walk away from someone who has hurt your feelings or made you angry. You nod your head and encourage another person to continue talking.

As we communicate, we naturally allow our verbal and nonverbal communication to interact using these techniques. However, they are not perfectly distinct categories. The raised-palm “stop” signal used while talking is both a complementary message and a regulating message. A tone of voice to suggest sarcasm is both complementing and contradicting. So, while you should understand how these relationships between verbal and nonverbal messages work, you should not assume that they represent perfectly distinct categories of behavior.

To better understand the relationship between verbal and nonverbal communication, consider how people use **American Sign Language (ASL)** to communicate mainly with people who are deaf or hard of hearing. As explained by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ASL is a complete language system that uses hand signs coupled with discrete facial expressions and body postures to convey meaning.⁹ Although precise census data do not exist, researchers generally estimate that more than 500,000 people use ASL in the United States.¹⁰ Individuals use many of the same types of nonverbal behaviors in ASL that we discuss in this chapter. However, because the language system has discrete meanings associated with particular hand signals, facial expressions, and body movements, ASL is different from the nonverbal communication behaviors we discuss. Nonverbal communication has many potential symbols and meanings, whereas ASL has much greater clarity on those issues for those who have learned the language. Stated simply, the multiple potential meanings interpreted from nonverbal communication make it distinct from ASL, which has nonverbal language rules that are more similar to verbal communication.

With this understanding of how nonverbal and verbal communication are related, we now turn to specific types of nonverbal behaviors, or what we call “codes.”

Nonverbal Codes

Nonverbal codes are messages consisting of symbols that are not words, including nonword vocalizations. Bodily movement and facial expression, physical attractiveness, the use of space, the use of time, touch, vocal cues, and clothing and artifacts are all nonverbal codes. Let us consider these systematic arrangements of symbols that have been given arbitrary meaning and are used in communication.

BODILY MOVEMENT AND FACIAL EXPRESSION

The study of bodily movements, including posture, gestures, and facial expressions, is called **kinesics**, a word derived from the Greek word *kinesis*, meaning “movement.” Some popular books purport to teach you how to “read” nonverbal communication so that you will know, for example, who is just kidding, and whom you should avoid. Nonverbal communication, however, is more complicated than that. Interpreting the meaning of nonverbal communication is partly a matter of assessing the other person’s unique behavior and considering the context. You don’t just “read” another person’s body language; instead, you observe, analyze, and interpret before you decide the probable meaning.

Assessing another person’s unique behavior means that you need to know how that person usually acts. A quiet person might be unflappable even in an emergency situation. A person who never smiles might not be unhappy, and someone who acts happy might not actually be happy. You need to know how the person expresses emotions before you can interpret what that person’s nonverbal communication means.

To look more deeply into interpreting nonverbal communication, let us consider the work of some experts on the subject: Albert Mehrabian, Paul Ekman, and Wallace Friesen.

Mehrabian studied nonverbal communication by considering its connection to how we display liking, status, and responsiveness.¹¹

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- *Liking* is expressed by forward leaning, a direct body orientation (such as standing face-to-face), close proximity, increased touching, relaxed posture, open arms and body, positive facial expression, and direct eye contact. Liking is essential in communication. For example, people who work for supervisors who engage in these kinds of behaviors tend to have higher self-reported satisfaction than do people who work for managers who do not use these behaviors.¹²
- *Status*, especially high status, is communicated nonverbally by large gestures, relaxed posture, and infrequent eye contact. During a conversation, an individual with high status might feel more comfortable using forceful gestures than would someone in a low-status role.
- *Responsiveness* is exhibited by movement toward the other person, spontaneous gestures, shifts in posture and position, and facial expressiveness. In other words, the face and body provide positive feedback to the other person.

Ekman categorized movement on the basis of its functions, origins, and meanings.¹³ The categories include emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adaptors.

- **Emblems** are nonverbal movements that substitute for words and phrases. Examples of emblems are a beckoning first finger to mean “come here,” an open hand held up to mean “stop,” and a forefinger and thumb forming a circle to mean “OK.” Be wary of emblems; they may mean something else in another culture.
- **Illustrators** are nonverbal movements that accompany or reinforce verbal messages. Examples of illustrators are nodding your head when you say yes, shaking your head when you say no, stroking your stomach when you say you are hungry, and shaking your fist in the air when you say, “Get out of here!” These nonverbal cues tend to be more universal than many in the other four categories of movement.
- **Affect displays** are nonverbal movements of the face and body used to show emotion. Watch people’s behavior when their favorite team wins a game, listen to the door slam when an angry person leaves the room, and watch men make threatening moves when they are very upset with each other but don’t really want to fistfight.
- **Regulators** are nonverbal movements that control the flow or pace of communication. Examples of regulators are starting to move away when you want the conversation to stop, gazing at the floor or looking away when you are not interested, and yawning and glancing at your watch when you are bored. Turn taking in conversations is generally managed with gestures, gaze, and touch. However, turn-taking regulators vary from one culture to another.¹⁴
- **Adaptors** are nonverbal movements that usually involve the unintended touching of our bodies or manipulations of a body artifact that serves some physical or psychological need. Some people habitually play with their hair, others adjust their glasses, and some even constantly rub or scratch their hands. We often use these adaptors without knowledge, but they could signal deep thought, anxiety, or distraction to observers.

Finally, Ekman and Friesen determined that people’s facial expressions provide information to others about how they feel.¹⁵ Consider the smile. Findings are overwhelming that a person who smiles is rated more positively than a person who uses a neutral facial expression. Indeed, you are more likely to be offered a job if you smile.¹⁶

Perhaps a more provocative finding is that people pay more attention to faces that are angry or threatening and less attention to neutral facial expressions. When adults were presented with multiple faces, including some that appeared threatening, they were more likely to attend to the angry faces than they were to others. Even children have this bias.¹⁷ This response to threatening stimuli may have evolved as a protective means to help people avoid danger.

What is the effect of showing disagreement with a negative facial expression and head shaking, compared to using a neutral facial expression? In a study investigating opponents who stood behind a political speaker and displayed neutral facial expression, occasional negative facial expression, constant negative expression, or both negative and positive expression,



surprising results were found. When either negative or negative and positive expressions were used, respondents viewed the speaker as less credible, less appropriate, and less skillful in debate than those with neutral expressions.¹⁸ In other words, some positive facial expressions did not lessen the negative response toward the speaker.

communicating with agility

Showing Cooperation by Synchronizing Facial Expressions

Think of situations where you are trying to work something out with another person. Perhaps it is deciding on a place for dinner, negotiating a price with a merchant, or trying to get agreement from your supervisor on how to complete a task. What behaviors might help you signal a cooperative outcome? Recent research reported in the journal *Emotion* found that when two participants began to synchronize, or mirror, their nonverbal behaviors, cooperative outcomes were more likely. This was even true when participants were not allowed to talk. In fact, when not allowed to talk, participants increased their nonverbal behaviors and were far more likely to synchronize their nonverbal expressions. With this knowledge, you can be more agile as a communicator by carefully monitoring another's nonverbal behaviors and synchronizing yours with theirs when appropriate. In situations where you agree with what the other person is saying, you can attempt to mirror their nonverbal expressiveness to implicitly signal cooperation.



Facial expressions show us what others are feeling.

MStudioImages/Getty Images

Facial expressions are important in conveying information to others and in learning what others are feeling. Bodily movement and orientation add to that information by suggesting how intense the feeling might be. When you are able to observe and interpret both facial expression and bodily movement, you gain a fuller understanding of the other person's message.

The connection between facial expression and body movement is commonly observed through head nodding. Take a moment to observe others in conversation and pay particular attention to head movements. Nodding the head up and down often acts as an illustrator to accompany verbal agreement. This type of illustrator is so innate that its importance even carries over into virtual environments. Researchers in the United Kingdom programmed avatars in a virtual world to closely follow realistic head nodding behaviors observed in humans, such as having the head nods happen in response to what the other person is saying.¹⁹ When study participants engaged in virtual interactions with those avatars, they reported significantly more trust and liking of those characters than they did for avatars that had more random and preprogrammed head movements. Head movements and facial expressions are important cues that help establish shared meaning with others.

building behaviors

DON'T FORGET THE 🙄

Partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly everyone has dramatically increased their online communication activity with apps like Microsoft Teams and Slack. Because chat messages are replacing some of the communication that formerly took place in person or over a phone, we naturally adapt our communication behaviors. For instance, the pandemic caused many people to drastically improve their emoji game.

Researchers exploring the use of emojis in the workplace found that the amount of emoji use by employees could accurately predict the likelihood that an employee would quit. Not surprisingly, employees who used more emojis in their workplace chats were far less likely to resign in comparison to employees who used few emojis. Although the researchers observed this relationship, their study could not definitely conclude why this observed relationship existed.

One possibility is that if you are more engaged by work, you are more likely to be engaged online and use more emojis. Think about how your use of emojis could play a role in your workplace satisfaction. If you frequently use emojis, how do you think your peers or even supervisors could react to you? By using emojis, you may create a perception of likability that causes others to engage with you more, which may improve your own engagement. Of course, too much of a good thing can appear frantic, so don't overdo it!

emoji: Yayayoyo/Shutterstock

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Physical attractiveness is the perceived desirability of another person's outward physical appearance. How people perceive physical attractiveness remains subjective—it is in the eye of the beholder. However, scholars and researchers point to evolutionary psychology to explain general features of attractiveness.²⁰ For instance, males who have a rugged, athletic look may be perceived as stronger and more formidable, which could be linked to historic indications of someone who would be good at protecting a family or tribe. In fact, one study found that perceptions of physical strength, tallness, and leanness accounted for approximately 80% of raters' perceptions of physical attractiveness.²¹ For females, similar historic patterns have been observed, where female body types that appear more fit may be perceived as desirable because, historically, that could signal greater chances of survivability. In essence, evolutionary perspectives on physical attractiveness assert that fitness in both males and females is desirable and, thus, is perceived as more attractive.

If historic perceptions of attractiveness guide the impressions of others, what communicative value could attractiveness have? In contrast to the evolutionary psychology scholars, other researchers who generally adopt a social construction perspective suggest that attractiveness is dictated not by evolution but, rather, by the social norms of a culture and situation. For instance, marketing researchers Haiyang Yang and Leonard Lee argued that our perceptions of beauty change regularly based on our impressions of what others think is attractive—they are socially constructed.²² Such group-based norms could explain why certain hair styles or clothing choices can cause a person to be perceived as more attractive to those who share similar norms and preferences than to others—they are consistent with group norms. By implication, we do use artifacts and other aspects of our appearance as signals to others about our adherence to culturally created norms, and those behaviors can affect how others perceive our attractiveness.

This culturally based understanding of beauty has profound implications. In her 1991 book *The Beauty Myth*, feminist scholar Naomi Wolf criticized the ways in which beauty standards have been used as a tool to control how women dress and how they style their makeup and hair, as well as the standards by which beauty has been evaluated.²³ In essence, Wolf sought to challenge the culturally accepted norms of beauty. In 2018, applied ethicist Heather Widdows published a follow-up to Wolf's book titled *Perfect Me: Beauty as an Ethical Ideal* in which she argued that in today's digital culture, beauty standards have been heightened to an ethical ideal by which people judge themselves as good or bad, successful or unsuccessful.²⁴ Importantly, both Wolf and Widdows observed that many beauty standards are created by commercialized notions of what constitutes beauty. Clothing, makeup, and other accessories and cosmetic procedures to enhance beauty are all enormous businesses. Others make money by convincing people to look a certain way, such as the fitness industry that promotes specific body norms achieved through memberships in gyms and fitness centers. In fact, some observers have argued that the privileged nature of beauty—meaning that beauty is expensive—has led to a normalization of dissatisfaction with our own bodies.²⁵

Because contemporary research shows that perceptions of physical attractiveness change according to cultural norms, scholars have attempted to explore how easily those norms change. In an experiment designed to mimic a dating site, researchers asked participants to quickly rate the attractiveness of other people based on their pictures.²⁶ What they found was that any particular face was more likely to be rated as attractive if the previous face was also attractive; in contrast, a face was more likely to be rated as unattractive if the previous face was also rated as unattractive. This research indicates that physical attractiveness is, in general, an initial impression that we form and one that is highly influenced by the situation and context.

As a nonverbal code, physical attractiveness is rarely something that we directly control while we are communicating. However, the ways in which people perceive physical attractiveness is something that could influence communication, along with many other variables such as messages, effective listening, and the context. Although physical attractiveness may impact initial impressions, our perceptions of others are more complex and varied. In other words, as we get to know someone, our initial impressions of physical attractiveness have less of an impact as we learn more about the other person. Research reported in the *Journal of Personal Relationships* shows that when individuals have good personalities, others are more likely to view them as desirable friends and romantic partners and rate their physical attractiveness as higher than those with bad personalities.²⁷ Other recent studies have also shown that bias in favor of attractive job candidates can be counteracted by supposedly less attractive candidates who establish a more powerful nonverbal posture by being expressive, attentive, and confident.²⁸

We can be optimistic that beauty standards are becoming more inclusive and diverse. One indication is that *People* magazine, known for its “Most Beautiful” issues, expanded the number of people included in the feature and renamed the issue “The Beautiful Issue.” Editor Jess Cagle wrote in a preview of the issue, “[It] will feature beautiful women (and a few men) of all shapes, sizes and colors, and it will celebrate the most beautiful qualities of all: strength, humanity and artistry.”²⁹ This change is important, and the hope is that such trends continue to the point that virtues are emphasized over commercially developed standards for how people look. As communicators, we have the ability to be part of such change. When we communicate with others, we can make choices about what we emphasize with respect to attractiveness. If we choose to focus on virtues other than commercialized norms of physical attractiveness, our small steps can be part of a larger societal change.



SPACE

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall introduced the concept of **proxemics**—the study of the human use of space and distance—in his 1966 book *The Hidden Dimension*.³⁰ Across scholarly writing on this topic, two concepts considered essential to the study of the use of space are territoriality and personal space.

- *Territoriality* refers to the need to establish and maintain certain spaces as your own. In a shared residence hall room, items on a common desk area mark territory. For example, you might place your notebook, pens, and tablet charger on the right side of the desk and your roommate might place books, a cell phone, and a laptop on the left side. While the desk is shared, you are each claiming part of the area. On a cafeteria table the placement of the plate, glass, napkin, and eating utensils marks the territory. In a neighborhood it might be fences, hedges, trees, or rocks that mark the territory. All are nonverbal indicators that signal ownership.
- *Personal space* is the personal “bubble” that moves around with you. It is the distance you maintain between yourself and others, the amount of space you claim as your own. Large people usually claim more space because of their size, and men often take more space than women. For example, in a lecture hall, observe who claims the armrests as part of their personal bubbles.

Hall was the first to define the four distances people regularly use while they communicate.³¹ His categories have been helpful in understanding the communicative behavior that might occur when two people are a particular distance from each other. From the closest contact and least personal space to the greatest distance, Hall’s categories are intimate distance, personal distance, social distance, and public distance.

- *Intimate distance* is a radius of 18 inches or less around a person, and it is used by people who are relationally close. Used more often in private than in public, this intimate distance is employed to show affection, to give comfort, and to protect. When we are attracted to others, we tend to try to stand or sit closer to them because being in intimate space zones has the potential to create positive perceptions, feelings of satisfaction, and closeness.³²
- *Personal distance* ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet, and it is the distance used by most Americans for conversation and other nonintimate exchanges.
- *Social distance* ranges from 4 to 12 feet, and it is used most often to carry out business in the workplace, especially in formal, less personal situations. The higher the status people possess, the greater the distance they tend to place between themselves and others.
- *Public distance* exceeds 12 feet and is used most often in public speaking in such settings as places of worship, courtrooms, and convention halls. Professors often stand at this distance while lecturing.

Distance, then, is a nonverbal means of communicating everything from the size of your personal bubble to your relationship with the person to whom you are speaking or listening. A

great deal of research has been done on proxemics. Generally speaking, people's sex, size, and similarity seem to be among the important determiners of how they use personal space and perceive the use of personal space by others.

Gender also affects the amount of space people are given and the space in which they choose to communicate.³³ Those who orient more toward masculinity tend to take up and control more space, whereas those who do not orient that way tend to take up and control less space. Even children learn to use space for safety and protection. Because gender orientations are often associated with biological sexes (men tend to be masculine and women tend to be feminine), you can easily see these characteristics play out if you observe others. Men tend to keep distance from other men when talking whereas women tend to stand closer, especially when talking with other women. When children are talking to parents, they tend to stand very close.

Your relationship to other people is related to your use of space. You stand closer to friends and farther from people you dislike. You stand farther from strangers, authority figures, high-status people, physically challenged people, and people from racial groups different from your own. You stand closer to people you perceive as similar or unthreatening, and that closeness communicates trust.

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The physical setting also can alter the use of space. People tend to stand closer together in large rooms and farther apart in small rooms.³⁴ In addition, physical obstacles and furniture arrangements can affect the use of personal space. We even use space when online. By friending, following, or connecting with people on social media, you invite them into your virtual space through your personal profile. Connecting online is similar to taking a step closer to someone in a face-to-face situation. Some apps even use location tagging to help us know when we are in proximity to contacts and friends.

The cultural background of the people communicating also must be considered in the evaluation of personal space. Hall was among the first to recognize the importance of cultural background when he was training American service personnel for service overseas. In 1963, he wrote:

Americans overseas were confronted with a variety of difficulties because of cultural differences in the handling of space. People stood "too close" during conversations, and when the Americans backed away to a comfortable conversational distance, this was taken to mean that Americans were cold, aloof, withdrawn, and disinterested in the people of the country. USA housewives muttered about "waste-space" in houses in the Middle East. In England, Americans who were used to neighborliness were hurt when they discovered that their neighbors were no more accessible or friendly than other people, and in Latin America, exurbanites, accustomed to unfenced yards, found that the high walls there made them feel "shut out." Even in Germany, where so many of my countrymen felt at home, radically different patterns in the use of space led to unexpected tensions.³⁵

Cultural background can result in great differences in the use of space and in people's interpretation of such use. As our world continues to shrink, more people will be working in

multinational corporations, regularly traveling to different countries, and interacting with others from a variety of backgrounds. Sensitivity to space use in different cultures and quick, appropriate responses to those variations are imperative.

TIME

Temporal communication, or **chronemics**, is the way that people organize and use time and the messages that are created because of their organization and use of that time. Time can be examined on a macro level. How do you perceive the past, future, and present? Some people value the past and collect photographs and souvenirs to remind themselves of times gone by. They emphasize how things have been. Others live in the future and are always chasing dreams or planning future events. They may be more eager when planning a vacation or party than they are when the event arrives. Still others live in the present and savor the current time. They try to live each day to its fullest and neither lament the past nor show concern for the future.

One distinction that has been drawn that helps us understand how individuals view and use time differently is the contrast between monochronic and polychronic people. *Monochronic* people view time as very serious and they complete one task at a time. Often their jobs are more important to them than anything else—perhaps even including their families. Monochronic people view privacy as important. They tend to work independently, and they rarely borrow or lend money or other items. They may appear to be secluded or even isolated. Although we cannot generalize to all people, we may view particular countries as generally monochronic. They include the United States, Canada, Germany, and Switzerland. In contrast, *polychronic* people work on several tasks at a time. Time is important, but it is not revered. Interpersonal relationships are more important to them than their work. Polychronic individuals tend to be highly engaged with others. Again, without generalizing to all people, countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, and the Philippines tend to be polychronic.

Your orientation toward time can affect how you relate with others. If you are a monochronic person who works or regularly communicates with a polychronic person, you both might feel frustrated with how the other person uses time.³⁶ However, when you communicate with others who follow your norms for time, you may have more positive perceptions of them. A group of communication researchers were interested in how students in the United States, a monochronic culture, perceived the issue of time, or chronemics, as it relates to email interactions with their teachers. In their study they found that when teachers responded more quickly to emails, students tended to perceive those teachers as more socially attractive, more competent, more caring, and of higher character.³⁷

building behaviors

Time Flies

We become better communicators as we are able to distinguish between others' varying behaviors. In the next week, observe at least three of your friends

varying behaviors. In the next week, observe at least three of your friends. Describe how each of them uses time differently. Do they tend to be more monochronic or polychronic? What cues did you use to make this assessment? How can you be more effective in your communication with them if they are monochronic? If they are polychronic? Consider adaptations that you can make when you communicate with people who are strongly monochronic or polychronic.

TOUCH

Tactile communication is the use of touch in communication. Because touch always involves invasion of another person's personal space, it commands attention. It can be welcome, as when a crying child is held by a parent, or unwelcome, as in sexual harassment. Our need for and appreciation of tactile communication start early in life.³⁸ Psychologist William Schutz observed:

The unconscious parental feelings communicated through touch or lack of touch can lead to feelings of confusion and conflict in a child. Sometimes a "modern" parent will say all the right things but not want to touch the child very much. The child's confusion comes from the inconsistency of levels: if they really approve of me so much like they say they do, why don't they touch me?³⁹

Researchers have found that the need for touch is both biologically and socially part of what it means to be human.⁴⁰ Because touch is an important signal of intimacy and affection, it fulfills our psychological and social needs for affection while calming us. A hug can be powerful and calming in the right circumstances.

For adults, touch is a powerful means of communication. Touch is usually perceived as positive, pleasurable, and reinforcing. The association of touch with the warmth and caring that began in infancy carries over into adulthood. People who are comfortable with touch are more likely to be satisfied with their past and current lives. They are self-confident, assertive, socially acceptable, and active in confronting problems. Think about how you use nonverbal communication. Are you comfortable touching and being touched? Do you frequently hug others or shake hands with others?

Touch is part of many important rituals. In business settings, a handshake can signal commitment or agreement. At the conclusion of athletic games, players and coaches from opposing teams shake hands, bump fists, or even sometimes hug to reestablish camaraderie after competition.⁴¹ In the Christian religious practice of baptism, there can range from as little as a touch on the head during the ceremony to as much as a total immersion in water. Rituals of touch permeate many aspects of our lives to such an extent that they become second nature.

Touch is also an important aspect of healing and caregiving. Physician Bernie Siegel wrote the following in his book on mind-body communication:

I'd like to see some teaching time devoted to the healing power of touch—a subject that only 12 of 169 medical schools in the English-speaking world deal with at all . . . despite the fact that touch is one of the most basic forms of communication between people. . . . We need to teach medical students how to touch people.⁴²

Siegel's appeal did not go unheard. A number of medical schools are now training their students to decode patients' nonverbal cues and to provide nonverbal communication, including touch, to their patients.⁴³ However, the results of the training are mixed; though students' awareness of nonverbal communication increases, their actual performance does not.⁴⁴

Touch is typically perceived differently depending on gender. Although there are always individual differences in preferences and communication style, psychology researchers Matthew Hertenstein and Dacher Keltner observed the following:⁴⁵

- Males tend to initiate touch more often than females.
- Women are more likely than men to perceive touch from an opposite-gender stranger as unpleasant.
- When women perceive touch as sexual from a male stranger, they are less likely to perceive the touch as friendly.
- When men are touched by a female stranger and perceive it as sexual, they tend to perceive the touch as friendly.

Whereas gender influences the social norms surrounding how touch is perceived, the communication setting is also important. For example, in business settings the concern of being accused of sexual harassment has eliminated a great deal of touch except for handshaking. When touch is used in such settings, the general nonverbal principle is that the higher-status individual gets to initiate touch, but touch is not reciprocal: the president might pat you on the back for a job well done, but in our society you don't pat back. We even see the importance of touch in online communication settings. Take a look at your Instagram feed and you will see how often pictures of people touching are posted. Indeed, new communication tools provide opportunities for hundreds or even thousands of people to witness our use of touch with others.⁴⁶

Further, culture determines the frequency and kind of nonverbal communication. People from different countries handle nonverbal communication differently—even something as simple as touch.⁴⁷ Sidney Jourard, a respected humanistic psychologist, determined the rates of touch per hour among adults from various cultures. In a coffee shop, adults in San Juan, Puerto Rico, touched 180 times per hour, whereas those in Paris, France, touched about 110 times per hour, followed by those in Gainesville, Florida, who touched about twice per hour, and those in London, England, who touched only once per hour.

Touch sends such a powerful message that it has to be handled with responsibility.

Touch may be welcomed by some in work or clinical settings, but it is equally likely that touch

The Ambiguity of Nonverbal Codes

Just as people have difficulty interpreting verbal symbols, they also struggle to interpret nonverbal codes. The ambiguity of nonverbal communication occurs for two reasons: people use the same code to communicate a variety of meanings, and they use a variety of codes to communicate the same meaning.

ONE CODE COMMUNICATES A VARIETY OF MEANINGS

The ambiguity of nonverbal codes occurs in part because one code may communicate several different meanings. For example, the nonverbal code of raising your right hand may mean that you are taking an oath, you are demonstrating for a cause, you are indicating to an instructor that you would like to answer a question, a physician is examining your right side, or you want a taxi to stop for you. Also consider how you may stand close to someone because of a feeling of affection, because the room is crowded, or because you have difficulty hearing. In these examples, the context, or situation, provides important information for how to interpret each code.

Recently, researchers interested in artificial intelligence (AI) have attempted to precisely decode the multiplicity of meanings associated with nonverbal communication.⁶⁵ Despite some successes, such as the ability for AI systems—and potentially even phone apps—to accurately read emotions through facial expressions, the task is daunting. When humans form a facial expression, they use an estimated 10,000 possible combinations of facial muscle movements. Like AI systems, humans naturally process such facial movements as codes that signal meaning. (Humans are currently more efficient than computers.) However, the complexity of so many simultaneous signals means that accurate perception and interpretation of such signals can be challenging, even for the best communicators.

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A VARIETY OF CODES COMMUNICATE THE SAME MEANING

Nonverbal communication is not a science; any number of codes may be used to communicate the same meaning. One example is the many nonverbal ways by which adults communicate love or affection. You may sit or stand more closely to someone you love. You might speak more softly, use a certain vocal intonation, or alter how quickly you speak when you communicate with someone with whom you are affectionate. Or perhaps you choose to dress differently when you are going to be in the company of someone you love.

Cultural differences are especially relevant when we consider that multiple cues may be used to express a similar message. How do you show respect to a speaker in a public speaking situation? In some cultures listeners show respect when they avert their eyes; in other cultures listeners show respect and attention by looking directly at the speaker. You may believe that



listeners show respect and attention by looking directly at the speaker. You may believe that showing your emotions is an important first step in resolving conflict, whereas a classmate may feel that emotional responses interfere with conflict resolution. Although you may have a strong understanding of which codes carry certain meanings in your own culture, those meanings may change completely when interacting with someone from a different culture.

Improving Nonverbal Communication

Skills in being able to effectively interpret and respond to nonverbal cues vary greatly among individuals. You can improve your understanding of nonverbal communication, though, by being sensitive to context, audience, and feedback.

The *context* includes the physical setting, the occasion, and the situation. In conversation, your vocal cues are rarely a problem unless you have distracting speaking habits such as speaking too quickly and using filler words, or you have a speech disorder such as a stutter or a pronounced lisp. Paralinguistic features loom large in importance in small-group communication. For instance, you may need to adapt for distance by talking louder to be heard by people who are sitting far apart. Paralinguistic features are perhaps most important in public speaking because you have to adjust volume and rate, you have to enunciate more clearly, and you have to introduce more vocal variety to keep the audience's attention. The strategic use of pauses and silence is also more apparent in public speaking than it is in an interpersonal context in conversations or small-group discussion. In addition to your vocal cues, the context could affect other nonverbal communication. For example, intercultural contexts could determine the types of bodily movements that are considered appropriate. For instance, in Thailand there is a very specific nonverbal gesture, which looks similar to the “praying” gesture in America, that accompanies greetings and goodbyes.



The occasion and physical setting also affect the potential meaning of a nonverbal cue. For example, when would it be appropriate for you to wear a cap over unwashed, uncombed hair, and when would doing so be interpreted as inappropriate? The distance at which you communicate may be different based on the setting and the occasion: you may stand farther away from people in formal situations when space allows but closer to family members or to strangers in an elevator.

The *audience* makes a difference in your nonverbal communication, so you have to adapt. When speaking to children, you must use a simple vocabulary and careful enunciation, articulation, and pronunciation. If you are speaking to an audience that includes people who are deaf or hard of hearing, you may need to speak louder or ask a sign-language interpreter to assist. Generally, children and older people in both interpersonal and public-speaking situations appreciate slower speech. Also, adaptation to an audience may determine your choice of clothing, hairstyle, and jewelry. For instance, a job interview will most likely require business attire to signal professionalism and credibility.

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Your attention to giving *feedback* can be very important in helping others interpret your nonverbal cues that might otherwise distract your listeners. While you are giving a speech, your listeners' own descriptive feedback—giving quizzical looks, staring, or nodding off—can signal you to talk louder, introduce variety, restate your points, or clarify your message. You can even use nonverbal communication to give your audience feedback. Suppose that you ask the audience a question during the beginning remarks in your presentation, and no one offers an answer. Some speakers might raise their own hand to signal that they are actually seeking a response.

If your conversational partner or audience does not provide you with feedback, what can you do? Practice asking questions and checking on the perceptions of others with whom you communicate. Silence has many meanings, and you sometimes must take great effort to interpret the lack of feedback in a communicative setting. You can also consider your past experience with particular individuals or a similar audience. Do they ever provide feedback? Under what circumstances are they expressive? How can you become more accurate in your interpretation of their feedback?

Although this chapter only introduces you to nonverbal communication, you know that your success in college and in the workplace is dependent on your sensitivity to nonverbal cues and your ability to alter familiar nonverbal cues, given the context and the situation. The following are some suggestions you can use to begin analyzing and improving your own nonverbal communication behaviors:

1. Establish eye contact and demonstrate interest through bodily movement and the use of space and artifacts. A growing concern in our culture is the amount of time that people spend with their smart devices, which are artifacts. How much time do you spend on Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube? Do you plan on “media-free” time while in class, while studying, and while at work? In a recent study, professors attempted to curtail the use of text messaging in class by using positive facial expressions, standing closer to the students, using

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a relaxed stance, and speaking in an animated manner, but these behaviors did not discourage the use of handheld devices.⁶⁶ Consider what you might do to show interest during all communication situations and to avoid being distracted by your phone or unintentionally signaling disinterest through other nonverbal behaviors.

2. Recognize that others may use time differently than you do. In general, it is important to be on time, especially in monochronic cultures such as the United States. You should also think about how your behaviors cause time-stress for others. Waiting until the last minute to ask a critical question, such as how to do an assignment or complete a job task, can cause stress on those on whom you depend.
3. Manage your time to maximize success. Whether you are budgeting time for school activities or attempting to balance your time between work and family, you must make choices that promote success in personal and professional areas. How you choose to budget your time signals to others what you deem as important and also influences how you are able to accomplish important tasks.
4. Manage your time in your interactions with others. Allow others to share their experiences, and be willing to exchange talk time. Do you tend to interrupt or overlap your statements with others' while they are talking? Try your best to allow others a full hearing.
5. Be aware of professional norms that guide nonverbal communication behaviors. Touching, using intimate physical space, requiring time alone after hours, and engaging in other such behaviors are generally inappropriate.
6. Dress appropriately for the situation. Many students have relaxed standards for classroom attire, as permitted by their schools. However, when you transition out of the student role and into the employee role, even if that is as a student-worker on your campus, you will likely need to wear business casual clothing.
7. Avoid using overly dramatic nonverbal behaviors to intentionally or unintentionally signal disagreement. Most people appreciate hearing about differences in opinions, but they do not value sneers or being mocked.

sizing things up

Berkeley Nonverbal Expressiveness Questionnaire

In this chapter you learned that nonverbal communication is used to express meaning generally and emotion in particular. Each statement below describes ways in which you express your emotions through nonverbal communication. Respond to each statement using the following scale. A guide for interpreting your responses appears at the end of the chapter.

1 = Strongly disagree

2

3



1. Whenever I feel positive emotions, people can easily see exactly what I am feeling.
2. I sometimes cry during sad movies.
3. People often do not know what I am feeling.
4. I laugh out loud when someone tells me a joke that I think is funny.
5. It is difficult for me to hide my fear.
6. When I'm happy, my feelings show.
7. My body reacts very strongly to emotional situations.
8. I've learned it is better to suppress my anger than to show it.
9. No matter how nervous or upset I am, I tend to keep a calm exterior.
10. I am an emotionally expressive person.
11. I have strong emotions.
12. I am sometimes unable to hide my feelings, even though I would like to.
13. Whenever I feel negative emotions, people can easily see exactly what I am feeling.
14. There have been times when I have not been able to stop crying even though I tried to stop.
15. I experience my emotions very strongly.
16. What I'm feeling is written all over my face.

Source: Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (1997). Revealing feelings: Facets of emotional expressivity in self-reports, peer ratings, and behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 438.

engaging diversity

Understanding Differences in Nonverbal Communication

A variety of characteristics can be used to identify distinctions among cultures—many of which include nonverbal differences in how we use gestures, space, touch, and even time. If you come from a country other than the United States, the amount of nonverbal adaptation you will need to undertake depends on how similar your culture is to U.S. culture. Although many nonverbal characteristics