AFTER STUDYING THE MATERIAL IN THIS CHAPTER

You should understand:
1. The characteristics of nonverbal communication.
2. The differences between verbal and nonverbal communication.
3. How culture and gender influence nonverbal communication.
4. The functions that nonverbal communication can serve.
5. How the types of nonverbal communication described in this chapter function.

You should be able to:
1. Identify and describe nonverbal behavior of yourself and others in various contexts.
2. Identify nonverbal behaviors that repeat, substitute for, complement, accent, regulate, and contradict verbal messages.
3. Recognize the emotional and relational dimensions of your own nonverbal behavior.
4. Share your interpretation of another person's nonverbal behavior in a tentative manner when such sharing is appropriate.
Nonverbal Communication

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Nonverbal communication has several important characteristics:

- Unlike verbal communication, it is always present when people encounter one another and in many situations where they aren’t physically present.
- It has great value in conveying information about others, and much of that information isn’t something others intentionally want to reveal.
- It is especially useful in suggesting how others feel about you and the relationship, although nonverbal messages are much more ambiguous than verbal communication.

While much nonverbal communication is universal, some factors do shape the way we express ourselves and understand others.

- Culture shapes many nonverbal practices.
- Gender plays a role in the way we communicate.

Nonverbal communication serves many functions, when compared to verbal messages.

- It can repeat, complement, and accent spoken words.
- Sometimes it can substitute for speech.
- It can regulate spoken conversation.
- It can contradict spoken words, or even deceive others.

There are many types of nonverbal communication including:

- Posture and gesture
- Face and eyes
- Voice
- Touch
- Physical appearance and attractiveness
- Distance and territory
- Time
- Physical environment
There is often a big gap between what people say and what they feel. An acquaintance says, “I’d like to get together again” in a way that leaves you suspecting the opposite. (But how do you know?) A speaker tries to appear confident but acts in a way that almost screams out, “I’m nervous!” (What tells you this?) You ask a friend what’s wrong, and the “nothing” you get in response rings hollow. (Why does it sound untrue?)

Then, of course, there are times when another’s message comes through even though there are no words at all. A look of irritation, a smile, a sigh—signs like these can say more than a torrent of words.

All situations like these have one point in common—the message was sent nonverbally. The goal of this chapter is to introduce you to this world of nonverbal communication. Although you have certainly recognized nonverbal messages before, the following pages should introduce you to a richness of information you have never noticed. And though your experience won’t transform you into a mind reader, it will make you a far more accurate observer of others—and yourself.

We need to begin our study of nonverbal communication by defining this term. At first this might seem like a simple task. If non means “not” and verbal means “words,” then nonverbal communication appears to mean “communication without words.” This is a good starting point after we distinguish between vocal communication (by mouth) and verbal communication (with words). After this distinction is made, it becomes clear that some nonverbal messages are vocal, and some are not. Likewise, although many verbal messages are vocal, some aren’t. Table 5–1 illustrates these differences.

What about languages that don’t involve words? Does American Sign Language, for example, qualify as nonverbal communication? Most scholars would say not. Keeping this fact in mind, we arrive at a working definition of nonverbal communication: “oral and nonoral messages expressed by other than linguistic means.” This rules out not only sign languages but also written words, but it includes messages transmitted by vocal means that don’t involve language—sighs, laughs, and other utterances we will discuss soon.

### Characteristics of Nonverbal Communication

Our brief definition only hints at the richness of nonverbal messages. You can begin to understand their prevalence by trying a simple experiment. Spend an hour or so around a group of people who are speaking a language you don’t understand. (You might find such a group in the foreign students’ lounge on campus,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-1 Types of Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocal Communication</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonvocal Communication</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonverbal Communication</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of voice, sighs, screams, vocal qualities (loudness, pitch, and so on)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestures, movement, appearance, facial expression, and so on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in an advanced language class, or in an ethnic neighborhood.) Your goal is to see how much information you can learn about the people you're observing from means other than the verbal messages they transmit. This experiment will reveal several characteristics of nonverbal communication.

**Nonverbal Communication Exists**

Your observations in the experiment show clearly that even without understanding speech it is possible to get an idea about how others are feeling. You probably noticed that some people were in a hurry, whereas others seemed happy, confused, withdrawn, or deep in thought. The point is that without any formal experience you were able to recognize and to some degree interpret messages that other people sent nonverbally. In this chapter, we want to sharpen the skills you already have and to give you a better grasp of the vocabulary of nonverbal language.

**Nonverbal Behavior Has Communicative Value**

The pervasiveness of nonverbal communication brings us to its second characteristic: It’s virtually impossible to not communicate nonverbally. Suppose you were instructed to avoid communicating any messages at all. What would you do? Close your eyes? Withdraw into a ball? Leave the room? As the photo on this page illustrates, the meaning of some nonverbal behavior can be ambiguous, but it always has communicative value.

Of course, we don’t always intend to send nonverbal messages. Unintentional nonverbal behaviors differ from intentional ones. For example, we often stammer, blush, frown, and sweat without meaning to do so. Some theorists argue that unintentional behavior may provide information, but it shouldn’t count as communication. Others draw the boundaries of nonverbal communication more broadly, suggesting that even unconscious and unintentional behavior conveys messages and thus is worth studying as communication. We take the broad view here because, whether or not our nonverbal behavior is intentional, others recognize it and take it into account when responding to us.

Although nonverbal behavior reveals information, we aren’t always conscious of what we are communicating nonverbally. In one study, less than a quarter of experimental subjects who had been instructed to show increased or decreased liking of a partner could describe the nonverbal behaviors they used. Furthermore, just because communicators are nonverbally expressive doesn’t mean that others will tune into the abundance of unspoken messages that are available. One study comparing the richness of e-mail to in-person communication confirmed the greater amount of information available in face-to-face conversations, but it also showed that some communicators (primarily men) failed to recognize these messages.
The fact that you and everyone around you are constantly sending nonverbal clues is important because it means that you have a constant source of information available about yourself and others. If you can tune into these signals, you will be more aware of how those around you are feeling and thinking, and you will be better able to respond to their behavior.

**Nonverbal Communication Is Primarily Relational**

Some nonverbal messages serve utilitarian functions. For example, a police officer directs the flow of traffic, and a team of street surveyors uses hand motions to coordinate its work. But nonverbal communication also serves a far more common (and more interesting) series of social functions.5

One important social function of nonverbal communication involves identity management. Chapter 2 discussed how we strive to create an image of ourselves as we want others to view us. Nonverbal communication plays an important role in this process—in many cases more important than verbal communication. Consider, for example, what happens when you attend a party where...
you are likely to meet strangers you would like to get to know better. Instead of projecting your image verbally (“Hi! I’m attractive, friendly, and easygoing”), you behave in ways that will present this identity. You might smile a lot, and perhaps try to strike a relaxed pose. It’s also likely that you dress carefully—even if the image involves looking as if you hadn’t given a lot of attention to your appearance.

Along with identity management, nonverbal communication allows us to define the kind of relationships we want to have with others. You can appreciate this fact by thinking about the wide range of ways you could behave when greeting another person. You could wave, shake hands, nod, smile, clap the other person on the back, give a hug, or avoid all contact. Each one of these decisions would send a message about the nature of your relationship with the other person.

Nonverbal communication performs a third valuable social function: conveying emotions that we may be unwilling or unable to express—or ones we may not even be aware of. In fact, nonverbal communication is much better suited to expressing attitudes and feelings than ideas. You can prove this for yourself by imagining how you could express each item on the following list nonverbally:

- You’re bored.
- You are opposed to capital punishment.
- You are attracted to another person in the group.
- You want to know if you will be tested on this material.
- You are nervous about trying this experiment.

The first, third, and fifth items in this list all involve attitudes; you could probably imagine how each could be expressed nonverbally. By contrast, the second and fourth items involve ideas, and they would be quite difficult to convey without using words. The same principle holds in everyday life: Nonverbal behavior offers many cues about the way people feel—often more than we get from their words alone. In fact, some research suggests that one important element of communicative competence is nonverbal expressiveness.

Nonverbal Communication Is Ambiguous

Before you get the idea that this book will turn you into a mind reader, it is important to realize that nonverbal communication is often difficult to interpret accurately. To appreciate the ambiguous nature of nonverbal communication, study the photo on this page. What emotions do you imagine the couple are feeling: grief? anguish? agony? In fact, none of these is even close. The couple have just learned that they won $1 million in the New Jersey state lottery!

Nonverbal communication can be just as ambiguous in everyday life. For example, relying on nonverbal cues in romantic situations can lead to inaccurate guesses about a partner’s interest in a sexual relationship. Workers of the Safeway supermarket chain discovered firsthand the problems with nonverbal ambiguity when they tried to follow the company’s new “superior customer service” policy that required them to smile and make eye contact with customers. Twelve employees filed grievances...
over the policy, reporting that several customers had propositioned them, misinterpreting their actions as come-ons.  

Although all nonverbal behavior is ambiguous, some emotions are easier to decode accurately than others. In laboratory experiments, subjects are better at identifying positive facial expressions such as happiness, love, surprise, and interest than negative ones such as fear, sadness, anger, and disgust. In real life, however, spontaneous nonverbal expressions are so ambiguous that observers are able to identify the emotions they convey no more accurately than by blind guessing.

Some people are more skillful than others at accurately decoding nonverbal behavior. Those who are better senders of nonverbal messages also are better receivers. Decoding ability also increases with age and training, although there are still differences in ability owing to personality and occupation. For instance, extroverts are relatively accurate judges of nonverbal behavior, whereas dogmatists are not. Interestingly, women seem to be better than men at decoding

CULTURAL IDIOM

**come-ons:** sexual advances  
**blind guessing:** coming to a conclusion without any factual basis for judgment

“**That was unkind, darling. When their mouths turn up at the corners they want to be friends.”**  
Source: Used by permission of the estate of Michael Ffolkes.
nonverbal messages. Over 95 percent of the studies examined in one analysis showed that women are more accurate at interpreting nonverbal signals.\textsuperscript{14} Despite these differences, even the best nonverbal decoders do not approach 100 percent accuracy.

When you do try to make sense out of ambiguous nonverbal behavior, you need to consider several factors: the context in which they occur (e.g., smiling at a joke suggests a different feeling from what is suggested by smiling at another’s misfortune); the history of your relationship with the sender (friendly, hostile, etc.); the other’s mood at the time; and your feelings (when you’re feeling insecure, almost anything can seem like a threat). The important idea is that when you become aware of nonverbal messages, you should think of them not as facts, but rather as clues that need to be checked out.

**Nonverbal Communication Is Different from Verbal Communication**

As Table 5-2 shows, nonverbal communication differs in several important ways from spoken and written language. These differences suggest some reasons why it is so valuable to focus on nonverbal behavior. For example, while verbal messages are almost always intentional, nonverbal cues are often unintended, and sometimes unconscious.

**Nonverbal Skills Are Important**

It’s hard to overemphasize the importance of effective nonverbal expression and the ability to read and respond to others’ nonverbal behavior. Nonverbal encoding and decoding skills are a strong predictor of popularity, attractiveness, and socio-emotional well-being.\textsuperscript{15} Good nonverbal communicators are more persuasive than people who are less skilled, and they have a greater chance of success in settings ranging from careers to poker to romance. Nonverbal sensitivity is a major part of what some social scientists have called “emotional intelligence,” and researchers have come to recognize that it is impossible to study spoken language without paying attention to its nonverbal dimensions.\textsuperscript{16}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 5-2</th>
<th>Some Differences between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complexity</strong></td>
<td>Verbal Communication: One dimension (words only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flow</strong></td>
<td>Verbal Communication: Intermittent (speaking and silence alternate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity</strong></td>
<td>Verbal Communication: Less subject to misinterpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>Verbal Communication: Has less impact when verbal and nonverbal cues are contradictory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intentionality</strong></td>
<td>Verbal Communication: Usually deliberate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INFLUENCES ON NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Much nonverbal communication is universal. For example, researchers have found at least six facial expressions that all humans everywhere use and understand: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and surprise. Even children who have been blind since birth reveal their feelings using these expressions. Despite these similarities, there are some important differences in the way people use and understand nonverbal behavior. We’ll look at some of these differences now.

Culture

Cultures have different nonverbal languages as well as verbal ones. Fiorello LaGuardia, legendary mayor of New York from 1933 to 1945, was fluent in English, Italian, and Yiddish. Researchers who watched films of his campaign speeches with the sound turned off found that they could tell which language he was speaking by the changes in his nonverbal behavior.

The meaning of some gestures varies from one culture to another. The “okay” gesture made by joining thumb and forefinger to form a circle is a cheery affirmation to most Americans, but it has less positive meanings in other parts of the world. In France and Belgium it means “You’re worth zero.” In Greece and Turkey it is a vulgar sexual invitation, usually meant as an insult. Given this sort of cross-cultural ambiguity, it’s easy to imagine how an innocent tourist might wind up in serious trouble.

Less obvious cross-cultural differences can damage relationships without the parties ever recognizing exactly what has gone wrong. Edward Hall points out that whereas Americans are comfortable conducting business at a distance of roughly four feet, people from the Middle East stand much closer. It is easy to visualize the awkward advance and retreat pattern that might occur when two diplomats or business people from these cultures meet. The Middle Easterner would probably keep moving forward to close the gap that feels so wide, whereas the American would continually back away. Both would feel uncomfortable, probably without knowing why.

Like distance, patterns of eye contact vary around the world. A direct gaze is considered appropriate for speakers in Latin America, the Arab world, and southern Europe. On the other hand, Asians, Indians, Pakistanis, and northern Europeans gaze at a listener peripherally or not at all. In either case, deviations from the norm are likely to make a listener uncomfortable.
Even within a culture, various groups can have different nonverbal rules. For example, many white teachers use quasi questions that hint at the information they are seeking. An elementary teacher might encourage the class to speak up by making an incorrect statement that demands refutation: “So twelve divided by four is six, right?” Most white students would recognize this behavior as a way of testing their understanding. But this style of questioning is unfamiliar to many students raised in traditional black cultures, who aren’t likely to respond until they are directly questioned by the teacher. Given this difference, it is easy to imagine how some teachers might view minority children as unresponsive or slow, when in fact they are simply playing by a different set of rules.

Communicators become more tolerant of others after they understand that unusual nonverbal behaviors are the result of cultural differences. In one study, American adults were presented with videotaped scenes of speakers from the United States, France, and Germany. When the sound was cut off, viewers judged foreigners more negatively than their fellow citizens. But when the speakers’ voices were added (allowing viewers to recognize that they were from a different country), the critical ratings dropped.

Despite differences like these, many nonverbal behaviors have the same meanings around the world. Smiles and laughter are a universal signal of positive emotions, for example, whereas the same sour expressions convey displeasure in every culture. Charles Darwin believed that expressions like these are the result of evolution, functioning as survival mechanisms that allowed early humans to convey emotional states before the development of language.

Although nonverbal expressions like these may be universal, the way they are used varies widely around the world. In some cultures display rules discourage the overt demonstration of feelings like happiness or anger. In other cultures the same feelings are perfectly appropriate. Thus, a Japanese might appear much more controlled and placid than an Arab when in fact their feelings might be identical.

The same principle operates closer to home among cocultures. For example, observations have shown that black women in all-black groups are nonverbally more expressive and interrupt one another more than do white women in all-white groups. This doesn’t mean that black women always feel more intensely than their white counterparts. A more likely explanation is that the two groups follow different cultural rules. The researchers found that in racially mixed groups both black and white women moved closer to the others’ style. This nonverbal convergence shows that skilled communicators can adapt their behavior when interacting with members of other cultures or cocultures in order to make the exchange more smooth and effective.

**Gender**

It’s easy to identify stereotypical differences in masculine and feminine styles of nonverbal communication. Just think about exaggerated caricatures of macho men and delicate woman that appear from time to time. Many humorous films and plays have been created around the results that arise when characters try to act like members of the opposite sex. (For some examples, see the “Feature Films” section at the end of this chapter.)

Although few of us behave like stereotypically masculine or feminine movie characters, there are recognizable differences in the way men and women look
and act. Some of the most obvious differences are physiological: height, depth and volume of the voice, and so on. Other differences are social. For example, females are usually more nonverbally expressive, and they are better at recognizing others' nonverbal behavior.  

Most communication scholars agree that social factors have more influence than biology does in shaping how men and women behave. For example, the ability to read nonverbal cues may have more to do with women’s historically less powerful social status: People in subordinate work positions also have better decoding skills. As women continue to gain equal status in the workplace and home, a paradoxical result may be less sensitivity at reading nonverbal cues.

Cultural norms in the Western world distinguish male from female behaviors. For example, women make more eye contact than do men with conversational partners. They are more vocally expressive than men. Women interact at closer distances, both with men and with other women, than do men in same-sex conversations. Men are more likely to lean forward in conversations than women. They require and are given more personal space. Women are more likely to face conversational partners head-on, whereas men more typically stand at an angle. Women express more emotions via facial expressions than men. Most noticeably, women smile considerably more than men. Women gesture more, whereas men use more expansive gestures.

After looking at differences like these, it might seem as if men and women communicate in radically different ways. In fact, men’s and women’s nonverbal communication is more similar than difference in many respects. Differences like the ones described in the preceding paragraph are noticeable, but they are outweighed by the similar rules we follow in areas such as making eye contact, posture, and gestures. You can prove this by imagining what it would be like to use radically different nonverbal rules: standing only an inch away from others, sniffing strangers, or tapping the forehead of someone when you want his or her attention. While biological sex and cultural norms certainly have an influence on nonverbal style, they aren’t as dramatic as the “men are from Mars; women are from Venus” thesis suggests.

A syndrome called nonverbal learning disorder (NVLD) makes reading facial expression, tone of voice, and other cues dramatically more difficult. Due to a processing deficit in the right hemisphere of the brain, someone with NVLD has trouble making sense of many nonverbal cues. People with NVLD—especially children—often misinterpret humorous or sarcastic messages literally, since those cues are based heavily on nonverbal signals.

People with NVLD also have trouble figuring out how to behave appropriately in new social situations, so they rely on rote formulas that often don’t work. For example, a child who has learned the format way of meeting an adult for the first time by shaking hands and saying “pleased to meet you” might try this approach with a group of peers. The result, of course, is to be regarded as odd or nerdy. And their disability leads them to miss nonverbal cues sent by other children that this isn’t the right approach.

Even for those of us who don’t suffer from NVLD, the nuances of nonverbal behavior can be confusing. It’s worth considering that there may be a physiological explanation for clueless people who seem socially inept.
FUNCTIONS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Although verbal and nonverbal messages differ in many ways, the two forms of communication operate together on most occasions. The following discussion explains the many functions nonverbal communication can serve and shows how nonverbal messages relate to verbal ones.

Repeating

If someone asked you for directions to the nearest drugstore, you could say, “North of here about two blocks,” repeating your instructions nonverbally by pointing north. This sort of repetition isn’t just decorative: People remember comments accompanied by gestures more than those made with words alone.33

Pointing is an example of what social scientists call emblems—deliberate nonverbal behaviors that have precise meanings known to everyone within a cultural group. For example, we all know that a head nod means “yes,” a head shake means “no,” a wave means “hello” or “good-bye,” and a hand to the ear means “I can’t hear you.”

Substituting

Emblems can also replace a verbal message. When a friend asks you what’s new, you might shrug your shoulders instead of answering in words. Not all substituting consists of emblems, however. Sometimes substituting responses are more ambiguous and less intentional. A sigh, smile, or frown may substitute for a verbal answer to your question, “How’s it going?” As this example suggests, nonverbal substituting is especially important when people are reluctant to express their feelings in words.

Complementing

Sometimes nonverbal behaviors match the content of a verbal message. Consider, for example, a friend apologizing for forgetting an appointment with you. Your friend’s sincerity would be reinforced if the verbal apology were accompanied by the appropriate nonverbal behaviors: the right tone of voice, facial expression, and so on. We often recognize the significance of complementary nonverbal behavior
when it is missing. If your friend’s apology were delivered with a shrug, a smirk, and a light tone of voice, you probably would doubt its sincerity, no matter how profuse the verbal explanation was.

Much complementing behavior consists of **illustrators**—nonverbal behaviors that accompany and support spoken words. Scratching the head when searching for an idea and snapping your fingers when it occurs are examples of illustrators that complement verbal messages. Research shows that North Americans use illustrators more often when they are emotionally aroused—trying to explain ideas that are difficult to put into words—when they are furious, horrified, very agitated, distressed, or excited.³⁴

**Accenting**

Just as we use italics to emphasize an idea in print, we use nonverbal devices to emphasize oral messages. Pointing an accusing finger adds emphasis to criticism (as well as probably creating defensiveness in the receiver). Stressing certain words with the voice (“It was your idea!”) is another way to add nonverbal accents.

**Regulating**

Nonverbal behaviors can control the flow of verbal communication. For example, parties in a conversation often unconsciously send and receive turn-taking cues.³⁵ When you are ready to yield the floor, the unstated rule is: Create a rising intonation pattern, then use a falling intonation pattern, or draw out the final syllable of the clause at the end of your statement. Finally, stop speaking. If you want to maintain your turn when another speaker seems ready to cut you off, you can suppress the attempt by taking an audible breath, using a sustained intonation pattern (because rising and falling patterns suggest the end of a statement), and avoiding any pauses in your speech. Other nonverbal cues exist for gaining the floor and for signaling that you do not want to speak.

**Contradicting**

People often simultaneously express different and even contradictory messages in their verbal and nonverbal behaviors. A common example of this sort of mixed message is the experience we’ve all had of hearing someone with a red face and bulging veins yelling, “Angry? No, I’m not angry!”

Even though some of the ways in which people contradict themselves are subtle, mixed messages have a strong impact. Research suggests that when a receiver perceives an inconsistency between verbal and nonverbal messages, the nonverbal one carries more weight—more than 12.5 percent more, according to some research.³⁶

Deliberately sending mixed messages might sound foolish at first, but there are times when we do just this. One deliberate use of mixed messages is to send a message politely but clearly that might be difficult to handle if it were expressed in words. For instance, think of a time when you became bored with a conversation while your companion kept rambling on. At such a time the most straightforward statement would be, “I’m tired of talking to you and want to go meet someone else.” Although it might feel good to be so direct, this kind of honesty is impolite for anyone over five years of age. Instead of being blunt in
situations like this, a face-saving alternative is to express your disinterest nonverbally. While nodding politely and murmuring, “uh-huh” and “no kidding?” at the appropriate times, you can signal a desire to leave by looking around the room, turning slightly away from the speaker, or even making a point of yawning. In most cases such clues are enough to end the conversation without the awkwardness of expressing outright what’s going on.

**Deceiving**

Deception is perhaps the most interesting type of nonverbal communication and one that social scientists have studied extensively. As Chapter 6 explains, most of the messages we exchange are not completely truthful. As you will read there, not all deception is self-serving or malicious. Much of it is aimed at saving the face of the communicators involved. For example, you might tell a “white lie” to avoid hurting the feelings of a friend who asks your opinion: “That new tattoo looks, uh, really nice.” In a situation like this, it’s easy to see how nonverbal factors can make the face-saving deception either succeed or fail.

Some people are better at hiding deceit than others. For example, most people—especially women—become more successful liars as they grow older. High self-monitors are usually better at hiding their deception than communicators who are less self-aware, and raters judge highly expressive liars as more honest than those who are more subdued. Not surprisingly, people whose jobs require them to act differently than they feel, such as actors, lawyers, diplomats, and salespeople, are more successful at deception than the general population.

We seem to be worse at catching deceivers when we participate actively in conversations than when we observe from the sidelines. It’s easiest to catch liars when they haven’t had a chance to rehearse, when they feel strongly about the information being hidden, or when they feel anxious or guilty about their lies. Imagine, for example, that you want to decline an unwanted invitation with a face-saving lie. Your chances of getting away with the deception are best if you have had advance notice of the invitation. If you are caught unprepared, your excuse for not attending is likely to be less persuasive. Trust (or lack of it) also plays a role in which deceptive messages are successful: People who are suspicious that a speaker may be lying pay closer attention to the speaker’s nonverbal behavior (e.g., talking faster than normal, shifted posture) than do people who are not suspicious. Still, asking questions—even if you are suspicious—isn’t especially effective at uncovering detection.

As you read earlier, people who focus their attention on catching liars are less effective than those who are busy with other mental tasks. Table 5–3 lists situations in which deceptive messages are most likely to be obvious.

Decades of research have revealed that there are no surefire nonverbal cues that indicate deception. Nonetheless, there are some cues that may reveal less-than-totally-honest communication. For example, deceivers typically make more speech errors than truth-tellers: stammers, stutters, hesitations, false starts, and so on. Vocal pitch often rises when people tell lies, and liars hesitate more. Deceivers tend to blink their eyes more often, fidget with their hands, and more rapidly shift their posture. Despite cues like these, it’s a mistake to assume that every tongue-tied, fidgeting, eye-blinking person is a liar.

How good are people at detecting lies? The range of effectiveness in uncovering deceptive messages is broad, ranging from 45 to 70 percent.
older we become better at interpreting contradictory messages. Children between the ages of six and twelve use a speaker’s words to make sense of a message. But as adults, we rely more on nonverbal cues to form many impressions. For example, audiences put more emphasis on nonverbal cues than on words to decide whether speakers are honest. They also use nonverbal behaviors to judge the character of speakers as well as their competence and composure; and differences in nonverbal behavior influence how much listeners are persuaded by a speaker.

Even with an awareness of nonverbal clues, it isn’t always easy to detect lies. Training can improve the ability to catch deceivers. Again, the range of effectiveness in uncovering deceptive messages is broad, ranging from 45 to 70 percent. Sometimes the very suspicion that someone is lying can improve the deceiver’s attempts to hide the truth. Research shows that people who probe the messages of deceptive communicators are no better at detecting lies than those who don’t investigate the truth of a message. One explanation for this surprising finding is that deceivers who are questioned become more vigilant about revealing the truth and their greater vigilance results in a better cover-up of deception cues.

Some people are better than others at uncovering deception. For example, women are consistently more accurate than men at detecting lying and what the underlying truth is. The same research showed that, as people become more intimate, their accuracy in detecting lies actually declines. This is a surprising fact: Intuition suggests that we ought to be better at judging honesty as we become more familiar with others. Perhaps an element of wishful thinking interferes with our accurate decoding of these messages. After all, we would hate to think that a lover would lie to us. When intimates do become suspicious, however, their ability to recognize deception increases. Despite their overall accuracy at detecting lies, women are more inclined to fall for the deception of intimate partners than are men. No matter how skillful or inept we may be at interpreting nonverbal behavior, training can make us better.

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**Table 5-3  Leakage of Nonverbal Clues to Deception**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deception Clues Are Most Likely When the Deceiver</th>
<th>Deception Clues Are Least Likely When the Deceiver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wants to hide emotions being experienced at the moment.</td>
<td>Wants to hide information unrelated to his or her emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels strongly about the information being hidden.</td>
<td>Has no strong feelings about the information being hidden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels apprehensive about the deception.</td>
<td>Feels confident about the deception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels guilty about being deceptive.</td>
<td>Experiences little guilt about the deception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets little enjoyment from being deceptive.</td>
<td>Enjoys the deception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs to construct the message carefully while delivering it.</td>
<td>Knows the deceptive message well and has rehearsed it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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CULTURAL IDIOM

**cover-up:** a plan to escape discovery

Fie, fie upon her! There’s language in her eyes, her cheek, her lip. Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out at every joint and motive in her body.

William Shakespeare

*Troilus and Cressida*
Technology may be gaining ground on deceivers. In 2002, Mayo Clinic researchers reported developing a facial imaging device that detected heat patterns in deceivers’ skins. Like more familiar polygraph lie detectors, the device seems to actually be measuring anxiety rather than deception itself. The device has more potential benefits for security providers than in personal situations. Still, the notion of using technology to catch liars is appealing.

Before we finish considering how nonverbal behaviors can deceive, it is important to realize that not all deceptive communication is aimed at taking advantage of the recipient. Some are a polite way to express an idea that would be difficult to handle if expressed in words. In this sense, the ability to deliberately send nonverbal messages that contradict your words can be a kind of communication competence.

**TYPES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Now that you understand how nonverbal messages operate as a form of communication, we can look at the various forms of nonverbal behavior. The following pages explain how our bodies, artifacts, environments, and the way we use time all send messages.
Posture and Gesture

Stop reading for a moment and notice how you are sitting. What does your position say nonverbally about how you feel? Are there other people near you now? What messages do you get from their posture and movements? Tune your television to any program, and without turning up the sound, see what messages are communicated by the movements and body position of the people on the screen. These simple experiments illustrate the communicative power of kinesics, the study of body movement, gesture, and posture.

Posture is a rich channel for conveying nonverbal information. From time to time postural messages are obvious. If you see a person drag through the door or slump over while sitting in a chair, it’s apparent that something significant is going on. But most postural cues are more subtle. For instance, the act of mirroring the posture of another person can have positive consequences. One experiment showed that career counselors who used “posture echoes” to copy the postures of clients were rated as more empathic than those who did not reflect the clients’ postures.55 Researchers have also found that partners in romantic relationships mirror one another’s behaviors.56

Posture can communicate vulnerability in situations far more serious than mere social or business settings. One study revealed that rapists sometimes use postural clues to select victims that they believe will be easy to intimidate.57 Easy targets are more likely to walk slowly and tentatively, stare at the ground, and move their arms and legs in short, jerky motions.

Gestures are a fundamental element of communication—so fundamental, in fact, that people who have been blind from birth use them.58 One group of ambiguous gestures consists of what we usually call fidgeting—movements in which one part of the body grooms, massages, rubs, holds, fidgets, pinches, picks, or otherwise manipulates another body part. Social scientists call these behaviors manipulators.59 Social rules may discourage us from performing most manipulators in public, but people still do so without noticing. For example, one study revealed that deceivers bob their heads more often than truth-tellers.60 Research confirms what common sense suggests—that increased use of manipulators is often a sign of discomfort.61 But not all fidgeting signals uneasiness. People also are likely to use manipulators when relaxed. When they let their guard down (either alone or with friends), they will be more likely to fiddle with an earlobe, twirl a strand of hair, or clean their fingernails. Whether or not the fidgeter is hiding something, observers are likely to interpret manipulators as a signal of dishonesty. Because not all fidgeters are liars, it’s important not to jump to conclusions about the meaning of manipulators.

Face and Eyes

The face and eyes are probably the most noticed parts of the body, and their impact is powerful. For example, smiling cocktail waitresses earn larger tips than un-
smiling ones, and smiling nuns collect larger donations than ones with glum expressions. The influence of facial expressions and eye contact doesn’t mean that their nonverbal messages are always easy to read. The face is a tremendously complicated channel of expression for several reasons. One reason is the number of expressions people can produce. Another is the speed with which they can change. For example, slow-motion films have been taken that show expressions fleeting across a subject’s face in as short a time as a fifth of a second. Finally, it seems that different emotions show most clearly in different parts of the face: happiness and surprise in the eyes and lower face, anger in the lower face and brows and forehead, fear and sadness in the eyes, and disgust in the lower face.

Ekman and Friesen have identified six basic emotions that facial expressions reflect—surprise, fear, anger, disgust, happiness, and sadness. Expressions reflecting these emotions seem to be recognizable in and between members of all cultures. Of course, affect blends—the combination of two or more expressions showing different emotions—are possible. For instance, it’s easy to imagine how someone would look who is fearful and surprised or disgusted and angry.

Research indicates that people are quite accurate at judging facial expressions of these emotions. Accuracy increases when judges know the “target” or have knowledge of the context in which the expression occurs or when they have seen several samples of the target’s expressions.
The eyes themselves can send several kinds of messages. In mainstream Euro-American culture, meeting someone’s glance with your eyes is usually a sign of involvement whereas looking away signals a desire to avoid contact. This is why solicitors on the street—panhandlers, salespeople, petitioners—try to catch our eye. After they’ve managed to establish contact with a glance, it becomes harder for the approached person to draw away.

Voice

The voice itself is another form of nonverbal communication. Social scientists use the term paralanguage to describe nonverbal, vocal messages. You can begin to understand the power of vocal cues by considering how the meaning of a simple sentence can change just by shifting the emphasis from word to word:

- *This is a fantastic communication book.*
  (Not just any book, but this one in particular.)
- *This is a fantastic communication book.*
  (This book is superior, exciting.)
- *This is a fantastic communication book.*
  (The book is good as far as communication goes; it may not be so good as literature or drama.)
- *This is a fantastic communication book.*
  (It’s not a play or a compact disc; it’s a book.)

There are many other ways the voice communicates—through its tone, speed, pitch, volume, number and length of pauses, and disfluencies (such as stammering, use of “uh,” “um,” “er,” and so on). All these factors can do a great deal to reinforce or contradict the message our words convey.

Sarcasm is one instance in which both emphasis and tone of voice help change a statement’s meaning to the opposite of its verbal message. Experience this yourself with the following three statements. The first time through, say them literally, and then say them sarcastically.

- *Thanks for waking me up.*
- *I really had a wonderful time on my blind date.*
- *There’s nothing I like better than waking up before sunrise.*

Researchers have identified the communicative value of paralanguage through the use of content-free speech—ordinary speech that has been electronically manipulated so that the words are unintelligible, but the paralanguage remains unaffected. (Hearing a foreign language that you do not understand has the same effect.) Subjects who hear content-free speech can consistently recognize the emotion being expressed, as well as identifying its strength.65

The impact of paralinguistic cues is strong. In fact, research shows that listeners pay more attention to the vocal messages than to the words that are spoken.
when asked to determine a speaker’s attitudes.67 Furthermore, when vocal factors contradict a verbal message, listeners judge the speaker’s intention from the paralanguage, not from the words themselves.68 Paralanguage can affect behavior in many ways, some of which are rather surprising. Researchers have discovered that communicators were most likely to comply with requests delivered by speakers whose rate was similar to their own.69 Besides complying with same-rate speakers, listeners also feel more positively about people who seem to talk at their own rate. Vocal intensity also can affect how willing people are to respond to another person’s requests.70 Vocal changes that contradict spoken words are not easy to conceal. If the speaker is trying to conceal fear or anger, the voice will probably sound higher and louder, and the rate of talk may be faster than normal. Sadness produces the opposite vocal pattern: quieter, lower-pitched speech delivered at a slower rate.71

Besides reinforcing or contradicting messages, some vocal factors influence the way a speaker is perceived by others. For example, communicators who speak loudly and without hesitations are viewed as more confident than those who pause and speak quietly.72 People who speak more slowly are judged as having greater conversational control than fast talkers.73 Research has also demonstrated that people with more attractive voices are rated more highly than those whose voice sounds less attractive.74 Just what makes a voice attractive can vary. As Figure 5–1 shows, culture can make a difference. Surveys show that there are both similarities and differences between what Mexicans and Americans view as the “ideal” voice.

**Touch**

Besides being the earliest means we have of making contact with others, touching—or haptics—is essential to our healthy development. During the
In our now more than slightly cock-eyed world, there seems to be little provision for someone to get touched without having to go to bed with whomever does the touching. And that’s something to think about. We have mixed up simple, healing, warm touching with sexual advances. So much so, that it often seems as if there is no middle way between “Don’t you dare touch me!” and “Okay, you touched me, so now we should make love!”

A nation which is able to distinguish the fine points between offensive and defensive pass interference, bogies, birdies, and par, a schuss and a slalom, a technical, a personal, and a player-control foul should certainly be able to make some far more obvious distinctions between various sorts of body contact.

Sidney Simon
Caring, Feeling, Touching

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many babies died from a disease then called *marasmus*, which, translated from Greek, means “wasting away.” In some orphanages the mortality rate was quite high, but even children in “progressive” homes, hospitals, and other institutions died regularly from the ailment. When researchers finally tracked down the causes of this disease, they found that many infants suffered from lack of physical contact with parents or nurses rather than poor nutrition, medical care, or other factors. They hadn’t been touched enough, and as a result they died. From this knowledge came the practice of “mothering” children in institutions—picking babies up, carrying them around, and handling them several times each day. At one hospital that began this practice, the death rate for infants fell from between 30 and 35 percent to below 10 percent.75

As a child develops, the need for being touched continues. In his book *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, Ashley Montagu describes research that suggests that allergies, eczema, and other health problems are, in part, caused by a person’s lack of contact as an infant with his or her mother.76 Although Montagu says that these problems develop early in life, he also cites cases where adults suffering from conditions as diverse as asthma and schizophrenia have been successfully treated by psychiatric therapy that uses extensive physical contact.

Touch seems to increase a child’s mental functioning as well as physical health. L.J. Yarrow has conducted surveys that show that babies who have been given plenty of physical stimulation by their mothers have significantly higher IQs than those receiving less contact.77

Touch also plays a large part in how we respond to others and to our environment.78 For example, touch increases self-disclosure, verbalization of psychiatric patients, and the preference children have for their counselors. Touch also increases compliance.79 In one study, subjects were approached by a female confederate who requested that they return a dime left in the phone booth from which they had just emerged. When the request was accompanied by a light touch on the subject’s arm, the probability that the subject would return the dime increased significantly.80 In a similar experiment, subjects were asked by a male or female confederate to sign a petition or complete a rating scale. Again, subjects were more likely to cooperate when they were touched lightly on the arm. In the rating-scale variation of the study, the results were especially dramatic: 70 percent of those who were touched complied, whereas only 40 percent of the untouched subjects complied (indicating a predisposition not to comply).81 An additional power of touch is its on-the-job utility. One study showed that fleeting touches on the hand and shoulder resulted in larger tips for restaurant waiters.82

Touch can communicate many messages. Researchers have cataloged twelve different kinds of touches, including “positive,” “playful,” “control,” and “ritualistic.”83 Some kinds of touch indicate varying degrees of aggression. Others signify types of relationships.84

- Functional/professional (dental examination, haircut)
- Social/polite (handshake)
- Friendship/warmth (clap on back, Spanish *abrazo*)
- Love/intimacy (some caresses, hugs)
- Sexual arousal (some kisses, strokes)
You might object to the examples following each of these categories, saying that some nonverbal behaviors occur in several types of relationships. A kiss, for example, can mean anything from a polite but superficial greeting to the most intense arousal. What makes a given touch more or less intense? Researchers have suggested a number of factors:

- What part of the body does the touching
- What part of the body is touched
- How long the touch lasts
- How much pressure is used
- Whether there is movement after contact is made
- Whether anyone else is present
- The situation in which the touch occurs
- The relationship between the persons involved

In traditional U.S. culture, touching is generally more appropriate for women than for men. Males touch their male friends less than they touch their female friends and also less than females touch their female friends. Fear of homosexuality seems to be a strong reason why many men are reluctant to touch one another. Although females are more comfortable about touching than men, gender isn’t the only factor that shapes contact. In general, the degree of touch comfort goes along with openness to expressing intimate feelings, an active interpersonal style, and satisfactory relationships.

Physical Attractiveness

Most people claim that looks aren’t the best measure of desirability or character, but they typically prefer others who they find attractive. For example, women who are perceived as attractive have more dates, receive higher grades in college, persuade males with greater ease, and receive lighter court sentences. Both men and women whom others view as attractive are rated as being more sensitive, kind, strong, sociable, and interesting than their less-fortunate brothers and sisters. Who is most likely to succeed in business? Place your bet on the attractive job applicant. For example, shorter men have more difficulty finding jobs in the first place, and men over six-foot-two receive starting salaries that average 12.4 percent higher than comparable applicants under six feet.

The influence of attractiveness begins early in life. Preschoolers were shown photographs of children their own age and asked to choose potential friends and enemies. The researchers found that children as young as three agreed as to who was attractive (“cute”) and unattractive (“homely”). Furthermore, they valued their attractive counterparts—both of the same and the opposite sex—more highly. Also, preschool children rated by their peers as pretty were most liked, and those identified as least pretty were least liked. Children who were interviewed rated good-looking children as having positive social characteristics (“He’s friendly to other children”) and unattractive children as having negative ones (“He hits other children without reason”).

Teachers also are affected by students’ attractiveness. Physically attractive students are usually judged more favorably—more intelligent, friendly, and popular than their less attractive counterparts. Fortunately, attractiveness is something we can control without having to call a plastic surgeon. We view others as beau-
tiful or ugly not just on the basis of the “original equipment” they come with, but also on how they use that equipment. Posture, gestures, facial expressions, and other behaviors can increase the attractiveness of an otherwise unremarkable person. Exercise can improve the way each of us looks. Finally, the way we dress can make a significant difference in the way others perceive us, as you’ll now see.

Clothing

Besides protecting us from the elements, clothing is a means of nonverbal communication, providing a relatively straightforward (if sometimes expensive) method of impression management. Clothing can be used to convey economic status, educational level, social status, moral standards, athletic ability and/or interests, belief system (political, philosophical, religious), and level of sophistication.

Research shows that we do make assumptions about people based on their clothing. Communicators who wear special clothing often gain persuasiveness. For example, experimenters dressed in uniforms resembling police officers were more successful than those dressed in civilian clothing in requesting pedestrians to pick up litter and in persuading them to lend a dime to an overparked motorist. Likewise, solicitors wearing sheriff’s and nurse’s uniforms increased the level of contributions to law enforcement and health-care campaigns. Uniforms aren’t the only kind of clothing that carries influence. In one study, a male and female were stationed in a hallway so that anyone who wished to go by had to avoid them or pass between them. In one condition, the conversationalists wore “formal daytime dress”; in the other, they wore “casual attire.” Passersby behaved differently toward the couple depending on the style of clothing: They responded positively with the well-dressed couple and negatively when the same people were casually dressed. Similar results in other situations show the influence of clothing. We are more likely to obey people dressed in a high-status manner. Pedestrians were more likely to return lost coins to well-dressed people than to those dressed in low-status clothing. We are also more likely to follow the lead of high-status dressers even when it comes to violating social rules. Eighty-three percent of the pedestrians in one study followed a well-dressed jaywalker who violated a “wait” crossing signal, whereas only 48 percent followed a confederate dressed in lower-status clothing. Women who are wearing a jacket are rated as being more powerful than those wearing only a dress or skirt and blouse.

As we get to know others better, the importance of clothing shrinks. This fact suggests that clothing is especially important in the early stages of a relationship, when making a positive first impression is necessary in order to encourage others to get to know us better. This advice is equally important in personal situations and in employment interviews. In both cases, your style of dress (and personal grooming) can make all the difference between the chance to progress further and outright rejection.
UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY

MARKED: WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Some years ago I was at a small working conference of four women and eight men. Instead of concentrating on the discussion, I found myself looking at the three other women at the table.

One woman had dark brown hair in a classic style that was a cross between Cleopatra and Plain Jane. The severity of her straight hair was softened by wavy bangs and ends that turned under. Because she was beautiful, the effect was more than plain. The second woman was older, full of dignity and composure. Her hair was cut in a fashionable style that left her with only one eye, thanks to a side part that let a curtain of hair fall across half her face. The third woman’s hair was wild, a frosted blond avalanche falling over and beyond her shoulders. When she spoke, she frequently tossed her head, thus calling attention to her hair and away from her lecture.

Then there was makeup. The first woman wore facial cover that made her skin smooth and pale. The second wore only a light gloss on her lips and a hint of shadow on her eyes. The third had blue bands under her eyes, dark blue shadow, mascara, bright red lipstick, and rouge; her fingernails also flashed red.

I considered the clothes each woman had worn on the three days of the conference: In the first case, man-tailored suits in primary colors with solid-color blouses. In the second, casual but stylish black T-shirt, a floppy collarless jacket and baggy slacks or skirt in neutral colors. The third wore a sexy jumpsuit; tight sleeveless jersey and tight yellow slacks; a dress with gaping armholes and an indulged tendency to fall off one shoulder.

As I amused myself finding patterns and coherence in these styles and choices, I suddenly wondered why I was scrutinizing only the women. I scanned the table to get a fix on the styles of the eight men. And then I knew why I wasn’t studying them. The men’s styles were unmarked. I was able to identify the styles and types of the women at the conference because each of us had to make decisions about hair, clothing, makeup and accessories, and each of those decisions carried meaning. Every style available to us was marked. Of course, the men in our group had to make decisions too, but their choices carried far less meaning. Each style available to us was marked. The men could have chosen styles that were marked, but they didn’t have to, and in this group, none did. Unlike the women, they had the option of being unmarked.

There could have been a cowboy shirt with string tie or a three-piece suit or a necklaced hippie in jeans. But there wasn’t. All eight men wore brown or blue slacks and standard-style shirts of light colors. No man wore sandals or boots; their shoes were dark, closed, comfortable, and flat. In short, unmarked.

I asked myself what style we women could have adopted that would have been unmarked, like the men’s. The answer was: none. There is no unmarked woman.

There is no woman’s hairstyle that could be called “standard,” that says nothing about her. The range of women’s hairstyles is staggering, but if a woman’s hair has no particular style, this in itself is taken as a statement that she doesn’t care how she looks—an eloquent message that can disqualify a woman for many positions.

Women have to choose between shoes that are comfortable and shoes that are deemed attractive. If a woman’s clothes are tight or revealing (in other words, sexy), it sends a message—an intended one of wanting to be attractive but also a possibly unintended one of availability. But if her clothes are not sexy, that too sends a message, lent meaning by the knowledge that they could have been.

Looking at the men and women sitting around the conference table, I was amazed at how different our worlds were. Though men have to make choices too, and men’s clothing styles may be less neutral now than they once were, nonetheless the parameters within which men must choose when dressing for work are much narrower than the riotous range of colors and styles from which women must choose. But even this contrast in the range from which men and women must choose is irrelevant to the crucial point: A man can choose a style that will not attract attention or subject him to any particular interpretation, but a woman can’t.

This does not mean that men have complete freedom when it comes to dress. Quite the contrary—they have much less freedom than women have to express their personalities in their choice of fabrics, colors, styles, and jewelry. But one freedom they have that women don’t is the point of this discussion—the freedom to be unmarked.

Deborah Tannen
Talking from 9 to 5
The study of the way people and animals use space has been termed *proxemics*. Preferred spaces are largely a matter of cultural norms. For example, people living in hyperdense Hong Kong manage to live in crowded residential quarters that most North Americans would find intolerable.\(^9^6\) Anthropologist Edward T. Hall has defined four distances used in mainstream North American culture.\(^9^7\) He says that we choose a particular distance depending on how we feel toward the other person at a given time, the context of the conversation, and our personal goals.

**Intimate distance** begins with skin contact and ranges out to about eighteen inches. The most obvious context for intimate distance involves interaction with people to whom we’re emotionally close—and then mostly in private situations. Intimate distance between individuals also occurs in less intimate circumstances: visiting the doctor or dentist, at the hairdresser’s, and during some athletic contests. Allowing someone to move into the intimate zone usually is a sign of trust.

**Personal distance** ranges from eighteen inches at its closest point to four feet at its farthest. Its closer range is the distance at which most relational partners stand in public. We are uncomfortable if someone else “moves in” to this area without invitation. The far range of personal distance runs from about two-and-one-half to four feet. This is the zone just beyond the other person’s reach—the distance at which we can keep someone “at arm’s length.” This term suggests the type of communication that goes on at this range: Interaction is still reasonably personal, but less so than communication that occurs a foot or so closer.

**Social distance** ranges from four to about twelve feet. Within it are the kinds of communication that usually occur in business situations. Its closer range, from four to seven feet, is the distance at which conversations usually occur between salespeople and customers and between people who work together. We use the far range of social distance—seven to twelve feet—for more formal and impersonal situations. This is the range at which we generally sit from the boss.

**Public distance** is Hall’s term for the farthest zone, running outward from twelve feet. The closer range of public distance is the one most teachers use in the classroom. In the farther range of public space—twenty-five feet and beyond—two-way communication becomes difficult. In some cases it’s necessary for speak-
Choosing the optimal distance can have a powerful effect on how we regard others and how we respond to them. For example, students are more satisfied with teachers who reduce the distance between themselves and their classes. They also are more satisfied with the course itself, and they are more likely to

Mike

(To himself) Why aren’t we getting on with it? 

(To himself) It’s a quarter to twelve. I’ve been here with Miguel for forty-five minutes already, and I haven’t even begun to talk business. I know that both me and this proposal are new to Miguel, but how can I count on this guy when all he does is ask me questions about myself, my background, my interests, my family, and my “philosophy”? Why does he have to be so nosy? I don’t know him well enough yet to get into that personal stuff. I know he’s just invited me to have lunch with him, but it’s a thirty minute drive to the one o’clock appointment I scheduled, and I have to be on time. All I wanted to do was run through this proposal quickly the first time, see if he had any interest and if he did come back again to see about doing business. Sometimes I think that all these Hispanics want to do is talk about anything but business.

(To himself) Oh, well, I’ve never had any luck doing business with Hispanics before. Why should it be any different this time?

Thanks for the invitation to have lunch with you, Miguel, but I’ve got to get along to my next appointment. Here’s my card. Maybe we can do business next time.

Miguel

(To himself) Why aren’t we getting on with it?

(To himself) It’s a quarter to twelve. I’ve been here with Mike for forty-five minutes already, and I haven’t even begun to talk business. How can I know if I want to do business with him unless I know something about him and the kind of man he is? But I feel like a dentist pulling teeth. And he doesn’t want to know anything about me! Where I come from, we don’t like to do business with strangers. We like to know something about the other person and feel we can at least begin to trust them before we start to talk business seriously. It’s too bad he turned me down for lunch. I think I can trust him and really am interested in his product line. With a little more time, I think we could do business. But first I’ve got to feel at least a little sure about who I’m doing business with. Sometimes I think that all these Anglos want to talk about is business.

(To himself) Oh, well, I’ve never had any luck doing business with gringos before. Why should it be any different this time?

Oh, that’s all right, Mike. We’ll have lunch another time. Come back again. I’d like to get to know you better. Maybe we can do business next time.

Adapted from John F. Kikoski and Catherine Kano Kikoski, Reflexive Communication in the Culturally Diverse Workplace (Westport, CT: Quorum, 1996), pp. 2–3.
follow the teacher’s instructions. Likewise, medical patients are more satisfied with physicians who are not standoffish.

**Time**

Social scientists use the term *chronemics* for the study of how human beings use and structure time. The way we handle time can express both intentional and unintentional messages. Social psychologist Robert Levine describes several ways that time can communicate. For instance, in a culture like ours that values time highly, waiting can be an indicator of status. “Important” people (whose time is supposedly more valuable than that of others) may be seen by appointment only, whereas it is acceptable to intrude without notice on lesser beings. To see how this rule operates, consider how natural it is for a boss to drop into a subordinate’s office unannounced, whereas some employees would never intrude into the boss’s office without an appointment. A related rule is that low-status people must never make more important people wait. It would be a serious mistake to show up late for a job interview, although the interviewer might keep you cooling your heels in the lobby. Important people are often whisked to the head of a restaurant or airport line, whereas the presumably less exalted are forced to wait their turn.

The use of time depends greatly on culture. In some cultures, punctuality is critically important, whereas in others it is barely considered. Punctual mainlanders often report welcoming the laid-back Hawaiian approach to time. One psychologist discovered the difference between North and South American attitudes when teaching at a university in Brazil. He found that some students arrived halfway through a two-hour class and that most of them stayed put and kept asking questions when the class was scheduled to end. A half-hour after the official end of the class, the professor finally closed off discussion, because there was no indication that the students intended to leave. This flexibility of time is quite different from what is common in most North American colleges!

Even within a culture, rules of time vary. Sometimes the differences are geographic. In New York City, the party invitation may say “9 P.M.” but nobody would think of showing up before 9:30. In Salt Lake City, guests are expected to show up on time, or perhaps even a bit early. Even within the same geographic area, different groups establish their own rules about the use of time. Consider your own experience. In school, some instructors begin and end class punctually, whereas others are more casual. With some people you feel comfortable talking for hours in person or on the phone, whereas with others time seems to be precious and not meant to be “wasted.”

**Territoriality**

Whereas personal space is the invisible bubble we carry around as an extension of our physical being, *territory* is fixed space. Any area, such as a room, house, neighborhood, or country, to which we assume some kind of “rights” is our territory. Not all territory is permanent. We often stake out space for ourselves in the library, at the beach, and so on by using markers such as books, clothing, or other personal possessions.

The way people use space can communicate a good deal about power and status relationships. Generally, we grant people with higher status more personal territory and greater privacy. We knock before entering the boss’s office, whereas a boss can usually walk into our work area without hesitating. In tradi-
tional schools, professors have offices, dining rooms, and even toilets that are private, whereas the students, who are presumably less important, have no such sanctuaries. In the military, greater space and privacy usually come with rank: Privates sleep forty to a barracks, sergeants have their own private rooms, and generals have government-provided houses.

Environment

The physical environment people create can both reflect and shape interaction. This principle is illustrated right at home. The impressions that home designs communicate can be remarkably accurate. Researchers showed ninety-nine students slides of the insides or outsides of twelve upper-middle-class homes and then asked them to infer the personality of the owners from their impressions. The students were especially accurate after glancing at interior photos. The decorating schemes communicated accurate information about the homeowners’ intellectualism, politeness, maturity, optimism, tenseness, willingness to take adventures, family orientations, and reservedness. The home exteriors also gave viewers accurate perceptions of the owners’ artistic interests, graciousness, privacy, and quietness.

Besides communicating information about the designer, an environment can shape the kind of interaction that takes place in it. In one experiment, researchers found that the attractiveness of a room influenced the happiness and energy of the people working in it. The experimenters set up three rooms: an “ugly” one, which resembled a janitor’s closet in the basement of a campus building; an “average” room, which was a professor’s office; and a “beautiful” room, which was furnished with carpeting, drapes, and comfortable furniture. The subjects in

A team of social scientists studying United Nations deliberations was puzzled by the unexpected and influential role that the ambassador from Ireland was playing in Middle East negotiations. It wasn’t until communication patterns were considered that the answer became clear. The Irish ambassador, it turns out, sits alphabetically among delegates from Iran, Israel, Jordan, and Kuwait. This arrangement facilitated communicative ties and, as a result, Ireland discovered itself playing the role of Middle East peace broker.

Aaron Cargile
the experiment were asked to rate a series of pictures as a way of measuring their energy and feelings of well-being while at work. Results of the experiment showed that while in the ugly room the subjects became tired and bored more quickly and took longer to complete their task. When they moved to the beautiful room, however, they rated the faces they were judging higher, showed a greater desire to work, and expressed feelings of importance, comfort, and enjoyment. The results teach a lesson that isn’t surprising: Workers generally feel better and do a better job when they’re in an attractive environment.

In a more therapeutic and less commercial way, physicians have also shaped environments to improve communication. Psychologist Robert Sommer found that redesigning the convalescent ward of a hospital greatly increased the interaction among patients. In the old design, seats were placed shoulder to shoulder around the edges of the ward. When the chairs were grouped around small tables so that patients faced each other at a comfortable distance, the number of conversations doubled.108

The design of an entire building can shape communication among its users. Architects have learned that the way housing projects are designed controls to a great extent the contact neighbors have with each other. People who live in apartments near stairways and mailboxes have many more neighbor contacts than do those living in less heavily traveled parts of the building, and tenants generally have more contacts with immediate neighbors than with people even a few doors away.109 Architects now use this information to design buildings that either encourage communication or increase privacy, and house hunters can use the same knowledge to choose a home that gives them the neighborhood relationships they want.

So far we have talked about how designing an environment can shape communication, but there is another side to consider. Watching how people use an already existing environment can be a way of telling what kind of relationships they want. For example, Sommer watched students in a college library and found that there’s a definite pattern for people who want to study alone. While the library was uncrowded, students almost always chose corner seats at one of the empty rectangular tables.110 Finally, each table was occupied by one reader. New readers would then choose a seat on the opposite side and far end of an occupied table, thus keeping the maximum distance between themselves and the other readers. One of Sommer’s associates tried violating these “rules” by sitting next to, and across from, other female readers when more distant seats were available. She found that the approached women reacted defensively, either by signaling their discomfort through shifts in posture or gesturing or by eventually moving away.

**SUMMARY**

Nonverbal communication consists of messages expressed by nonlinguistic means. There are nonverbal dimensions to all spoken language, and there are sign languages that are not spoken.

Nonverbal behavior is an integral part of virtually all communication, and nonverbal skill is a positive predictor of relational success. There are several important characteristics of nonverbal communication. First is the simple fact that it exists—that communication occurs even in the absence of language. This leads to the second characteristic: It is impossible not to communicate nonverbally; humans constantly send messages about
themselves that are available for others to receive. The third characteristic is that nonverbal communication is ambiguous; there are many possible interpretations for any behavior. This ambiguity makes it important for the receiver to verify any interpretation before jumping to conclusions about the meaning of a nonverbal message. Finally, nonverbal communication is different from verbal communication in complexity, flow, clarity, impact, and intentionality.

Some nonverbal communication is influenced by culture and gender. While there are some universal expressions, even the manner in which these expressions are used reflects the communicator’s culture and gender. And behaviors that have special meanings in one culture may express different messages in another. We stated that nonverbal communication serves many functions: repeating, substituting, complementing, accenting, regulating, and contradicting verbal behavior, as well as deceiving.

The remainder of this chapter introduced the many ways in which humans communicate nonverbally: through posture, gesture, use of the face and eyes, voice, touch, clothing, distance, time, territoriality, and physical environment.

**HEd TERMS**

- affect blends 169
- chronemics 177
- disfluencies 170
- emblems 163
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- manipulators 168
- nonverbal communication 154
- paralanguage 170
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- proxemics 176
- public distance 176
- social distance 176
- territory 177

**ACTIVITIES**

1. **Observing and Reporting Nonverbal Behavior**

   This exercise will give you a clear idea of the many nonverbal behaviors that are available to you whenever you encounter another person. It will also help prevent you from jumping to conclusions about the meaning of those behaviors without checking out your interpretations. You can try the exercise either in or outside of class, and the period of time over which you do it is flexible, from a single class period to several days. In any case, begin by choosing a partner, and then follow these directions:

   1. For the first period of time (however long you decide to make it), observe the way your partner behaves. Notice how he or she moves; his or her mannerisms, postures, way of speaking; how he or she dresses; and so on. To remember your observations, jot them down. If you’re doing this exercise out of class over an extended period of time, there’s no need to let your observations interfere with whatever you’d normally be doing: Your only job here is to compile a list of your partner’s behaviors. In this step, you should be careful not to interpret your partner’s actions; just record what you see.

   2. At the end of the time period, share what you’ve seen with your partner. He or she will do the same with you.

   3. For the next period of time, your job is not only to observe your partner’s behavior but also to interpret it. This time in your conference you should tell your partner what you thought his or her actions revealed. For example, if your partner dressed carelessly, did you think this meant that he or she overslept, that he or she is losing interest in his or her appearance, or that he or she was trying to be more comfortable? If you noticed him or her yawning frequently, did you think this meant that he or she is bored, tired from a late night, or sleepy after a big meal? Don’t feel bad if your guesses weren’t all correct. Remember that nonverbal clues tend to be ambiguous. You may be surprised how checking out the nonverbal clues you observe can help build a relationship with another person.

2. **Culture and Nonverbal Communication**

   1. Identify at least three significant differences between nonverbal practices in two cultures or cocultures (e.g., ethnic, age, or socioeconomic groups) within your own society.

   2. Describe the potential difficulties that could arise out of the differing nonverbal practices when members from the cultural groups interact. Are there any ways of avoiding these difficulties?

   3. Now describe the advantages that might come from differing cultural nonverbal practices. How might people from diverse backgrounds profit by encountering one another’s customs and norms?
3. **Kinesics in Action** You can appreciate the many ways kinesic cues operate by identifying examples from your own experience when body movement served each of the following nonverbal functions:

- Repeating
- Substituting
- Complementing
- Accenting
- Regulating
- Contradicting

4. **The Eyes Have It** Prove for yourself the role eye contact plays in social influence by trying a simple experiment.

1. Choose a situation where you can make simple requests from a series of strangers. You might, for example, ask to cut in line to use a photocopying machine, or you could ask passersby for a small amount of change to make an important phone call.

2. Make such a request to at least twenty people. Use the same words for each request but alternate your nonverbal behavior. Half the time make direct eye contact, and the other half of the time avoid looking directly at the other person when you make your request.

3. Record your results, and see if your eye behavior played any role in generating compliance to your request.

4. If eye contact does make a difference, describe how you could apply your findings to real-life situations.

5. **Building Vocal Fluency** You can become more adept at both conveying and interpreting vocal messages by following these directions.

1. Join with a partner and designate one person A and the other B.

2. Partner A should choose a passage of twenty-five to fifty items from the telephone directory, using his or her voice to convey one of the following attitudes:
   - Egotism
   - Friendliness
   - Insecurity
   - Irritation
   - Confidence

3. Partner B should try to detect the emotion being conveyed.

4. Switch roles and repeat the process. Continue alternating roles until each of you has both conveyed and tried to interpret at least four emotions.

5. After completing the preceding steps, discuss the following questions:
   - What vocal cues did you use to make your guesses?
   - Were some emotions easier to guess than others?
   - Given the accuracy of your guesses, how would you assess your ability to interpret vocal cues?

6. **The Rules of Touch** Like most types of nonverbal behavior, touching is governed by cultural and social rules. Imagine you are writing a guidebook for visitors from another culture. Describe the rules that govern touching in the following relationships. In each case, describe how the gender of the participants affects the rules.

- An adult and a five-year-old
- An adult and a twelve-year-old
- Two good friends
- Boss and employee

7. **Distance Violations** You can test the importance of distance for yourself by violating the cultural rules for use of the proxemic zones outlined on pages 176–177.

1. Join with a partner. Choose which one of you will be the experimenter and which will be the observer.

2. In three situations, the experimenter should deliberately use the “wrong” amount of space for the context. Make the violations as subtle as possible. You might, for instance, gradually move into another person’s intimate zone when personal distance would be more appropriate. (Be careful not to make the violations too offensive!)

3. The observer should record the verbal and nonverbal reactions of others when the distance zones are violated. After each experiment, inform the people involved about your motives and ask whether they were consciously aware of the reason for any discomfort they experienced.
FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Print Resources

For a more detailed list of readings about nonverbal communication, see the CD-ROM that came with this book, and the Understanding Human Communication Web site at www.oup.com/us/uhc.


Feature Films

For descriptions of each film below and descriptions of other movies that illustrate nonverbal communication, see the CD-ROM that came with this book, and the Understanding Human Communication Web site at www.oup.com/us/uhc.

Making Sense of Nonverbal Behavior


Blind since birth, Virgil Adamson (Val Kilmer) regains his sight as an adult. When the surgical bandages are removed, he opens his eyes to a word that is confusing and terrifying. The movie, based on a true story, illustrates how sighted people can take for granted their understanding of nonverbal messages. Virgil asks his girlfriend, “What does that face mean?” He is unfamiliar with the relational cues being sent in a coy smile, a pained grimace, or an embarrassed blush. Ultimately, they both learn that assigning meaning to sensory information and nonverbal behavior is not a natural ability—it is a skill that must be learned and honed.

The Communicative Value of Nonverbal Behavior

For a better understanding of nonverbal communication, there is value in watching any film (without subtitles) in which the characters speak an unfamiliar language. The surprising amount of information that can be gained from visual and vocal behavior will give an appreciation for the communicative value of nonverbal behavior, and the details that cannot be understood will show its limitations.

The Nuances of Nonverbal Behavior


Leonardo DiCaprio plays two characters: the heartless French King Louis XIV and his heroic deposed twin brother, Philippe. DiCaprio’s acting gives Louis and Philippe different identities. Identifying the different behaviors of each character provides good practice in observing and recording nonverbal communication.

Masculine and Feminine Nonverbal Behavior

The Birdcage (1996). Rated R.


Tootsie (1982). Rated PG.

One way to recognize differences between masculine and feminine styles of nonverbal communication is to observe the same person playing different gender-related roles. Filmmakers have found this notion intriguing enough to produce several movies in which characters disguise themselves with makeup and costumes—and nonverbal cues—related to masculine and feminine roles.

In Tootsie, Michael Dorsey (Dustin Hoffman) is an aspiring New York actor who can’t get any roles—at least as a man. In a flash of inspiration, he transforms himself into Dorothy Michaels, a middle-aged woman, and wins a part in a daytime soap opera. Robin Williams takes on a Tootsie-like role in Mrs. Doubtfire, where he plays Daniel Hillard, a divorced father and the eponymous housekeeper who cares for his own children. In the climactic scene, Williams plays both roles in a tour de force of nonverbal gender-switching.

In yet another twist on the masculine/feminine theme, Robin Williams plays a man who teaches his gay partner to be more macho in The Birdcage. The goal, once again, is disguise: The partners want their soon-to-be in-laws to believe they are brothers, not lovers.