

Interpersonal Communication

THE WHOLE STORY

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6

Nonverbal Communication

How do we communicate
without words?

Why is nonverbal
communication powerful?

What behaviors do we use to
communicate nonverbally?

CHAPTER OUTLINE

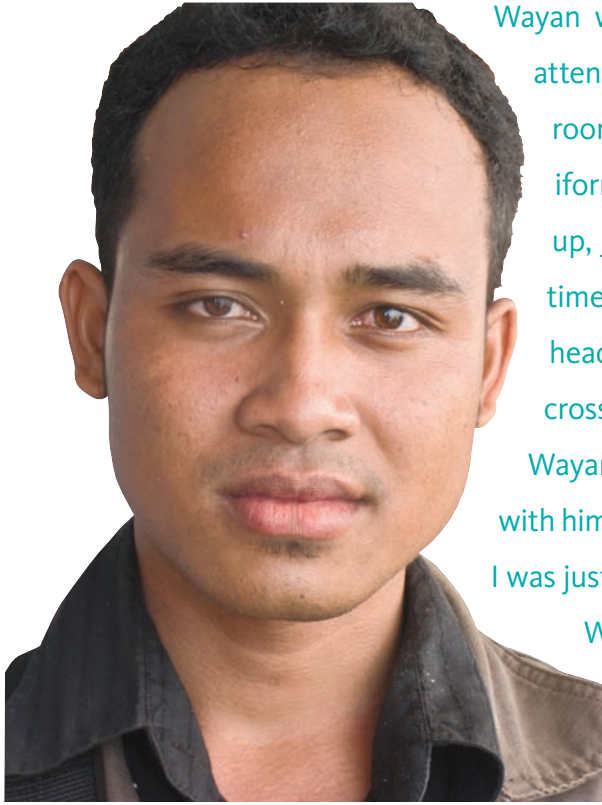
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- 1 The Nature of Nonverbal Communication**

 - 2 Ten Channels of Nonverbal Communication**

 - 3 Functions of Nonverbal Communication**

 - 4 Improving Your Nonverbal Communication Skills**

Wayan and Jack



Wayan was born and raised in Bali, but he attends college in the United States. His roommate, Jack, grew up in northern California. Since midterm exams are coming up, Jack and Wayan are spending a lot of time studying. One morning, as Wayan heads out for his sociology exam, Jack crosses his fingers to wish him good luck. Wayan gasps and asks Jack what's wrong with him. Puzzled, Jack replies, "Nothing, man; I was just wishing you good luck on your test."

Wayan lets out a sigh of relief, laughs, and explains that, in Bali, crossing your fingers has the same meaning as flipping someone off!

Nonverbal communication is powerful stuff. So much of what we learn about other people's thoughts and feelings comes not through listening to their words but through observing their body language—watching their facial expressions, seeing how they move and gesture, and taking note of their eye contact. These and other behaviors often convey enormous amounts of information about people in efficient and sometimes subtle ways.

In this chapter, we'll explore the uses of nonverbal behavior in various communication contexts. In particular, we'll discuss:

- 1} What nonverbal communication is and what five of its most important characteristics are
- 2} How nonverbal communication makes use of ten specific channels
- 3} The ways we use nonverbal communication to manage conversations, express emotions, maintain relationships, form impressions, influence others, and conceal information
- 4} How we can become better nonverbal communicators



I } The Nature of Nonverbal Communication {



Marge Simpson uses her facial expressions, posture, and tone of voice to communicate her feelings about her husband and children.

On the animated television show *The Simpsons*, Marge Simpson is seldom shy about expressing disapproval when her husband, Homer, or son, Bart, misbehaves. She frequently communicates her feelings through her facial expressions, her posture, and the stressful grunting sound she makes with her voice when she's annoyed. These and other nonverbal communication behaviors clearly convey Marge's state of mind to anyone who happens to be around her at the time. What makes nonverbal behavior such an effective form of communication? We'll find out in this section, first by differentiating nonverbal communication from verbal communication and then by examining five of its most important characteristics.

The body says what words cannot.

—Martha Graham (1894–1991)
Pioneer in dance and choreography

What Is Nonverbal Communication?

If we just look at the word “nonverbal,” we can tell right away that it means “not verbal.” Nonverbal communication requires neither words nor language. How, exactly, do we communicate with one another without using words?

The answer is, in many ways! We can tell a great deal about people by watching their facial expressions or listening to the tone of their voices. When you listen to your doctor tell you the results of your recent blood tests, for instance, you might hear the tension in her voice and determine that something is wrong, or you might see the pleasant look on her face and conclude that everything is fine. We also interpret people's gestures and notice the way they carry themselves. Perhaps you see two people punching each other but you determine from their behaviors that they are playing rather than genuinely fighting.

In addition, we frequently make judgments about people on the basis of their appearance. While scanning a series of personal ads online, for example, you might be more drawn to some people than to others based on their photographs. Sometimes, we also perceive others according to the way they use their time and the space around them. Perhaps you tried talking to your boss about your recent evaluation, but you felt ignored because he kept looking at his new BlackBerry. As we'll see in this chapter, people routinely communicate more information through their nonverbal behaviors than they do through their use of language. When it comes to interpersonal communication, actions often do speak louder than words.

We can define **nonverbal communication**, then, as *those behaviors and characteristics that convey meaning without the use of words*. Nonverbal communication behaviors frequently accompany verbal messages to clarify or reinforce them. For instance, if someone asks you for directions to the bookstore and you point and say “It's that way,” your nonverbal behavior (pointing) clarifies the meaning of your verbal message. In contrast, if you just say “It's that way” without pointing, then your verbal message is ambiguous—and not very helpful. Likewise, if you're explaining to a nurse where you're feeling pain, you might point to certain areas on your body and

Nonverbal communication Those behaviors and characteristics that convey meaning without the use of words.

say “I’m hurting here.” The combination of your words and your nonverbal gestures will help the nurse understand where your pain is located.

At other times, however, nonverbal communication behaviors convey meaning on their own. For example, if you ask me where the bookstore is and I shrug my shoulders, you will probably infer from my behavior that I don’t know the answer to your question, even though I never actually said that. Similarly, if you ask your nurse how many times you should take your pain medication each day and she holds up two fingers, you’ll probably interpret her behavior to mean that you should take your medication twice a day, even though she didn’t tell you that verbally.

Nonverbal behavior is a powerful way of communicating. It also comes naturally to many of us. In fact, we often engage in nonverbal behavior without really thinking about it. Therefore, you might wonder why, if nonverbal behavior is so natural, we need to study it in the first place. The truth is, there’s much more to nonverbal communication than meets the eye. Even though we frequently encounter nonverbal behaviors, we often face challenges when trying to interpret them. In a 1993 episode of the television sitcom *Seinfeld*, for instance, characters Jerry, Elaine, and George visit with Jerry’s accountant, Barry, who seems to be sniffing frequently. After Barry leaves, Jerry and his friends try to figure out how to interpret Barry’s sniffing behavior. Unable to figure it out, Jerry becomes increasingly concerned that Barry is sniffing because he’s addicted to cocaine. Only at the end of the episode does Jerry discover that Barry was sniffing because he is allergic to the material in a sweater Jerry was wearing.

As that example illustrates, interpreting nonverbal communication accurately can be challenging. The more we learn about nonverbal communication, the better we can understand it. In the following section, we’ll take a look at five important characteristics of nonverbal behavior, each of which makes this type of communication worth our while to study.



Martha Graham

Five Characteristics of Nonverbal Communication

It’s difficult to imagine what life would be like if we didn’t have nonverbal communication. It’s particularly critical for people who lack language skills, such as infants, who can only vocalize without words, and people with certain types of neurological problems, such as a stroke, that limit their language use.

Even people with language abilities, however, rely immensely on nonverbal communication. For example, because Bergitta had only a limited knowledge of Spanish, she relied heavily on nonverbal behaviors while traveling through Bolivia, Uruguay, and Argentina the summer after she graduated from college. She was frequently amazed at how well she could understand others simply by observing their gestures and facial expressions. Her communication was more challenging than it would have been if she had known the language, but she was still able to understand and be un-

derstood by others through nonverbal behaviors. Imagine you are traveling through an area where you don't speak the language. How might you use nonverbal behaviors to be understood by others?

Five characteristics of nonverbal communication explain why it plays such an important role in human interaction. We list these characteristics here and then discuss each one in detail.

- Nonverbal communication is present in most interpersonal communication.
- Nonverbal communication often conveys more information than verbal communication.
- Nonverbal communication is usually believed over verbal communication.
- Nonverbal communication is the primary means of communicating emotion.
- Nonverbal communication is meta-communicative.

Nonverbal communication is present in most interpersonal conversations. Whether you talk to people one-on-one or in a group, you have access not only to the words they speak but also to several dimensions of nonverbal communication. Whether you're hosting a party, meeting a new friend, or attending a business lunch, you can watch people's facial expressions for signs of emotion. For example, you might tell from your supervisor's facial expression that she is bored at the business lunch and eager to leave. You can also see from the gestures people use and the posture they adopt whether they're feeling confident or insecure. You might notice your new friend's expressive use of gestures, for instance, and infer that she feels confident and comfortable around you. You can judge from the tone of their voices when people are being serious and when they're kidding. At a party, you might come across a small group of people who are speaking in hushed voices and infer that they are discussing something serious.

Even the way people dress and the way they smell to you can send you information. Glancing around the room at a business lunch, you might be able to guess which people are managers and which are staff members by the formality of their dress. You're also likely to form more positive impressions of those who smell good to you than of those who don't. In these and many other social situations, we are nearly flooded with nonverbal signals.

In other communication contexts, such as talking on the telephone or sending e-mail messages, we don't have access to as many nonverbal cues as we do in face-to-face conversation. We still make use of what's available, however. On the telephone, for instance, even if we haven't met the people to whom we're speaking, we can make judgments about their voices, such as how fast they're talking, how loudly, with what tone, and with what type of accent. In electronically mediated communication, such as e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, and text messaging, we can introduce nonverbal cues through the use of emoticons, the familiar textual representations of facial expressions (see Figure 6.1), and through other signals such as pauses and the use of all capital letters. Take a look at the e-mail messages in Figures 6.2a and 6.2b. These two messages are identical verbally, but would you interpret them in the same way?

Most of our interpersonal communication includes at least some form of nonverbal communication. Going further, when we only have a few nonverbal signals to go on, we pay them extra attention. For example, vocal characteristics such as pitch and tone are important nonverbal cues in face-to-face conversation, but they are even more important on the telephone because so many other nonverbal signals, such as facial expressions and gestures, are unavailable to us. By the same token, when people lose the ability to use one of their senses to communicate, they typically compensate by relying more heavily on their remaining senses. Deaf people, for example, pay extra attention to visual cues when communicating with others because they are unable

Communication in computer-mediated formats, such as e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging, relies heavily on language. Even in these environments, however, people can still introduce nonverbal facial expressions through the use of emoticons (a word that means *emotional icons*). Here are some of the most common emoticons:








Smiles	:)	
Laughs	:D	
Frowns	:(
Winks	;)	
Kisses	:X	
Confusion	:/	
Sticking out tongue	:P	

FIGURE 6.1 Emoticons: Nonverbal Communication in Cyberspace You might be surprised to learn that the first emoticon appeared in an online bulletin board posting more than 25 years ago, on September 19, 1982. Since then, emoticons have been used in computer-mediated communication to simulate the facial expression of various emotions, which helps readers decipher the sender's emotions. Interestingly, there are sex differences in emoticon use that mirror sex differences in facial expressions during face-to-face communication. For instance, women use them more often than men, particularly when they are communicating with other women. In cross-sex communication, though, men tend to match women's use of emotions, but women do not tend to match men's use of them. The sexes also differ in *why* they use emoticons: Women tend to use them primarily to express joy or humor, whereas men are more likely to use them to communicate sarcasm. Sources: Microsoft, Inc. (2006). The first smiley :). Retrieved January 19, 2006, from <http://research.microsoft.com/~mbj/Smiley/Smiley.html>; Walther, J. B., & D'Addario, K. (2001). The impacts of emoticons on message interpretation in computer-mediated communication. *Social Science Computer Review*, 19, 324–347; Witmer, D., & Kaztman, S. (1997). On-line smiles: Does gender make a difference in the use of graphic accents? *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2(4). Retrieved May 23, 2000, from <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol2/issue4/witmer1.html>; Wolf, A. (2000). Emotional expression online: Gender differences in emoticon use. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 3, 827–833.

to interpret vocal characteristics. Similarly, blind people often rely more heavily on their senses of hearing and touch to help them communicate, because they are unable to see gestures or facial expressions.

Nonverbal communication often conveys more information than verbal communication. If you browse the self-help section at most bookstores, chances are you'll find at least one book about the power of nonverbal communication. Open up titles such as *How to Read a Person like a Book*¹ or *What You Do Is More Important Than What You Say*,² and you'll get the impression that nearly all the information we get by communicating with others comes through nonverbal behavior. In fact, some unreliable but frequently cited studies have estimated that as much as 93% of meaning is transmitted nonverbally, leaving only 7% to be conveyed by the words we use.³

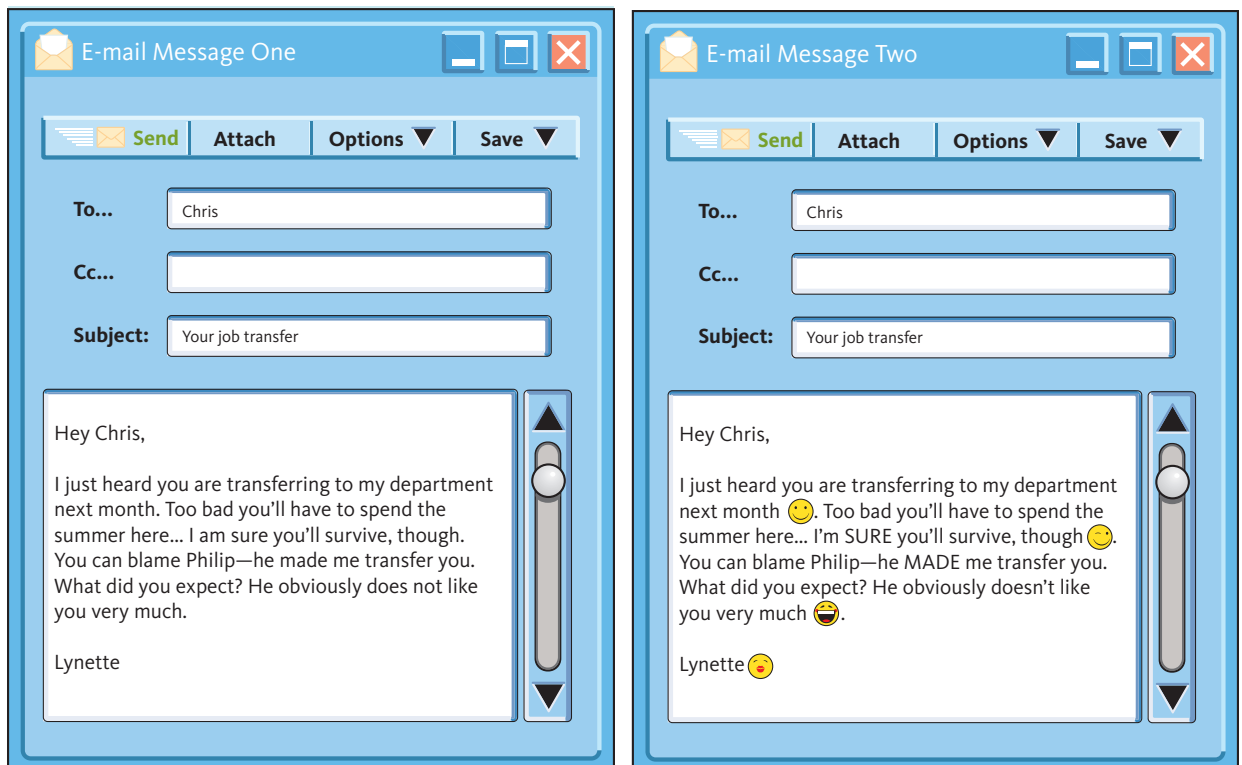


FIGURE 6.2 Two e-mail messages Based on the first email message on the left, how would you describe Lynette’s feelings about Chris being transferred to her department? Does she think Chris will enjoy being there during the summer? How does she think Philip feels about Chris? With only the text to go by, many of us would find it difficult to interpret a message such as this. Now read through the email on the right, which is the same text message supplemented by a few nonverbal clues. From the addition of the emoticons and the use of all capital letters for emphasis, we can gather that Lynette actually is happy about Chris’s transfer to her department. The wink at the end of the second sentence suggests that Lynette is being sarcastic when she says it’s too bad Chris will have to spend the summer there. The laughing emoticon at the end of the last sentence suggests she is also being sarcastic when she says that Philip doesn’t like Chris very much. Notice how much these small nonverbal clues reveal the true intent of the message.

Nonverbal communication isn’t quite that powerful, however. More realistic estimates from nonverbal communication scholar Judee Burgoon suggest that between 65% and 70% of meaning comes from nonverbal clues, whereas 30% to 35% comes from language.⁴ Significantly, even Burgoon’s more conservative statistics suggest that we communicate more through our nonverbal behaviors than we do through our words.

Nonverbal channels
The various forms that nonverbal communication takes.

The most likely reason why nonverbal communication adds up to such a significant percentage is that it makes use of many **nonverbal channels**, which are the various behavioral forms that nonverbal communication takes. Some of these channels rely on our sense of vision, such as facial expressions, gestures, and personal appearance. Vocal characteristics, such as loudness, pitch, and tone of voice, engage our sense of hearing. We also use our senses of touch and smell to communicate. We often express different messages with a handshake and a hug, and we convey subtle messages about attraction to others through our use of smell.

We sometimes rely on clues from nonverbal channels to make sense of a situation when talking to others isn’t a good option. As the son of an alcoholic, for instance, Rick has learned that his mother, Claudia, has very unpredictable mood swings. When Rick visits his mother, he’s never really sure how she’ll be feeling. Some days, she’s

outgoing and chipper; other days, she's sullen and withdrawn. Occasionally, she'll start yelling at the slightest provocation. Over time, Rick has noticed that he can tell which mood Claudia is in without even talking to her. He only needs to look at her posture and facial expression to tell whether she's feeling cheerful, depressed, or angry that day. Perhaps you also know people whose emotional states you can interpret by paying attention to nonverbal channels.

In many situations, we send and receive multiple signals through multiple channels at once. Imagine you and I were sitting on the sidelines at my sister's soccer game having a conversation about her upcoming deployment to Afghanistan. Not only would you hear my words, but you would also be able to listen to the tone of my voice, watch my facial expressions, interpret any gestures that I use, and see how I was dressed. You could also smell my cologne and you could feel if I touched your arm. In other words, you would have access not only to the verbal channel (the words I'm using) but also to quite a number of nonverbal channels at once (my facial expressions, gestures, posture, appearance, voice, smell, and touch).

Given the number and variety of signals we can receive at one time, you might wonder why we aren't overwhelmed by having to pay attention to this much information at once. The answer is that your nervous system gives you the ability to manage social interaction and process a great deal of information simultaneously. Indeed, you do it every time you talk to someone. The important point to remember is that you will learn more about what I'm thinking and feeling by processing all those nonverbal signals than by paying attention only to my words. How do I feel about my sister being deployed? Am I proud? sad? nervous? You might not figure this out just by listening to my words. Language is very important, of course, but nonverbal communication is often even more important.

Nonverbal communication is usually believed over verbal communication. It's not uncommon to get conflicting messages from what a person says versus what he or she does. How do we respond when this occurs? Multiple studies have demonstrated that we believe the nonverbal clues most of the time.⁵

Let's say, for example, that you're meeting your friend Joel at your favorite bookstore. When he walks in, Joel slumps down on the seat next to you, rolls his eyes, and lets out a heavy sigh. You ask him how he's doing, and he says, "It's been a *great* day." In this situation, Joel's verbal behavior is sending you one message ("I'm having a great day"), but his nonverbal behavior is suggesting something quite different ("I'm having a lousy day"). These messages obviously contradict each other, so which one do you believe? Most of us would pay attention to what Joel is *doing* instead of what he is *saying*. In other words, we would believe his nonverbal message.

Why do we put our trust in nonverbal communication? The most likely reason is that we believe people have a harder time controlling nonverbal signals than verbal ones. Thus, we assume that nonverbal behaviors more accurately reflect what a person is really thinking or feeling. It's easy for Joel to *say* he's having a great day, but if he actually feels frustrated or depressed, it's probably tougher for him to *act* as though his day is going well. Therefore, when he slumps in his chair, rolls his eyes,



Nonverbal communication is a part of most interpersonal interactions and it often involves multiple channels at once. During a face-to-face conversation, speakers can attend to facial expressions, eye behaviors, tone of voice, gestures, posture, and touch as sources of information.

and sighs, you probably would conclude that his day is going poorly, despite his words to the contrary.

Our preference for believing nonverbal signals even when they conflict with words is especially critical for our ability to detect deception, because people often display inconsistent verbal and nonverbal behaviors when they're lying. Imagine that Tawny misses her group study session for the third time because she overslept, yet she tells her study group that she was in the emergency room with a severe migraine. Tawny might feel nervous telling such a lie, especially because she knows she could be kicked out of the group were she to get caught. Chances are that her nervousness will affect her nonverbal behavior. She might perspire, get dry in the mouth, sound unusually tense, and assume an especially rigid posture. In contrast, if she really had been in the hospital, there's probably no reason she would be nervous telling her study group about it. She would be able to explain her medical emergency calmly and apologize for her absence. So, if she looks or sounds nervous, these nonverbal messages will contradict her verbal message and may convince her group that she's not telling the truth.

Nonverbal communication is the primary means of communicating emotion. Although we have a large verbal vocabulary for describing our emotions, our nonverbal behaviors communicate emotion much more efficiently. How many times have you been able to tell how someone is feeling just by looking at him or her? We may not always be right about the emotions we sense—and some of us are better than others at interpreting people's emotions—but research shows that humans are acutely sensitive to nonverbal emotion cues.⁶ As we saw in the example of Rick and his mother, Claudia, Rick has developed the ability to interpret Claudia's emotional state accurately with just a glance by paying attention to her facial expressions and posture. Emotion is a powerful influence on our behavior, and our primary way of communicating how we feel is through our nonverbal behaviors.

Two channels of nonverbal behavior that are particularly important in communicating emotion are facial expressions and vocal behaviors. Humans are highly visually oriented beings, meaning that we tend to pay a great deal of attention to people's facial expressions when we want to figure out their emotional state, whether we're talking to them face-to-face, listening to them speak to a group, or even watching them on television. On reality TV shows such as *American Idol*, *Project Runway*, and *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, for instance, producers often shoot close-ups of people's faces during critical moments in the show to capture their facial expressions of emotion. Most of us can easily think of the type of facial expression that connotes happiness, for example: The eyes tend to be wide and bright, and the person tends to be smiling. This expression differs from the expressions we associate with anger, sadness, surprise, and other emotional states. The distinctive patterns associated with each expression help us interpret other people's emotions.

In fact, several studies suggest that facial expressions of these basic emotions are interpreted very similarly across cultures.⁷ In a classic study, psychologist Paul Ekman took photographs of people communicating six basic emotions through their facial expressions: happiness, fear, disgust, anger, sadness, and surprise. He then showed the photos to participants in Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Japan, and the United States. Each participant was asked to identify

Nonverbal communication—particularly facial expression—is our primary means of conveying emotion.



the emotion that was being expressed in each photograph. Ekman then compared the participants from different countries and found that they were equally accurate at describing which emotion was displayed in each photograph.⁸

Similar studies have repeated these results using groups from a range of cultures, including Greek, Chinese, Turkish, Malaysian, Ethiopian, Swedish, Italian, Sumatran, Estonian, and Scottish.⁹ The degree of similarity in interpretations of emotion displays does differ from culture to culture. It also differs from emotion to emotion, with facial displays of some emotions, such as happiness, being interpreted more consistently than others, such as fear.¹⁰ Overall, however, it appears that facial expressions of our most basic emotions are interpreted similarly around the world.

We also pay attention to vocal cues to understand a person's emotional state. When someone is yelling or screaming and using harsh vocal tones, for example, we usually infer that he or she is angry. In contrast, we interpret laughing and extensive pitch variation to suggest happiness or excitement. It turns out that we may be more accurate at interpreting emotions through vocal cues than through facial expressions.¹¹ This appears to be particularly true when the vocal channel is the only channel we have access to, such as when we're speaking with someone on the telephone. We don't necessarily get *more* information about their emotional state from their voice than from their facial expressions, but we might get *more accurate* information.

Let's say you're chatting about an upcoming sales meeting with your co-worker Jude, whose desk is in the cubicle next to yours. Although you can't see each other, you can hear each other just fine. You might notice from the sound of Jude's voice that she seems nervous when describing the presentation she will be giving at the meeting. You finally walk into her cubicle, and even though her facial expression doesn't suggest that she's nervous, you have correctly interpreted her emotional state by listening to the sounds of her voice. Just as with facial expressions, the vocal clues to emotion show consistency across cultures.¹² Take a look at the "How Do We Know?" box to learn more.

Nonverbal communication is meta-communicative. As we discussed in Chapter 1, meta-communication is communication *about* communication, and we often meta-communicate verbally. When we use phrases like "Let me tell you what I think" or "Don't take this the wrong way," or "I'm just kidding," we are sending messages related to our other messages; that is, we're communicating about our communication. Usually, we use meta-communication to avoid misunderstandings and to provide listeners with greater clarity about the meaning of our statements.

This is a very important feature of social interaction, and several nonverbal behaviors also help us to achieve this goal. Suppose, for example, that you're sitting at the dinner table with your brother and he leans over to you, lowers his voice to a whisper, and cups his mouth with

Nonverbal behaviors can be meta-communicative. When a friend whispers and covers her mouth with her hand, those behaviors convey that what she's telling you is meant to be a secret.



How Do We Know?

Vocal Expressions of Emotion Are Interpreted Similarly in Different Cultures

In the previous section, we explained that people from different cultures interpret vocal expressions of emotion similarly. How do we know this is true?

This finding comes from an experiment in which psychologists Klaus Scherer, Rainer Banse, and Harald Wallbott had professional actors record different speech segments while they were instructed to sound happy, sad, fearful, angry, and disgusted. The researchers then played the recordings for participants in nine countries in Europe, North America, and Asia. Each participant was asked to listen

to each speech segment and to identify which emotion was being portrayed.

The researchers found that participants across cultures were able to identify nearly all the emotions with a high degree of accuracy on the basis of the vocal recordings. In contrast to Ekman's studies, however, the most difficult emotion to interpret from the vocal samples was happiness; participants frequently identified the happy sounding voice as emotionally neutral. Overall, however, vocal emotion cues appear to show cross-cultural consistency, just as facial expressions of emotion do.

Ask Yourself:

- How accurately do you think you can identify a person's emotional state just by listening to his or her voice?
- Why do you suppose cultures are more similar than different when it comes to interpreting vocal and facial expressions of emotion?

Source: Scherer, K. R., Banse, R., & Wallbott, H. G. (2001). Emotion inferences from vocal expression correlate across languages and cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32, 76–92.

his hand, as though he's about to tell you a secret. This combination of nonverbal behaviors sends you the message "What I'm about to say is meant for only you to hear." In other words, his nonverbal behavior meta-communicates his intentions to you.

We often use nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions or gestures to indicate how someone else should interpret our messages. For instance, we might smile and wink to indicate that we're being sarcastic or raise our eyebrows to signal that what we're saying is very serious. All these behaviors are examples of how we can use nonverbal cues to meta-communicate with those around us.

Learn It: What determines whether a form of communication is verbal or nonverbal? Why are we more likely to believe nonverbal behaviors than words when the two conflict?

Try It: Consider how tone of voice can influence meaning. Take a simple phrase such as "She made me do that." First, say it as though you're angry, then surprised, and, finally, sarcastic. Notice how your voice changes each time, even though the words are the same.

Reflect on It: How accurate do you think you are at interpreting other people's nonverbal behaviors? Why do you suppose that some people are better at "reading" nonverbal behavior than others?

2} Ten Channels of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication engages nearly all our senses, so it's probably no surprise that we experience it in so many different forms, or channels. In this section, we consider ten channels:

- Facial displays
- Eye behaviors
- Movement and gestures
- Touch behaviors
- Vocal behaviors
- The use of smell
- The use of space
- Physical appearance
- The use of time
- The use of artifacts

The human body is the best picture of the human soul.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951)
Austrian philosopher

Facial Displays

It's hard to overstate the importance of **facial displays**, or facial expressions, in nonverbal communication. Indeed, according to the *principle of facial primacy*, the face communicates more information than any other channel of nonverbal behavior.¹³ This principle is especially true for three important functions of facial displays: identity, attractiveness, and emotion. We use the appearance of the face more than any other single cue to identify others. We consider facial attractiveness to be of prime importance when evaluating our attraction to others. Finally, we look to facial displays more than any other channel to provide cues about a person's emotional state.

Facial display
The use of facial expression for communication.

Identity. The face is the most important visual clue that humans use to identify one another.¹⁴ We don't usually hang pictures on our walls of people's hands or legs or feet; rather, we hang pictures of their faces because the appearance of the face is our most reliable clue to identity. It's your face that appears on your driver's license and in your passport to help authorities identify you. Likewise, it's your face that appears in your high school yearbook to help your classmates remember you.

Attractiveness. The face also plays a major role in attractiveness. Even though we like to think that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," there is actually remarkable consistency in what people find attractive in faces, both within and across cultures. Two properties that appear to be especially important in assessing attractiveness are **symmetry** and **proportionality**. Symmetry refers to the similarity between the left and right sides of your face. For most of us, the two sides of our faces look similar, but they aren't *exactly* alike. For both women and men, however, attractive faces have greater symmetry than unattractive faces.¹⁵ Take a look at the photos in Figure 6.3 for an example of symmetric and asymmetric faces.

Proportionality
The size of facial features relative to one another.

Symmetry
The similarity between left and right sides of the face or body.

Proportionality refers to the relative size of your facial features. Is your nose too big for your face? Are your ears too small? On a proportional face, all the features are of the proper size, not in an absolute sense, but relative to one another. Just as with symmetry, attractive faces have greater proportionality than unattractive ones. Unlike symmetry, which can be objectively measured, proportionality is a subjective judgment we make about a person's face. It makes a difference for the attractive-



FIGURE 6.3 Facial Symmetry All else being equal, symmetrical faces are more attractive than asymmetrical faces. When researchers study facial symmetry, they often do so by taking a photograph of a face and modifying it with computer software to make it appear more symmetrical. For instance, the image on the left is an original, un-retouched photo of an adult man's face, and the image on the right is a modified version of the same face that increases its symmetry. Research indicates that most people would find the face on the right to be more attractive. Which face do you find more attractive? Why?

ness of a face, however. Our tendency to find proportional faces attractive is a major reason why rhinoplasty, a surgical procedure to alter the size and shape of the nose, is one of the most commonly performed cosmetic surgery procedures in the United States.¹⁶ Because the nose occupies such a prominent position on the face, making its size more proportional to that of other facial features often enhances a person's facial attractiveness.

It may seem odd to identify symmetry and proportionality as primary contributors to facial attractiveness, because we so often think of attractiveness as a highly individual assessment. As you'll learn in the "Fact or Fiction?" box on page 220, however, we're much more similar than dissimilar when it comes to judging a person's attractiveness.

Emotion. Recall from our earlier discussion that nonverbal behaviors communicate emotions more effectively than verbal communication. Because the face is the major channel of nonverbal behavior, we should not be surprised to learn that facial behavior is our primary means of communicating emotion. Our face enables us to make hundreds of different expressions, and we use those expressions to convey a host of emotions, from happiness, surprise, and determination to anger, fear, sadness, and contempt.

How accurately we decode these emotions from other people's facial expressions depends on several factors. The first factor is the emotion itself. As we saw in the previous discussion of facial expressions, certain emotions are easier to decode than

Fact or Fiction? Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder

Most of us have heard the cliché that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” meaning that what one person finds attractive may not be appealing to another. You might be surprised to learn that this idea dates back at least to the third century BC, which means that humans have long considered beauty to be subjective, a matter of individual taste. If that were the case, then we would expect to find little agreement from person to person, and from culture to culture, about what is physically attractive. Exactly how true is this idea, though?

Not very, according to research. In fact, a host of studies has shown just the opposite: People are remarkably consistent when it comes to judging attractiveness. In 2000, developmental psychologist Judith Langlois and her colleagues reviewed 130 of these studies and found that, within cultures, people showed 90% agreement with one another when judging how attractive someone is. Moreover, people from different cultures agreed in their judgments of attractiveness 94% of the time. Thus, although we sometimes think of beauty as being culturally specific, Langlois and her team found that there was more agreement *across* cultures than within cultures in assessing attractiveness.

These findings indicate that people are much more similar than different when it comes to judging looks. Therefore, people who are considered attractive by one social group are much more likely than not to be considered attractive by other groups.

Ask Yourself:

- Why does the idea that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” persist?
- What do you find most physically attractive in members of the other sex? in members of your own sex?



From Me to You:

- Many features other than physical appearance make a person attractive. For example, we might be drawn to someone’s intelligence, optimism, sense of adventure, or sense of humor. We might find other people attractive because of their kindness, empathy, or competence, or their ethical and moral commitments. Remember that physical appearance is an important component of attraction, but it’s only one component. As we get to know people, we can see beyond their outward appearance and discover all the attractive things about them.

Sources: Langlois, J. H., Kalakanis, L. E., Rubenstein, A. J., Larson, A. D., Hallam, M. J., & Smoot, M. T. (2000). Maxims or myths of beauty: A meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 380–423; Rubenstein, A. J., Langlois, J. H., & Roggman, L. A. (2002). What makes a face attractive and why: The role of averageness in defining facial beauty. In G. Rhodes & L. A. Zebrowitz (Eds.), *Facial attractiveness: Evolutionary, cognitive, and social perspectives* (pp. 1–33). Westport, CT: Ablex.

others. Happiness seems to be the easiest to decode. In one study, for instance, people accurately interpreted facial expressions of happiness more often than expressions of sadness or surprise.¹⁷

Another factor that affects our ability to decode messages is sex. In general, women tend to be better than men at decoding facial displays of emotion.¹⁸ This observation is true across different cultures. It might reflect the fact that in many societies, women are taught to be more friendly, supportive, and nurturing than men, so they



FIGURE 6.4 Facial Expressions in American Sign Language Facial expression plays a vital role in communicating ideas in American Sign Language (ASL). In some instances, the same hand sign is associated with different meanings if it is accompanied by different facial expressions. Both photographs feature the hand sign for “you,” for example, but they involve different facial displays. The photo on the left would be interpreted as a question, such as “Are you?” or “Did you?” The photo on the right, however, would be interpreted as an exclamation, such as “It’s you!” Although the hand sign is the same in the two photographs, the meaning differs because of the accompanying facial expression.

learn better decoding skills as result.¹⁹ Finally, people who are very outgoing and extroverted tend to be better at interpreting facial emotion displays than people who are shy or introverted.²⁰

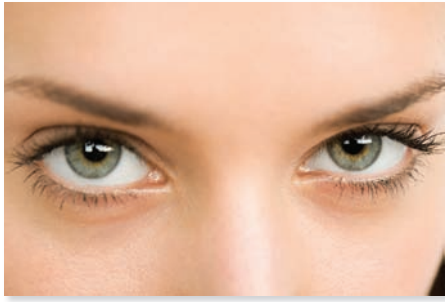
As a way to convey meaning, facial expressions are also extremely important to people who communicate through sign language. In sign language, facial expressions are sometimes called “non-manual signals” because they work alongside hand signs to help express a particular meaning. For instance, when someone asks a yes-or-no question using sign language, his or her eyes are wide open, the eyebrows are raised, and the head and shoulders are pushed forward. Sometimes a person can change the entire meaning of a sign just by changing the facial expression that goes with it (see Figure 6.4).²¹

Eye Behaviors

Because the eyes are part of the face, it may strike you as odd that researchers study eye behavior separately from facial behavior. However, just as facial behavior communicates more than any other nonverbal channel, the eyes communicate more than any other part of the face. For that reason, we treat **oculesics**, or the study of eye behavior, as a separate nonverbal channel.

When people think about eye behavior, they frequently think first about eye contact, and with good reason. Eye contact plays a role in several important types of relational interaction. The role it plays, however, varies by culture. In Western cultures,

Oculesics
The study of eye behavior.



such as those in North America, Europe, and Australia, we use eye contact to signal attraction to someone and to infer that someone is attracted to us. We use it to gain credibility and to come across as sincere or trustworthy. We use it to persuade others and to signal that we are paying attention and understanding what others are saying. We can even use eye contact when we want to intimidate someone or take a dominant or authoritative position in a conversation or a group discussion. Indeed, there are few times when we feel as connected to other people—in either positive or negative ways—as

when we are looking each other in the eyes.

In contrast to Western cultures, some Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern cultures discourage eye contact in certain situations. For example, they teach people to avoid making eye contact with authority figures as a sign of deference or respect.²² In these cultures a young person who maintained eye contact with a teacher or another authority figure would be acting disrespectfully.

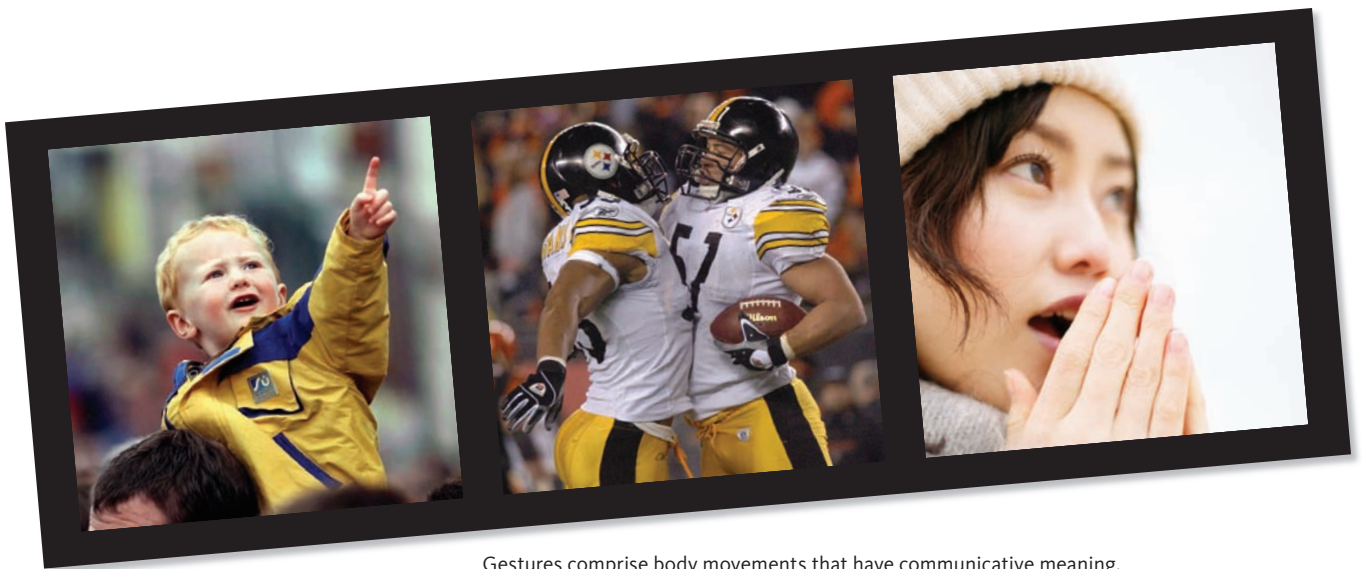
In addition to eye contact, researchers also study the communicative value of other eye behaviors, including the *lack* of eye contact. Sometimes, not looking a person in the eyes can send just as strong a message as looking at him or her. Multiple studies have shown that avoiding eye contact—at least, in Western cultures—elicits negative evaluations from others.²³ Let's say, for instance, that Ruben is being interviewed by an admissions committee at the medical school to which he has applied. Early in the interview, the committee members notice that Ruben rarely looks at them when responding to their questions. Instead, he gazes at the floor or out the window. Although he has good grades and excellent recommendations from his undergraduate professors, the committee is reluctant to recommend his admission. His lack of eye contact has caused the committee members to perceive Ruben as untrustworthy and lacking in self-confidence.

Another eye behavior that has communicative value is pupil size. The pupil is the darkest spot right in the center of your eye, which you can see when you look at your eyes in a mirror. Your pupils control how much light enters your eyes; as a result, they continually change in size. In darker environments, they dilate, or open wider, to take in every available amount of light. In brighter environments, they contract, or become smaller, to avoid taking in too much light at once.

What communication researchers find interesting is that your pupils also dilate when you look at someone you find physically attractive and when you feel any kind of arousal. This is true whether your response is positive, such as excitement or sexual arousal, or negative, such as anxiety or fear. Watching how a person's pupils react to different social situations or conversational partners, therefore, tells us something about his or her interest and arousal. Unless it is extreme, however, pupil dilation is not easily noticeable to the naked eye. Rather, researchers use sophisticated video equipment to measure and track changes in a person's pupil size.

Movement and Gestures

Think about the different ways you can walk. When you're feeling confident, you hold your head high and walk with smooth, consistent strides. When you're nervous, you probably walk more timidly, stealing frequent glances at the people around you. Perhaps you walk fast when it's raining, facing downward to avoid the raindrops. Your *gait*, or the way you walk, is one example of how your body movement can commu-



Gestures comprise body movements that have communicative meaning, and we begin to use them when we are young children. How would you interpret the gestures used by each of these people?

Kinesics

The study of movement.

nicate various messages about you to others, such as “I feel proud,” “I feel scared,” or “I don’t want to get wet.” The study of movement is called **kinesics**.

Gesticulation The use of arm and hand movements to communicate.

Now imagine how you use your arms and hands to communicate. Perhaps it’s to wave at your neighbor when you see her at the grocery store. Maybe it’s to hold up two fingers to signal that you want two hot dogs at the football game concession stand. It might be to point in the direction you want your taxi driver to go. The use of arm and hand movements to communicate is called **gesticulation**. Research indicates that most people—even people who are born blind—start using gestures even before they begin speaking.²⁴ Communication scholars divide gestures into several forms, including emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adaptors. Let’s look at some examples of each.

Emblem A gesture with a direct verbal translation.

Emblems. An **emblem** is any gesture that has a direct verbal translation. Whenever you see an emblematic gesture, you should be able to translate it into words. Examples are the wave for “hello” or “goodbye,” the upright extended palm for “stop,” and the shrugged shoulders for “I don’t know.” As we saw in the opening vignette, the specific words an emblem symbolizes can vary by culture. Although Jack used the crossed-fingers gesture to mean “good luck,” his roommate Wayan interpreted the gesture differently, according to the way it is used in his native Bali.

Illustrator A gesture that enhances or clarifies a verbal message.

Illustrators. **Illustrators** are gestures that go along with a verbal message to enhance or clarify it. Suppose, for example, you’re telling your sister about the salmon you caught on your fishing trip to Alaska. If you hold up your hands a certain distance apart and say that your fish was “this big,” your gesture serves as an illustrator to clarify what you mean by “this big.” Similarly, when a politician is making a particularly important point in a campaign speech, she or he might raise her or his arms in the air. This gesture would also be an illustrator because it would enhance the importance of what the individual was saying.

Affect display A gesture that communicates emotion.

Affect displays. **Affect displays** are gestures that communicate emotion. You probably know people who wring their hands when they’re nervous or cover their mouths with

their hands when they're surprised. Both of these actions are affect displays because they communicate the particular emotions that the person is feeling at the time.

Some affect displays are specific to certain cultures. In China, for example, women express emotional satisfaction by holding their fingertips over their closed mouth. Similarly, a man in Uruguay will hold his fists together and turn them in opposite directions, as if wringing out a wet cloth, to express anger.

Regulators. Regulators are gestures that control the flow of conversation. If you're speaking and someone is trying to interrupt, you might hold up your index finger to signal that you're not quite finished talking. When someone is telling a long, drawn-out story and you want that person to get to the point, you might roll your hand in a circle, as if to say "get on with it." One regulator you're probably very familiar with is raising your hand when you're in a group and wish to speak or ask a question. Each of these gestures plays a role in regulating who is speaking, and for how long, so that conversations can flow smoothly.

Regulator
A gesture that controls the flow of conversation.

Adaptors. Finally, adaptors are gestures you use to satisfy some personal need, such as scratching an itch or picking lint off your shirt. When we do these behaviors to ourselves, we call them *self-adaptors*. When adaptors are directed at others (say, picking lint off someone else's shirt), they're called *other-adaptors*. Although we don't usually engage in adaptors for the purpose of communicating, research shows that they do convey messages about us to others. When people use excessive self-adaptors, for instance, they are often perceived by others as being nervous, aroused, or even deceptive.²⁵ Moreover, using other-adaptors with someone can signal a high level of familiarity and intimacy with that person. Because other-adaptors often require you to touch or be in close proximity to a person, using these gestures can convey the message that you have a close, familiar relationship with that person.

Adaptor A gesture used to satisfy a personal need.

Touch Behaviors

Touch is the first of our five senses to develop. Therefore, even before an infant can see, hear, taste, or smell, her skin can respond to stimuli in the environment. Touch is the only sense we cannot survive without. No matter how much we may cherish our other senses, it's entirely possible to survive without being able to see, hear, taste, or smell. Without our sense of touch, however, we would constantly be susceptible to burn, frostbite, and other forms of injury that would eventually be life-threatening.

Not only is touch vital to our survival, but it also plays a key role in communication. We call the study of how we use touch to communicate **haptics**. In human communication, there are five major areas in which touch plays a critical role in conveying meaning: affection, caregiving, power and control, aggression, and ritual. Let's take a closer look at each one.

Haptics
The study of how we use touch to communicate.

Affectionate touch. Sharing affection is one of the most important functions of touch. Behaviors such as hugging, kissing, and hand-holding communicate love, intimacy, commitment, and safety; they are commonplace in many romantic relationships, parent-child relationships, and friendships.²⁶ One reason affectionate touch is so important is that it contributes to our physical and mental well-being. Infants who are regularly cuddled ex-



No matter how much we cherish our other senses, touch is the only sense we cannot survive without.



Touch has become a sensitive issue in many grade schools. What are the implications of discouraging touch with children?

keys were scared. On the basis of his findings, Harlow concluded that affectionate touch was nearly as important for infant monkeys as food or shelter. Although these studies would not be conducted in the same way

today, their findings were influential in shaping much of the advice given to human parents about the importance of touching and cuddling their children.

In recent years, concerns over sexual abuse of children have caused many public school districts to adopt strict “no touch” policies that prevent teachers, counselors, or other school staff from touching students in any way unless it is a medical emergency. As educator Tony Del Prete explains, “In an effort to keep one step ahead of sexual offenders, more and more schools are sending the message to adults—hands off! Touching children in schools has become virtually taboo.”²⁹

Although such zero-tolerance policies are designed to protect children, many experts have wondered whether preventing children from being touched actually does more harm than good. For example, researcher Tiffany Field, an internationally recognized expert on touch, believes that no-touch policies are “not a good idea, because children need touch for survival. Their growth and development thrive on touch. And how will they learn about love and affection if not through touch?”³⁰

What’s your opinion? Do you think no-touch policies in schools help protect children from abuse? Do they go too far? not far enough? If you were the parent of a young schoolchild, would you want him or her to be touched by a teacher? If so, what types of touch would you consider appropriate?

Caregiving touch. We’re often touched by others while receiving some form of care or service. When you get your hair cut, have your teeth cleaned, receive a massage, or work with a personal trainer, you’re touched in ways that correspond to those activities. Babysitters touch young children while cleaning or dressing them, and nursing home employees touch elderly residents while changing a bandage or helping them take a medication. Each of these actions is an example of caregiving touch because it is done in the course of providing a specific type of care or service.

Caregiving touch is distinguished from affectionate touch because it doesn’t necessarily reflect any affection or positive emotion for the person being touched. When a physician touches you as part of a physical exam, for example, you don’t infer from her touch that she has personal feelings for you. Rather, you interpret her touch as task-oriented. As a consequence, we generally expect caregiving touch to be limited to caregiving contexts. Although you allow a dentist to touch your teeth and gums as

perience faster physical development than those who are not.²⁷

Just how essential is affectionate touch? In a now-famous set of experiments, psychologist Harry Harlow demonstrated that baby monkeys preferred the touch of a terrycloth-covered artificial “mother” over one made only of wire, even when the wire “mother” was the one who dispensed food.²⁸ This preference seemed to be especially true when the mon-

part of a dental exam, for example, you probably wouldn't be comfortable allowing the same kind of touch if you ran into him at an art fair.

The fact that caregiving touch is task-oriented doesn't mean it isn't beneficial. Indeed, several forms of caregiving touch have important health benefits. For instance, adolescents and adults who receive therapeutic massage show improvement in a host of medical conditions, ranging from depression and stress to asthma, diabetes, cancer, multiple sclerosis, and HIV.³¹ Caregiving touch can also induce calm and relieve stress for nursing home residents, as well as patients in a hospital or clinic.³²

Power and control touch. Still other touches are used to exert power over other people's behavior. We sometimes touch people merely to suggest a certain course of behavior, as when the host of a party puts his hand on a guest's back to lead her in a certain direction. In other instances, we touch people to protect them by restricting their movement, such as when a nursing aide holds the hand of an elderly patient to help him walk without falling.

Although these behaviors involve some degree of control, they are intended to be friendly and helpful. In some cases, however, we touch people to control their behavior against their wishes. This type of touch can constitute a legitimate exercise of power, such as when police officers hold a suspect on the ground while applying handcuffs. It can also embody an illegitimate or unlawful exercise of power, such as when bullies hold an adolescent immobile to steal from him.

Aggressive touch. Behaviors done to inflict physical harm, such as punching, pushing, kicking, slapping, and even stabbing, are all forms of aggressive touch. Using touch behaviors to inflict physical harm on others almost always constitutes a criminal act. In fact, in some U.S. states, even *acting* as though you are going to touch someone to inflict harm, such as raising your hand as if you're about to strike, is a crime, whether you actually touch the person or not. In those states, threatening to hit somebody is called "assault," and actually hitting the person is called "battery."

Despite such laws, however, incidents of violence and abuse using aggressive touch are unfortunately still common, both in North America and in many societies around the world. Research indicates that, although men are more likely than women to be the victims of violence at the hands of a stranger, women are more likely than men to be victimized by a close relational partner, such as a spouse.³³

Ritualistic touch. Some touches are ritualistic, meaning that we do them as part of a custom or a tradition. In North America, shaking hands is one such example: When we shake hands with people as part of a greeting ritual, we understand that the handshake does not convey any particular meaning about the relationship (the way that, say, holding hands would). By contrast, the greeting ritual in many cultures involves kissing on the lips or on the cheeks; people in those cultures would also understand those touches to be part of a ritual, not necessarily expressions of love or affection. Other ritualistic touches take place in the context of athletics. For example, basketball, wrestling, soccer, water polo, and many other sports involve body-to-body contact between players.³⁴

Vocal Behaviors

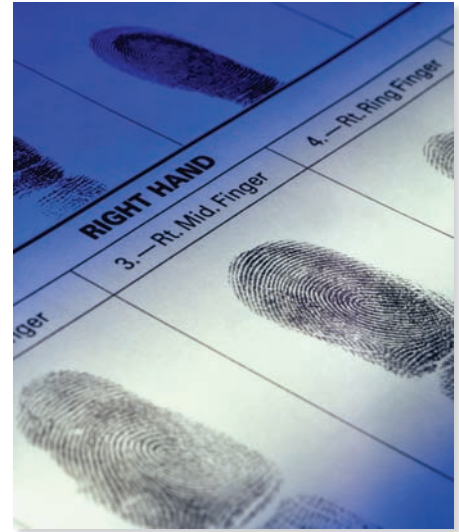
Perhaps you have a high, breathy voice or a deep, booming voice. Maybe you usually talk very fast, or quite loudly. Perhaps you have an accent that indicates where you grew up. Finally, there may be times when you speak with a particular tone in your voice to suggest that you are irritated, amused, or bored. We refer to these and other characteristics of the voice collectively as **vocalics**.

Vocalics
Characteristics of the voice.

Some people are surprised to learn that the voice is a channel of nonverbal communication. After all, we speak with our voices, and spoken communication is verbal, right? That's true, but the only aspect of spoken communication that's verbal is *what* we say—that is, the words themselves. Everything else about our voices is nonverbal.

Voices are much like fingerprints. Although two voices might sound similar, each voice comprises multiple properties that make it unique. We refer to these properties as *paralinguistic cues*. Calling these cues “paralinguistic” means we use them in conjunction with the words we speak; however, each can also communicate meaning separately from the meaning of the words. In this section we list and then examine some of the most important paralinguistic cues that affect how your voice conveys meaning:

- Pitch
- Inflection
- Volume
- Rate
- Filler words
- Pronunciation
- Articulation
- Accent
- Silence



Voices are much like fingerprints. Your voice is composed of multiple properties that make it different from every other voice.

Pitch. The pitch of your voice is an index of how high or deep your voice sounds. Pitch is also called “fundamental frequency.” Every person’s voice has an average fundamental frequency, which is the pitch your voice hits the most often. On average, women’s voices have a higher pitch than men’s voices, and adults have deeper voices than children. Several studies have reported that women are more attracted to men with lower vocal pitch than to men with higher voices, particularly when they are seeking short-term romantic partners.³⁵ Men show the opposite pattern, judging women with higher voices as more attractive than women with lower voices.³⁶ One possible reason for this sex difference is that low voices are associated with high levels of the male sex hormone testosterone.³⁷ Having a high level of testosterone gives a person a masculine look, which would tend to make men *more* physically attractive but women *less* attractive.

Inflection. When we talk about the inflection in your voice, we’re referring to your variation in pitch. Voices that have a great deal of inflection are usually described as very expressive; those with little inflection are said to be “monotone.” Perhaps you have seen the classic comedy *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, in which the economics teacher, played by Ben Stein, calls attendance in monotone: “Bueller? Bueller?” Research indicates that most of us find monotone voices unattractive, regardless of whether the speaker is female or male.³⁸ That may be because monotone voices lack variety, so we might find them less interesting than voices with greater inflection.

Volume. Volume is an index of how loud or quiet your voice is. Most of us alter our vocal volume as the social context demands. For instance, we tend to speak more loudly than normal when we are excited or when we are trying to be heard over a long distance. By contrast, we might speak more quietly than normal when sharing a secret or conversing in a library. Each of our voices also has an average volume, meaning that some people generally speak more loudly than others.

An especially quiet voice was the cause of problems in a season five episode of *Seinfeld* called “The Puffy Shirt.” Kramer’s girlfriend, Leslie, whom Jerry referred to as a “low talker” because of her unusually quiet voice, asked Jerry to wear a puffy pirate shirt she had designed while he was being interviewed on national television. Because he couldn’t hear her, Jerry simply nodded his head, unaware of what he was agreeing to. As a result of Leslie’s particularly quiet voice, therefore, Jerry ended up having to wear the puffy shirt on television, causing him great embarrassment. Research suggests that we don’t find unusually quiet voices to be attractive, but neither are we attracted to unusually loud ones. Instead, people are most attracted to voices with moderate average volume.³⁹

Rate. Vocal rate refers to how fast or slowly you speak. The average adult speaks at a rate of approximately 150 words per minute, but there are several instances in which we increase or decrease our rate.⁴⁰ For instance, many of us speak faster than usual when we’re excited or when we have only a short period of time to talk. By contrast, we might speak more slowly than usual when we’re unsure of ourselves, or when we’re speaking to children or the elderly, since they may find it challenging to hear or pay attention. Vocal rate doesn’t appear to be directly related to how attractive we find a person’s voice to be. Research has found, however, that faster speakers are perceived as more physically attractive than slower speakers.⁴¹



Filler words. Filler words are nonword sounds such as “umm” or “er” that people often use to fill the silence during pauses while they’re speaking. Linguists explain that normal conversation consists of a series of back-and-forth speaking turns, and that when one person pauses or is silent, this can signal that the person is ready to give up his or her turn. If we have to pause while speaking—say, to remember the word we want to use or the fact we want to describe—we can use filler words during the pause to indicate that we intend to continue speaking.

The particular sounds we use as filler words vary among languages. Although “umm” and “er” are common filler words for English speakers, the pure sound of the “e” vowel is frequently used by people speaking Latin languages. Moreover, speakers of Chinese often say “zhege zhege zhege”—which translates to “this this this”—as filler words. Although using filler words is common, research indicates that we judge people as less competent and sociable the more they use them.⁴²

Pronunciation. Pronunciation reflects how correctly you combine vowel and consonant sounds to say a word. For example, how would you pronounce the word “victuals”? Although it looks as though it should be pronounced VIK-TULES, its correct pronunciation is VITTLES. Some mispronunciations become notorious when they are committed by public figures. For instance, President George W. Bush was frequently parodied for mispronouncing the word “nuclear” as NU-KU-LER instead of NU-KLEE-ER. Many people struggle with pronunciation, however, when they are learning a foreign language, since rules for pronunciation vary among languages.⁴³

Articulation. Articulation refers to how clearly you speak. People who mumble their words, or who speak with their mouths full, demonstrate poor articulation. By contrast, people whose words are clear and easily understandable are enacting good articulation. We sometimes refer to articulation as *enunciation*. Poor articulation can make it difficult to identify the words a speaker is speaking. If an adult who normally

has good articulation suddenly begins to slur his words, this can be a sign of fatigue, intoxication, or even neurological problems such as a stroke or speech apraxia.⁴⁴

Accent. An accent is a pattern of pronouncing vowel and consonant sounds that is representative of a particular language or geographic area. Everyone speaks with an accent—even you—although we typically notice only those accents that are different from ours. When you encounter accents with which you're familiar, they often provide clues as to where a person grew up. For instance, you might be able to distinguish residents of Brooklyn, Boston, and Biloxi on the basis of their different accents. Likewise, you may be able to tell whether a person's first language was Russian, Italian, or Hindi just by listening to his or her accent.

Silence. Silence is the absence of sound. In a technical sense, therefore, it isn't an attribute of vocalics. Nevertheless, we frequently use silence to convey meaning in conversations.⁴⁵ For instance, we often become silent when we are unsure how to respond to a question or when we have said as much as we wish to about a topic. We might also give someone the "silent treatment," ignoring him or her to convey defiance or disdain.⁴⁶ Finally, we can use silence to indicate that we do not wish to answer a question, perhaps to avoid embarrassment or offense.⁴⁷

As we've seen, each of these vocal properties—pitch, inflection, volume, rate, filler words, pronunciation, articulation, accent, and silence—can communicate messages that are independent of the words being spoken. This is part of what makes vocalics such a powerful nonverbal channel.

The Use of Smell

Out of all the channels of nonverbal behavior, you might have the hardest time figuring out what smell has to do with human communication. It's relatively easy to describe how movement, gesture, touch, and voice convey meaning. Is it really possible, however, to communicate meaning through smell? The truth is that your sense of smell, which we call **olfactics**, operates in some subtle but powerful ways to influence how you react to other people. In fact, two phenomena that are central to the human experience and how we communicate are profoundly affected and regulated by smell. These are memories and sexual attraction.

Olfactics
The study of
the sense of
smell.

Memories. Smells can affect our communication behavior by influencing our memories and our moods. Have you ever smelled a particular scent—maybe a certain food or a specific cologne—and instantly remembered a particular person, event, or place? Maybe the smell of banana bread makes you think of your grandmother's kitchen, or the smell of motor oil reminds you of your uncle who used to work on cars in his garage. These are examples of *olfactic association*, which is the tendency of odors to bring to mind specific memories. Many of our other senses evoke memories as well. For instance, hearing a certain song or seeing a certain painting can make us recall specific times or people in our lives. Because of the way that sensory information is processed in the brain, however, none of your senses evokes memories as strongly as your sense of smell.

Why does this connection between smell and memories matter for communication? The answer is that memories are often accompanied by specific emotions. Therefore, when a smell reminds us of a particular person or place, it can affect our mood and our behavior by arousing specific emotions.

To illustrate this process, imagine that you have a job interview for a management position with a major name-brand retailer. When you walk through the door, you notice that the office smells like the place where you worked while you were

in high school. That job had been awful because of the cranky, disorganized store manager. Without even realizing why, you suddenly feel anxious and apprehensive, and those feelings come across in the way you interact during your interview. Even though you went into your interview feeling positive and acting upbeat, the olfactory association you experienced brought back a memory—and with it, an emotion—that quickly changed your disposition.

Sexual attraction. Smell also affects our communication by playing a role in determining to whom we are sexually attracted. This may surprise you, because we often think of sexual attraction as being driven mostly by visual cues. That is, when we say that we find someone attractive, this usually means we think he or she *looks* attractive. Whether you realize it or not, though, your judgments about how sexually attractive someone appears are strongly affected by the way that person smells to you. More specifically, research tells us that when we are looking for opposite-sex romantic partners, we are drawn to people whose natural body scent is the most different from our own.

Why is this true? The answer is that if two people smell very similar, that means their genes are very similar. People produce much healthier children when they mate with partners who are dissimilar to them genetically. Therefore, selecting a sexual partner with similar genes can increase the probability of producing genetically abnormal children. It turns out that a person's natural body scent sends a signal to your brain that tells you how similar his or her genes are to yours. The more dissimilar a person's body odor is to yours, therefore, the more sexually attractive you will instinctively judge him or her to be. We don't make these judgments consciously. Rather, our brains are adapted to pick up on these olfactory signals subconsciously.

This point is very important. One of the reasons we may not think of smell as a component of nonverbal communication is that its influence often operates outside our conscious awareness. Smelling a particular odor may evoke a specific memory, for instance, but we may not realize it was the odor that brought the memory to mind. In fact, some researchers argue that because smell often influences us in subconscious ways, it is not a genuine channel of communication. These scholars consider only consciously controlled behaviors to be legitimate elements of communication.

In truth, however, we do intentionally manipulate the way we smell to others. Particularly in Western cultures, people use a number of products, including deodorant, soap, toothpaste, and perfume or cologne, to mask or eliminate their natural body odors. Although we may not always be consciously aware of how smells are influencing our behavior, therefore, we frequently manipulate the way we smell in very intentional ways.



The Use of Space

When we interact socially, we constantly negotiate our use of space. This behavior becomes particularly apparent when our personal space is limited; think of being in a crowded elevator or on a full airplane, for instance. Why do so many of us find situations such as these to be uncomfortable? The scientific study of spatial use, known as **proxemics**, explains that we each have a preferred amount of personal space that

Proxemics
The study of
spatial use.

we carry like an invisible bubble around us. How much personal space each of us prefers depends on a number of factors, including our temperament, the type of situation we're in, and how well we know the people around us.

High-contact culture A culture in which people frequently touch and maintain little personal distance with one another.

Our culture also plays a large role in the way we negotiate personal space. Researchers refer to some cultures as **high-contact cultures** and others as **low-contact cultures**. People in high-contact cultures usually stand or sit fairly close to one another and touch one another frequently. Many Hispanic, southern European, and Middle Eastern cultures are classified as high-contact. By contrast, people in low-contact cultures keep greater amounts of personal space between themselves and touch one another less frequently. Some Asian and Scandinavian cultures are examples of low-contact cultures.

Low-contact culture A culture in which people touch infrequently and maintain relatively high levels of personal distance with one another.

Many communication researchers also classify the United States as a fairly low-contact culture. In one study involving observations at McDonald's restaurants, touch researcher Tiffany Field found that adolescents in France (a high-contact culture) touched one another substantially more often during a 20-minute period than did adolescents in the United States.⁴⁸

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall discovered that people in Western cultures use four spatial zones, or levels of personal distance, when interacting with one another.⁴⁹ "Intimate distance," which ranges from 0 to approximately 1½ feet, is the zone we willingly occupy with only our closest and most intimate friends, family members, and romantic partners. With other friends and relatives, we typically maintain a "personal distance," which Hall defined as extending from 1½ to about 4 feet. With customers, casual acquaintances, or others whom we don't know very well, we occupy a "social distance." Social distance ranges from about 4 to 12 feet and indicates

that interactions are more formal and less personal. Finally, we typically use "public distance" when we are giving a speech or performing in front of a large audience. The purpose of public distance is to keep the presenter far enough away from the group that he or she is safe and visible to everyone. Public distances are usually 12 to 25 feet or greater, depending on the circumstance.

The ways in which people use space are also important, and this is particularly true in groups. In any group of people, where



This bus is empty now but what if it were filled with passengers? Where would you sit? How much personal space do you prefer when taking public transportation?

the group members stand or sit relative to one another affects the flow of conversation and the ways the group interacts. In particular, the more powerful or dominant group members tend to position themselves in a more visible,

central location, such as at the front of the room or the end of the conference table. By contrast, people who don't wish to play as big a role in the group's discussions are more likely to position themselves in the sidelines, out of the view of the group leaders.⁵⁰

You might notice this type of pattern in your classroom or in meetings. Most likely, the instructor or the person running the meeting stands or sits at the head of

the room, with all the chairs or desks facing him or her. People who sit toward the front of the room are probably actively engaged in the class or meeting, whereas others may tend to sit in the back or on the sides of the room.

Another factor that influences physical proximity is a person's disability status. Many people who do not have physical disabilities stand or sit farther away from individuals with physical disabilities than they do from others. In fact, communication scholars Dawn and Charles Braithwaite have suggested that people often shy away from interacting with persons with disabilities in the same way they tend to avoid people from other cultures.⁵¹ Some researchers think this happens because people are inherently cautious around anyone they think of as different from themselves.⁵² Why do you think people maintain greater distances from persons with disabilities? What might be done to change that pattern?

Physical Appearance

The importance we place on physical appearance is extraordinary. Whether we intend to or not, we make all sorts of judgments about people on the basis of how they look. Imagine that the two women pictured in Figure 6.5 were both running for office and you had to decide which one to vote for. Now imagine these pictures are the only information you have to go on. Research suggests that most people, if they were being honest, would say they'd vote for the woman on the right because she is more attractive. If we don't know anything about either woman, why would most of us choose the more attractive one?

The reason is the "halo effect," which is the tendency to attribute positive qualities to physically attractive people. In other words, when a person *looks* good, most of us subconsciously assume that he or she *is* good. Indeed, research has shown that we think attractive people are friendlier, more competent, and more socially skilled than less attractive people.⁵³



FIGURE 6.5 Which woman would you vote for if she were running for office?

These perceptions translate into some real advantages for attractive people. For instance, they have higher self-esteem and date more frequently than less attractive people.⁵⁴ We are also nicer and more cooperative toward attractive people and more lenient toward attractive criminal defendants.⁵⁵ Thus, if it seems at times that good-looking people get all the breaks, research tells us this is often the case. Much as we may like to claim otherwise, most of us are strongly influenced by physical appearance when making assessments about other people.

Assessments based only on a person's attractiveness can be strongly misguided, however. In a 2007 episode of the television series *House*, for instance, Dr. Gregory House (played by Hugh Laurie) offers a fellowship to Dr. Samira Terzi (played by Michael Michelle) simply because he is smitten by her good looks. He soon discovers, however, that despite Dr. Terzi's beauty, she is not particularly competent. Before long, he begins to regret hiring her. This story line doesn't imply that highly attractive people *can't* be good doctors. Rather, it illustrates that a person's attractiveness and his or her professional competence are not necessarily related.

The Use of Time

Chronemics Chronemics is the way we use time. You might not immediately think of our use of time as nonverbal behavior. In fact, the way we give (or refuse to give) our time to others can send them important messages about the way we feel about them. This is particularly true for two important relational messages, one concerning value and the other concerning power.

Messages of value. Let's say that you have saved up for a plane ticket to visit your friend Shelley in California during spring break. The two of you have been planning the trip for months. Once you arrive, however, you find that Shelley hasn't taken any time off from work and has a number of other obligations during the week you're there. Some days you barely see her at all. Even though the time you spend together is enjoyable, you leave with the feeling that your visit wasn't very important to Shelley because of the limited amount of time she set aside for it. Because we tend to spend our time on things that matter to us, Shelly's failure to set aside time for your visit sent the signal—whether accurate or not—that she doesn't really value your relationship.

Messages of power. Our use of time also sends messages about power. When you go to see someone who is in a position of power over you, such as your supervisor, it is not uncommon for her or him to keep you waiting. We would probably consider it in very bad form, however, to keep a more powerful person waiting for us. Indeed, the rule seems to be that the time of powerful people is more valuable than the time of less powerful people. You wait to see the doctor; the doctor does not wait to see you. You might keep a subordinate waiting, but not a superior. Thus, when we are kept waiting to see someone, that use of time can signal or reinforce a power difference between us.

The Use of Artifacts

The first thing Alma did after moving into her new house was to fix it up the way she wanted. She painted her bedroom walls a nice shade of green, made sure there was plenty of light in the kitchen and the hallways, and filled the living room with her favorite pictures, plants, and artwork. Like many of us, Alma wanted her home environment to reflect her tastes and her personality. Without realizing it, she was using artifacts as a nonverbal channel to express herself.

Artifact An object or a visual feature of an environment with communicative value.

Each of us has certain physical environments that we inhabit and control, such as a house or an apartment, a residence-hall room, or an office. **Artifacts** are the objects and visual features within an environment that reflect who we are and what we like. Some offices, for instance, are plush and opulent, with oak desks, leather furniture, soft lighting, and expensive paintings on the walls. Others are decidedly spartan, featuring metal desks and chairs, fluorescent lighting, and bare walls. What messages might these different artifacts convey about the occupants of these two offices?

We can select and arrange artifacts in many ways to send specific nonverbal messages. For instance, some people create an “ego wall” in their home or office, on which they display diplomas, awards, photographs of them with famous people, and other artifacts that signal their status or achievements.⁵⁶ Others prefer to cover the walls with photographs of their friends and relatives. Each of these arrangements may send a different signal about the person and what he or she values. Even something as simple as our choice of holiday decorations can convey information concerning our values, beliefs, and sociability.⁵⁷

The way we place artifacts such as furniture within an environment can facilitate or inhibit interpersonal interaction. For example, teachers at Phillips Exeter Academy, a private preparatory school in New Hampshire, practice the “Harkness method” of teaching, which involves arranging up to 12 students and a teacher around an oval table. This arrangement is meant to diminish the separation between students and teachers, encouraging everyone to interact in an open, engaging way. By contrast, people who wish to discourage conversation in their offices or work environments might place their desks so that their back is to others.

The color of our environments can also influence nonverbal behavior by affecting our mood and disposition.⁵⁸ Specifically, “warm” colors such as red, orange, and yellow tend to be arousing, whereas “cool” colors such as blues and greens have calm-



Artifacts are objects that reflect who we are and what we like. What messages would you infer about the person who owned this chair?

At a Glance: Ten Channels of Nonverbal Communication

Facial displays	Important for identity, attraction, and emotion.
Eye behaviors	Eye contact and pupil size both have communicative value.
Movement and gestures	Serve as emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adaptors.
Touch behaviors	Used for conveying affection, caregiving, power and control, aggression, and ritual.
Vocal behaviors	Voices vary in pitch, inflection, volume, rate, use of filler words, pronunciation, articulation, accent, and silence.
Use of Smell	Important for memory and sexual attraction.
Use of space	Four spatial distances: intimate, personal, social, and public.
Physical appearance	Halo effect maintains we assume attractive people have other positive qualities.
Use of time	Sends messages of value and power.
Use of artifacts	Includes selection and placement of objects, use of light, and use of color.

ing effects on people.⁵⁹ Some researchers have suggested that these associations may have been formed early in human history, when humans associated blues and greens with nature and nighttime—and therefore with being passive—and bright colors with sunshine and daytime—and therefore with being active.⁶⁰

The ten channels by which we communicate with others nonverbally encompass almost all our senses, making nonverbal communication a truly engaging experience. A brief summary of these nonverbal channels appears in the “At a Glance” box on the previous page. Although we have addressed the question of *how* we communicate nonverbally, we have yet to discuss *why* we do so. Now that we are familiar with the various forms nonverbal communication can take, let’s look at the functions it can serve.

Learn It: What are three primary communicative functions of the face? How is eye behavior affected by culture? When is a gesture an emblem? Why is touch the most important sense for survival? Which aspects of the voice are verbal and which are nonverbal? How does smell affect memory and sexual attraction? What are Hall’s four spatial zones? What is the halo effect? How does the use of time communicate messages about value? What is an artifact?

Try It: Dress in conservative business attire, and visit a restaurant, a department store, a bank, or some other business. Take note of how quickly you are helped by the employees and how friendly and eager they are to serve you. Now repeat the experiment in casual or run-down clothing. What differences do you notice in other people’s behaviors toward you? What differences do you notice in your own behavior?

Reflect on It: What olfactive associations do you have? Why do you think the halo effect is so powerful?

3 } Functions of Nonverbal Communication {

We have seen that nonverbal behaviors come in many forms, or channels. People also use these channels for many reasons. In this section, we will take a look at six common functions that nonverbal communication serves in personal relationships:

- Managing conversations
- Expressing emotions
- Maintaining relationships
- Forming impressions
- Influencing others
- Concealing information

What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)
U.S. American essayist, poet, philosopher

Managing Conversations

Even though conversations involve the exchange of verbal communication, we use several nonverbal behaviors to help our conversations with others go smoothly. In particular, nonverbal cues assist us in inviting, maintaining, and ending conversations.

Inviting conversations. Imagine you’ve just arrived at a crowded holiday party being thrown by your partner’s company. Your partner is running late, so you’re left to

interact with others until he arrives. Unfortunately, you can't spot anyone you know very well. How, then, do you decide with whom you'll strike up a conversation?

Research suggests that three nonverbal cues are especially relevant for inviting conversations: proxemics, personal appearance, and eye contact. First, you're most likely to initiate conversations with people who are physically closest to you than with people who are farther away.⁶¹ Therefore, whom you happen to be standing by partly determines whom you'll talk to. Second, you'll be more inclined to initiate conversations with people you find physically attractive.⁶² Because attractive people are often sought out as conversational partners, you may not always be successful in striking up conversations with them. Their physical attractiveness, though, will often motivate you to try. Finally, you'll be more likely to talk with people who make eye contact with you than with people who don't.⁶³ Conversely, when people avoid making eye contact with you, they're often signaling that they're unavailable for conversation.

Maintaining conversations. Let's say you've struck up a conversation with Miriam, an accountant in the company's international division. You'll probably use gestures, eye contact, and tone of voice as **turn-taking signals**. Turn-taking signals are nonverbal signs that indicate when each person's speaking turns begin and end. For example, you might raise a finger, a gesture that indicates you have something to say or that signals to Miriam that you're not yet finished with your speaking turn. Eye contact can serve similar turn-taking functions. Research shows that most of us maintain more eye contact with a conversational partner when we're listening than when we're speaking.⁶⁴ You can therefore withhold eye contact while you're speaking as a way of signaling that you're not yet done with your turn. When you're ready to give the speaking turn back to Miriam, then you can reestablish eye contact with her.

In addition to using gestures and eye contact to indicate turn taking, we use tone of voice to signal changes in the conversation.⁶⁵ When you're talking but want to give the speaking turn back to Miriam, for instance, you can let the pitch of your voice drop at the end of your last statement. This nonverbal cue would indicate that you're about to finish speaking. You might also let your vocal pitch rise at the end of your last statement, as though it were a question, inviting Miriam's response. Using and exchanging these nonverbal turn-taking signals will help your conversation flow smoothly.

Ending conversations. Suppose that while you're talking to Miriam, you notice out of the corner of your eye that your partner has just arrived at the party. You decide, therefore, to wrap up your conversation with Miriam so you can go and greet him. It would be rude simply to walk away in the middle of your conversation. How, then, can you end the conversation politely? One way would be to say, "I see that my partner has just arrived; it's been nice talking with you." If you choose not to be that direct, however, you can also employ nonverbal *leave-taking behaviors*, which are signals that you are ready to end a conversation.

Research suggests that changes in eye behavior and posture are particularly common as strategies for ending a conversation. When communication scholar Mark Knapp and his colleagues induced experimental participants to try to end conversations, the most frequent nonverbal leave-taking behavior was breaking eye contact.⁶⁶ As we just discussed, we tend to look at people when we're listening to them. Therefore, one way you could signal to Miriam that you're ready to end your conversation is to break eye contact with her.

A second strategy would be to angle your posture away from Miriam and toward the direction in which you wish to go, which in this case



Turn-taking signal Nonverbal behavior that indicates when a person's speaking turn begins and ends.

would be toward your partner. This behavior is called *left-positioning*, and it signals that you are preparing yourself to leave the site of the conversation.⁶⁷

Expressing Emotions

As you may have observed in this chapter, many nonverbal behaviors communicate information about a person's emotional state. This fact is consequential for interpersonal communication because our emotions can influence our behavior in multiple ways. When we're angry or frustrated, for instance, we may be less patient with others than we usually are. Similarly, when we're nervous or frightened we may be more withdrawn or cautious. Interpreting another person's emotions can therefore give us clues about how best to interact with that person. The two most expressive nonverbal channels for emotion are facial expressions and vocal behaviors.

Facial expressions of emotion.

Many of us "wear" our emotions on our face.⁶⁸

Facial expression is such a central part of our experience as social beings that we begin signaling our emotions through facial displays very early in life. For instance, studies have shown that infants begin

smiling in response to external stimuli, such as a pleasant voice or touch, around the end of the first month of life.⁶⁹ By 10 months of age, most infants smile more in the presence of a parent than a stranger, suggesting they are happier when the parent is present.⁷⁰ Another indicator of the importance of facial emotion displays is that they show considerable consistency across cultures.⁷¹ If you're happy, therefore, you'll express it in much the same way regardless of whether you grew up in Laos, Chad, Pakistan, Belgium, Estonia, or Costa Rica.

Vocal expressions of emotion.

The voice is also remarkably emotionally expressive.⁷² We sometimes can tell how a person is feeling not by what he or she says but by the way his or her voice sounds. Experimental research on vocal displays of emotion has shown that many emotions affect the pitch of the voice. Specifically, the emotions of anger, surprise, happiness, fear, and affection tend to cause a higher-than-normal vocal pitch, whereas disgust, boredom, and extreme grief are conveyed by a lower vocal pitch.⁷³ Sadness, unless it is extreme, typically does not cause the pitch of the voice to change.⁷⁴

Several emotions also influence a person's rate of speech. Research indicates that we speak much faster than normal when we're scared, slightly faster than normal when we're angry, slightly slower than normal when we're sad, and much slower than normal when we're disgusted.⁷⁵ With respect to happiness, some studies have shown that we talk faster than normal when we're happy, but others have concluded that we talk slower than normal.⁷⁶ One possible explanation for these contradictory results is that our speech becomes faster when we're excited but slower when we're content.

Although facial displays and vocal behaviors are the most emotionally expressive nonverbal channels, other nonverbal behaviors also convey a person's emotional



state.⁷⁷ For example, hostile emotions, such as anger, disgust, and jealousy, often involve particular movements, such as slamming doors or gritting one's teeth. At other times, we express them by moving toward the other person and touching him or her in an aggressive manner. Finally, they often lead us to spend time apart from the person toward whom we feel angry, disgusted, or jealous.

Going further, we commonly convey sadness and anxiety through slouched posture and slow movement, excessive fidgeting, and frequent use of self-adaptors, such as scratching your head or picking lint off your shirt. Finally, when we feel happy or affectionate we are more likely to spend time with others, to enhance our physical appearance, to give gifts, and to engage in mutual eye contact with those around us.

Maintaining Relationships

Think about the relationships that matter most to you. They might include current or former romantic relationships, your close friendships, work partnerships, and your relationships with family members. How do you maintain each of these important relationships, ensuring that it doesn't end? Communication plays a central role in how most of us maintain our relationships, and nonverbal behaviors are especially important for several key features of relationships. These behaviors include attraction and affiliation, power and dominance, and arousal and relaxation.

Attraction and affiliation. Many nonverbal behaviors send messages of attraction or affiliation. Researchers call these **immediacy behaviors**. When two people flirt, for example, they use their eye contact to signal attraction; they stand or sit close to each other; they touch each other playfully; and they use expressive tones of voice to convey the message that they are interested in each other.⁷⁸ People in many cultures use these same types of behaviors in initial interactions to signal that they are attracted to each other and wish to explore the possibility of future interaction.⁷⁹

Immediacy behavior
Nonverbal behavior that conveys attraction or affiliation.

In more established relationships, nonverbal behavior is a common means of expressing affection and love. We hug, kiss, and hold hands with the people we love, and we speak to them in softer and higher-pitched tones of voice. These kinds of behaviors help to reinforce feelings of affiliation, intimacy, and love, whether with our romantic partners, our family members, or our friends.⁸⁰

Power and dominance. Power is the potential to affect another person's behavior, and dominance is the actual exercise of that potential. Adults often convey messages about their power and status using nonverbal behavior. For example, supervisors touch subordinates more than subordinates touch superiors, and a powerful person is more likely to keep a less-powerful person waiting than vice versa.⁸¹ As we discussed earlier, many of us also use artifacts as status symbols. For instance, we might hang college diplomas on our office walls to signal our level of education or leave our expensive cars parked conspicuously in the driveway to signal our wealth.

People also use nonverbal behaviors to assert dominance and control over others. Teachers do this anytime they use a certain look to convey disapproval about a child's behavior. Police officers control drivers' behaviors when they hold up a hand to signal "stop." Finally, some of us use silence to stop others from continuing to speak when we're in an uncomfortable conversation. In these and many other ways, one person's nonverbal behavior can be used to control the behavior of other people.

Arousal and relaxation. You may have noticed that some interpersonal interactions are physically and emotionally arousing, such as describing an exciting vacation or a significant health scare to a close friend. Other interactions cause you to feel physically and emotionally calm and relaxed, such as discussing the day's mundane events

with your neighbor. Several nonverbal behaviors provide clues to those around us about whether we're feeling aroused or relaxed at any given moment.

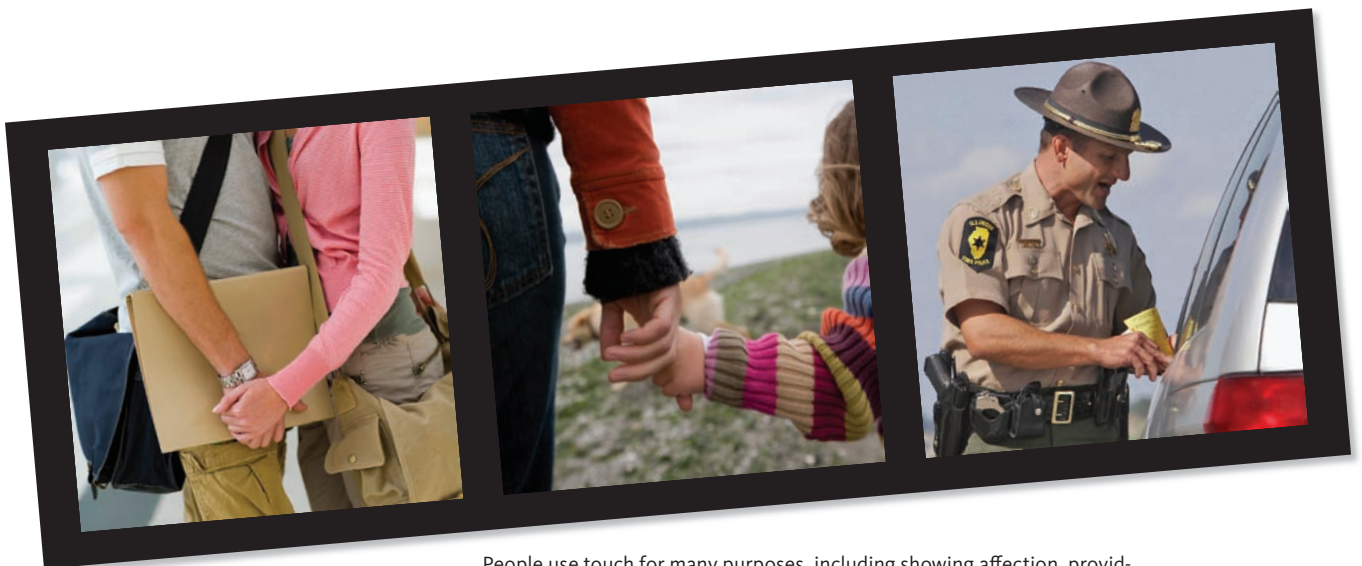
Arousal refers simply to an increase in energy. We experience arousal in two fundamentally different ways depending on whether it is accompanied by positive or negative emotions. When it is accompanied by positive emotions, we experience it as excitement. Most of us express excitement through nonverbal cues such as an increase in eye contact with others, more laughter, faster rate of speech, higher vocal pitch and volume, and closer proximity to others.⁸² When arousal is accompanied by negative emotions, however, we experience it as anxiety. Feeling anxious tends to cause fidgeting and random movement, nervous smiling or laughter, the use of more gestures and self-adaptors, higher vocal pitch and rate of speech, and the use of more filler words.⁸³

The opposite of arousal is relaxation, which we feel in situations of decreased energy. As with arousal, we experience relaxation in two different ways depending on the emotion involved. When relaxation is accompanied by positive emotion, we experience it as contentment. Feeling content leads most of us to smile more than usual, have a more relaxed posture, and increase our eye contact with and proximity to those around us.⁸⁴

In contrast, when relaxation is accompanied by negative emotion, we experience it as depression. Some people suffer from clinical depression, a psychiatric disorder thought to be caused by problems with chemicals called neurotransmitters, which relay signals between neurons and other cells in the brain.⁸⁵ Others just feel down from time to time, experiencing some of the symptoms of depression without the underlying psychiatric problems. In either case, feeling depressed often leads people to smile less, make less frequent eye contact, and use fewer gestures and more self-adaptors.⁸⁶

Forming Impressions

Many of us enjoy people-watching. While sitting in a coffee shop, waiting at the airport, or strolling through the mall, we notice other people. We pay attention to what they look like, what they sound like, and how they behave, and we use those pieces of information to form impressions about who they are. Although our impressions are influenced by what people say, they are also strongly affected by their nonverbal



People use touch for many purposes, including showing affection, providing care, and exercising power.

behaviors. In particular, nonverbal cues influence two general types of impressions, those related to a person's demographic characteristics and those related to a person's sociocultural characteristics.

Demographic impressions. A person's demographic characteristics include his or her age, ethnic background, sex, and sexual orientation. Research indicates that, on the basis of visual cues, most of us can accurately classify a person into broad categories for age—such as infant, teenager, or elderly adult—and ethnicity—such as Asian, Hispanic, or white.⁸⁷ Making finer distinctions, such as whether a woman is 50 or 60 years old or whether a man is Cambodian or Vietnamese, is often more challenging. Similarly, most people can correctly identify an individual's biological sex by attending to visual cues such as the shape of the face and the body, hairstyle, clothing, jewelry, and cosmetics.⁸⁸ These studies don't indicate that we're necessarily going to be right 100% of the time, however. Can you think of instances when you've been unsure of a person's sex, ethnicity, or age on the basis of his or her appearance?

Although patterns in anatomy and physiology provide relatively reliable visual cues about a person's age, ethnicity, and sex, a person's sexual orientation is not as distinguishable using those same cues.⁸⁹ Although members of sexual minorities might adopt distinctive styles of clothing that can signal their sexual orientation, homosexual and bisexual women and men don't necessarily differ from heterosexual women and men in any of their physical characteristics.⁹⁰ As a result, sexual orientation is not as reliably determined as other demographic characteristics on the basis of visual cues.

The voice is another nonverbal channel that helps us form demographic impressions of others. Vocal behaviors tend to be particularly good clues as to a person's age, sex, and sexual orientation. As people age, for instance, their vocal pitch and rate of speech typically decrease.⁹¹ Consequently, many of us can determine a person's age with relative accuracy by listening to the sound of his or her voice.⁹² By the same token, women and men's voices differ from each other in average pitch and vocal quality.⁹³ As a result, listeners can distinguish between male and female adult voices with nearly perfect accuracy.⁹⁴ We tend to be less accurate at determining sex on the basis of children's voices, however, since vocal characteristics don't differ between the sexes as much before puberty as after it.⁹⁵

Several studies have also shown that people can reliably use vocal cues to distinguish heterosexual from homosexual or bisexual adults.⁹⁶ Research on the acoustic properties of people's voices has found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults articulate the “e,” “i,” and “u” vowel sounds more clearly than do heterosexual adults.⁹⁷ Moreover, gay men's voices articulate the “s” consonant sound more clearly than do heterosexual men's voices,⁹⁸ but they do not differ in average pitch or inflection.⁹⁹

Vocal behaviors can suggest a person's age, sex, and sexual orientation, but they do not reliably indicate a person's ethnic background. Some vocal characteristics, such as average pitch, do systematically differ among some ethnic groups.¹⁰⁰ These differences are small, however. Generally speaking, most people cannot accurately discriminate among ethnic groups on the basis of vocal cues unless they are specifically trained to do so.¹⁰¹

Sociocultural impressions. When you watch people in restaurants, on public transportation, or in the aisles of the supermarket, you might form an idea about their demographic features, but you're probably more likely to speculate about their sociocultural characteristics. One such characteristic is socioeconomic status, which is an index of how much money and education a person has and how prestigious his or her career is. Another sociocultural feature reflects the cultures and co-cultures to which

people belong, such as whether someone is British, Filipino, or Venezuelan, or identifies with surfers, feminists, or bird-watchers.

Personal appearance is usually the most informative nonverbal channel for forming sociocultural impressions. When you see a woman in an expensive, tailored business suit, for instance, you're likely to infer that she is of higher socioeconomic status than a woman wearing torn jeans and a sweatshirt.¹⁰² You may not be accurate in your impression of these particular women, but the quality of a person's clothing is a relatively reliable visual cue to his or her socioeconomic status, for two reasons. First, compared with people with limited economic resources, people with greater resources can usually afford more expensive clothing and may also be more likely to work in occupations in which dressier attire is required. Second, people often use personal appearance cues to signify their socioeconomic status, so higher-status people may wear expensive clothing or jewelry to convey or symbolize their good fortune.¹⁰³



Many organized co-cultural groups, such as those associated with particular sports interests or music preferences, adopt fashions that identify their members. You might infer, therefore, that a young man in a football jersey and tennis shoes is a sports fan, whereas a young woman in black pants and a black shirt featuring a skull and crossbones is into alternative rock. Similarly, studies have shown that we can accurately distinguish between people with conservative and liberal political ideologies on the basis of how conventional their clothing styles are.¹⁰⁴ You might accurately infer, therefore, that a young man in a button-down shirt and cotton pants has more conservative political views than a young man in ripped jeans and a T-shirt denouncing U.S. foreign policy. Unless people are wearing traditional cultural attire, such as the kimono for Japan or the kilt for Scotland, personal appearance generally is not a reliable clue about their cultural backgrounds.

Many people believe they can identify a person's socioeconomic status by the sound of his or her voice.

Studies that have tested this idea have found that although people are highly *consistent* in the socioeconomic impressions they form on the basis of vocal cues, they are not very *accurate*.¹⁰⁵ That means people may strongly agree with one another on the socioeconomic status that a particular voice represents, but they will often be incorrect. The voice is also a poor indicator of a person's co-cultural affiliations, making it difficult to identify people's interests, hobbies, or religious orientations on the basis of how their voices sound.¹⁰⁶

Research does suggest, however, that we may be able to identify a person's cultural background on the basis of his or her vocal accent. As you learned earlier in this chapter, a person's accent is largely determined by the region in which he or she was raised. Speakers native to Taiwan, Finland, Brazil, the Ivory Coast, Mexico, and Australia would therefore speak with distinctive accents that we might be able to identify.¹⁰⁷

Our ability to identify people's cultural backgrounds diminishes, however, when we try to differentiate people from cultures with similar languages (and thus similar accents). For example, we may not be able to distinguish an Australian accent from a British one, a Korean accent from a Japanese one, or a Finnish accent from a Swedish one unless we have particular familiarity with those accents. In general, however, vocal accents can provide us with cues about a person's cultural background.

Influencing Others

You probably find yourself in many social situations in which you wish to influence other people's behaviors. Perhaps you're trying to persuade your co-workers and friends to sponsor you in a marathon for cancer research. Maybe you're trying to talk your elderly grandfather into considering a move to an assisted care facility. You might just be trying to get the diners on whose table you're waiting to leave you a good tip. In these and many other contexts, you can use nonverbal behaviors to influence others. Nonverbal communication can be persuasive when it is applied as part of several strategies, including creating credibility, promoting affiliation, and maximizing attractiveness.

Creating credibility One of the most effective strategies for influencing other people's behaviors is to project an image of credibility. We often do this by adopting a personal appearance that conveys expertise and authority. Consider uniforms as an example. A judge's black robes, a doctor's white lab coat, and a police officer's badge and uniform all symbolize particular forms of experience and authority.¹⁰⁸ Several studies have shown that we not only consider people in uniform to have more credibility than people in lay clothing but also are actually more likely to comply with their requests.¹⁰⁹ The same is also true of formal business attire, such as suits and dresses. People are more persuaded by requests made by people in business attire than by people dressed in more casual clothing.¹¹⁰ The most likely reason for this higher rate of compliance is that professional attire projects a higher level of credibility than casual attire does.

There are other nonverbal behaviors you can use to enhance your credibility. For instance, speaking loudly, quickly, and expressively, with a good deal of pitch variation, makes a person sound more credible.¹¹¹ Research shows that in the legal profession, attorneys who speak loudly and fluently, with fewer slips of the tongue, not only are seen as highly credible but also earn more favorable decisions.¹¹² The use of eye contact and illustrator gestures also enhances a person's credibility.¹¹³ In particular, maintaining eye contact with someone while you're speaking, instead of only while you're listening, has been shown to be a powerful influence on persuasiveness.¹¹⁴

Promoting affiliation. Suppose you were asking people to help you pack up your belongings and move to a new condo across town. Whom would you ask? Most of us would approach family members and close friends, as opposed to people we hardly know or who dislike us. The reason we would select these individuals is that we are more persuaded by people we like than by people we don't.¹¹⁵ Nonverbal behaviors that promote a sense of affiliation, closeness, and liking can therefore enhance our persuasive ability.

One behavior that often contributes to a sense of affiliation is touch.¹¹⁶ Because we share more touch within close relationships than casual ones, being touched in appropriate, familiar ways can make us feel close to others. Several experiments have demonstrated that casual touches—such as a brief touch to the hand, forearm, or shoulder—make people more likely to comply with our requests. In one study, for instance, waitresses received significantly larger tips when they briefly touched customers on the hand or the shoulder as they were returning change.¹¹⁷ Other studies have concluded that being touched increases our willingness to comply with another person's requests or to help a person in need.¹¹⁸

Affiliation is also enhanced by interactional synchrony, which is the convergence of two people's behaviors. When you mirror another person's posture, gestures, facial expressions, or vocal behaviors, you may cause that person subconsciously to perceive you as similar to him or her.¹¹⁹ This perception is consequential for persuasion, because we like people who are similar to us.¹²⁰

Let's say that you're preparing to make a persuasive appeal to the president of your homeowners' association to allow holiday decorations to be placed on front lawns, which the association's policies currently prohibit. You've noticed that the president usually speaks slowly and deliberately during association meetings. When you visit with him one-on-one, therefore, you intentionally match his slow rate of speech, even though you usually speak more quickly. This strategy puts you in vocal synchrony with your listener. Multiple studies suggest that you will be more persuasive as a result.¹²¹

Maximizing attractiveness. You may have noticed that models who appear in television commercials and print ads tend to be physically attractive. Advertisers hope that if you see an attractive person using their product, you'll be more persuaded to buy that product. Guess what—they're right!¹²² Physical attractiveness makes a person more persuasive.

Significantly, this observation isn't limited to models in commercials. Several studies have shown that even in our interpersonal conversations, we are more influenced by attractive than unattractive people.¹²³ One likely explanation for this behavior is that because we value physical attractiveness, we want to identify with and be liked by attractive people, and this desire leads us to comply with their requests.¹²⁴

Nonverbal behaviors that maximize our physical attractiveness can therefore increase our interpersonal influence. Physical appearance cues, such as dress, hairstyle, use of cosmetics, and use of jewelry, can all be manipulated to make a person look more attractive. Multiple studies have demonstrated that good-looking people are more influential than unattractive people in a variety of contexts, including job interviews,¹²⁵ salary negotiations,¹²⁶ college admission decisions,¹²⁷ and requests for assistance from others.¹²⁸

Although physical appearance is the most relevant nonverbal channel when it comes to perceptions of physical attractiveness, some evidence suggests that other channels affect how attractive we perceive someone to be. One study, for example, explored whether smell would affect the perception of physical attractiveness. In a field experiment, communication researcher Kelly Aune had female research assistants

approach male and female undergraduate students to ask if they could be interviewed about their library usage. The assistants explained that they were enrolled in an interviewing class and would be asking the students to evaluate them at the end of the interview. The evaluations included an assessment of the assistants' physical attractiveness. Assistants conducted the interviews while wearing either no perfume, a small amount of perfume, a moderate amount, or a heavy amount.

Aune found that male students rated the assistants as most physically attractive when they wore a small amount of perfume. In contrast, female students claimed the confederates were most attractive when they wore no perfume. Because the assistants were the same women in all conditions, these results indicate that how a person *smells* can affect how attractive other people think she *looks*.¹²⁹

Perceptions of physical attractiveness also appear to be influenced by the attractiveness of the person's voice. Two experiments have demonstrated that the more pleasant a woman's voice sounds, the more physically attractive she is judged to be.¹³⁰ Whether these findings extend to the smells and voices of men is still unknown.



Your personal appearance, clothing, and demeanor can give you the credibility to influence others.

The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication

Eating Disorders and the Pressure to Be Attractive

There's little question that being physically attractive is an advantage in everyday life. Because of the halo effect, we think attractive people are nicer, smarter, friendlier, more honest, and more competent than unattractive people, and we treat them accordingly. From childhood, most of us are taught to prize physical attractiveness. Unfortunately, this emphasis on physical looks can create enormous social and psychological pressures for people to make themselves as attractive as possible.

Particularly in Western societies, people see thin, slim bodies as attractive and overweight bodies as unattractive. Because of the pressure to be

attractive, and because being attractive means being thin, an alarming number of people suffer from eating disorders. The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health identifies two major types of eating disorders: anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Anorexia nervosa derives from the desire to be as thin as possible. People with anorexia pursue thinness relentlessly, through excessive dieting and exercise, self-induced vomiting, and the abuse of laxatives or diuretics. Anorexia is associated with major health risks, including low blood pressure, cardiac arrest, clinical depression, and suicide. Research suggests that about 1% of U.S. females

between the ages of 10 and 20 suffer from anorexia. Anorexia is only about one-tenth as common among males in the same age range.

Bulimia nervosa is characterized by bingeing on large quantities of food and then compensating for overeating by vomiting, abusing laxatives or diuretics, or fasting. Whereas people with anorexia are often excessively thin, people with bulimia are often of normal weight for their age and height. Like people with anorexia, though, people with bulimia have an obsessive fear of gaining weight and are intensely unhappy with their bodies. Bulimia elevates the risk of several health problems,

All these studies suggest that attractiveness is an advantage for influencing other people's behavior. There's a dark side to this observation, however. Because physical attractiveness is so highly valued, some people go to dangerous extremes to achieve it. As you'll see in the "Dark Side" box, one of the unfortunate effects of the quest for beauty is the prevalence of eating disorders.

Concealing Information

The final function of nonverbal communication is to help people conceal information. Despite the cultural adage that "honesty is the best policy," people frequently decide not to be entirely truthful in their conversations with others. As you'll discover in Chapter 11, "Deceptive Communication," we have many reasons for choosing to conceal information. Sometimes people lie to benefit themselves, such as faking an illness to get out of work. Sometimes they lie to avoid hurting themselves, such as concealing marital infidelity. Often, however, people choose to be deceptive to avoid hurting others—for example, by saying they're happy to receive a gift that they actually dislike.

Whatever our reasons for concealing information, however, research indicates that certain facial, vocal behaviors, and kinesic behaviors are reliably associated with deception. We address these behaviors briefly in this section and then discuss them more fully in Chapter 11.



including gastrointestinal disorders, clinical depression, and tooth decay (as a result of frequent purging). About 4% of U.S. females and 0.4% of U.S. males between the ages of 10 and 20 suffer from bulimia.

Even people without eating disorders can take extreme

measures to achieve thinness. For instance, some people undergo a procedure called vertical banded gastroplasty—better known as “stomach stapling”—which surgically alters the stomach to restrict food intake so that the patient will lose weight. A different procedure called abdominoplasty—better known as a “tummy tuck”—surgically removes excess skin and fat from a person’s abdomen to make her or him appear thinner.

Ask Yourself:

- Why do you suppose thinness is considered attractive in so many cultures, particularly for women?
- Besides developing eating disorders, what are some other examples of dangerous extremes to which people will go in their quest for attractiveness?

From Me to You:

- If you’ve never had an eating disorder, it might be easy to dismiss anorexia and bulimia as merely the result of narcissism, an unhealthy obsession with the self. In a similar vein, people who have never experienced clinical depression sometimes wonder why depressed patients can’t simply “snap out of it.” Eating disorders and depression are illnesses, however. People suffering from these disorders need treatment from the medical community, and they also need compassion and support from their relatives and friends.

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/eating-disorders/what-are-eating-disorders.shtml>; National Eating Disorders Association: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org.

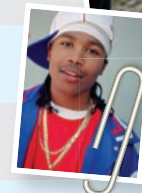


We begin our discussion by examining facial behaviors. One of the most commonly studied facial behaviors that can indicate deception is smiling. Most research studies have found that people don’t differ in *how much* they smile when they’re being honest as opposed to being deceptive. Rather, they differ in *how* they smile.¹³¹ When we’re telling the truth, we’re more likely to use genuine smiles that reflect actual positive emotion. This is the kind of smile we display when we hear really good news or smell a delicious dinner cooking in the oven. When we’re being dishonest, however, we’re more likely to use false smiles to make it appear as though we’re happy even though we aren’t. This is the smile you display when you run into a coworker you don’t like and are trying to appear happy to see him. Both types of smiles draw the edges of the mouth upward, but genuine smiles also cause the skin around the eyes to wrinkle, whereas false smiles do not.

Attempting to conceal information can also influence certain vocal behaviors, particularly the pitch of the voice. Several studies have demonstrated that people speak with a higher pitch when they are deceiving than when they’re telling the truth.¹³² In one study, for instance, student nurses were asked to watch either a pleasant nature film or a grotesque film depicting amputations and burns. After viewing each film, the student nurses were told to convince an interviewer that the film they had just watched was pleasant and enjoyable. In one condition, therefore, the students were to be truthful, and in the other they were to be deceptive. By recording the participants’ voices and analyzing them later, the researchers determined that the students’ vocal

At a Glance: Six Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Managing conversations	Nonverbal cues are used to invite, maintain, and end conversations.
Expressing emotions	Facial and vocal channels are particularly expressive.
Maintaining relationships	Nonverbal behaviors signal attraction and affiliation, power and dominance, arousal and relaxation.
Forming impressions	Nonverbal cues are useful in forming demographic and sociocultural impressions.
Influencing others	Strategies include creating credibility, promoting affiliation, maximizing attractiveness.
Concealing information	Facial behaviors, eye behaviors, vocal behaviors, and kinesic behaviors are most useful.



pitch was significantly higher when they were attempting to deceive the interviewer than when they were telling the truth.¹³³

Finally, certain kinesic behaviors indicate that a person is concealing information. Because being deceptive generally makes people feel nervous, you might expect it would also cause an increase in body movements that are commonly associated with anxiety, including gesturing, forward leaning, and random hand and foot movements.¹³⁴ You may be surprised to learn, then, that most studies have shown just the opposite. That is, kinesic behavior decreases, rather than increases, when people are being dishonest.¹³⁵ In particular, speakers use fewer illustrator gestures, fewer hand and finger movements, fewer foot and leg movements, and fewer forward leans when they are lying than when they are telling the truth.¹³⁶

One explanation for this decreased body movement is that people try too hard to control signs of nervousness when they're being deceptive and they end up looking rigid or tense as a result.¹³⁷ An alternative theory suggests that we simply don't think about engaging in body movement when we're deceiving because our minds are so focused on the lie itself.¹³⁸ Whatever the reason, decreased kinesic behavior appears to be a reliable cue to deception.

Managing conversations, expressing emotions, maintaining relationships, forming impressions, influencing others, and concealing information are not the only functions of nonverbal behavior, but they are among the most valuable. In its own way, each of these functions helps us to communicate with others in efficient, productive ways. A summary of these functions appears in the "At a Glance" box above.

Learn It: What are leave-taking behaviors? How do people communicate emotion vocally? Which nonverbal behaviors convey power and dominance in personal relationships? How are demographic and sociocultural impressions different? What are three major strategies for influencing others? Which facial and eye behaviors are most reliably associated with deception?

Try It: Find a good location and spend an hour people-watching. Take note of the impressions you form of people, and ask yourself which channels of nonverbal communication you relied on most heavily to form each impression.

Reflect on It: What nonverbal behaviors do you use to influence others? How do you know when someone you're around is feeling depressed?

4} Improving Your Nonverbal Communication Skills {

In the NBC television comedy series *The Office*, actor Steve Carell plays Michael Scott, the regional manager of a paper distribution company who can accurately be described as socially awkward. In conversations with employees and customers, he often has difficulty expressing some of his emotions, using inappropriate humor to mask feelings of insecurity or inadequacy. At the same time, he frequently fails to notice when other people react negatively to his communication style. Although he tries to get others to like him and even comes across as a likable character, he is not a particularly skilled nonverbal communicator. In this section, we'll explore some

A body talks.

—Anne Parillaud (1960–)
French actress

ways you can improve two fundamental communication skills: interpreting nonverbal communication and expressing messages verbally.

Interpreting Nonverbal Communication

As you've discovered in this chapter, people use nonverbal communication to express many types of messages, including messages related to emotions and attitudes, power and dominance, persuasion, and deception. An important skill for communicators, therefore, is the ability to decode, or interpret, other people's nonverbal behaviors. This ability requires two separate but interrelated skills: being sensitive to, and deciphering the meaning of, messages.

Be sensitive to nonverbal messages. One skill involved in interpreting nonverbal communication is being sensitive to other people's nonverbal messages. When your daughter grimaces after learning you're having broccoli for dinner or your son has an excited tone in his voice when he describes his last fencing bout, do you notice those nonverbal emotion cues? When a competitor at work intentionally keeps you waiting for an appointment or seems unusually tense during your conversation, do you pick up on those potential signs of dominance or deception?

Sensitivity to nonverbal behaviors is important because we can't interpret messages unless we first take note of them. Although research tells us that some people are more nonverbally sensitive by nature than others, you may be able to increase your own nonverbal sensitivity through mindful awareness.¹³⁹ When you're interacting with someone, try these approaches:

- Remind yourself that as much as two-thirds of his or her communication is being conveyed through nonverbal behaviors. It's useful to interpret his or her words, but remember that nonverbal communication is often more important.



Just as facial behavior communicates more than any other nonverbal channel, the eyes communicate more than any other part of the face.

- Pay particular attention to facial expressions for signs of what he or she is feeling. Remember that the face communicates more emotion than other nonverbal channels do.
- Don't forget to take note of his or her tone of voice and body movements, because those behaviors are particularly relevant for signaling dominance and deception.

To the extent that you can remind yourself of these principles when you are interacting with others, you may be able to increase your nonverbal sensitivity. Being aware of others' nonverbal behaviors is only half of the interpretation process, however. As we'll see, to interpret nonverbal communication effectively you must learn to decipher the meaning of the messages you perceive.

Decipher the meaning of nonverbal messages. Nonverbal messages sometimes carry multiple meanings. If you notice a young man smiling, for instance, it might mean he's happy. It might also mean, however, that he's persuading a customer to make a purchase, giving comfort to a relative who has just shared bad news, or flirting with his attractive new neighbor.¹⁴⁰ If you hear him speaking loudly, it might mean he's excited, or it might mean he's angry, or surprised, or talking with someone who's hard of hearing.

An essential part of interpretation, therefore, is deciphering the meaning of the nonverbal behaviors exhibited by the people with whom you're communicating. Accurately deciphering a nonverbal behavior means taking it to mean what the sender

intended it to mean.¹⁴¹ Suppose that while you are describing your grandmother's failing health to your friend Vanessa, she squeezes your hand to convey her support. If you take her behavior as a gesture of support, then you have accurately deciphered her nonverbal message. If you interpret it to mean she's interested in you romantically, however, then you have deciphered her message inaccurately.

To improve your skill at deciphering nonverbal messages, try the following strategies:

Be aware of the situation. Consider both the social situation a person is in and what other nonverbal behaviors he or she is enacting. If you notice a man crying, for instance, your first instinct might be to conclude that he's sad. Perhaps you also notice, however, that he is surrounded by smiling friends and relatives who are hugging him and patting him on the back. You even hear him laugh, although tears are running down his face. When you take these additional pieces of information into consideration, you might take his crying to mean that he is happy or relieved, rather than sad.

Keep culture in mind. Remember that cultural differences sometimes influence the meaning of a nonverbal message. This observation appears to be particularly true for gestures and eye behaviors. We've seen, for instance, that using the thumbs-up gesture or maintaining eye contact while talking with someone can have different meanings in different cultures. The more you learn about cultural variation in nonverbal behaviors, therefore, the more accurately you'll be able to decipher those behaviors.

Ask for clarification. When you're unsure of how accurately you've deciphered a person's nonverbal message, it often helps to ask the person. Let's say you're describing the details of a new product to a client, and her facial expression suggests that she's confused. Instead of assuming you've deciphered her expression accurately, you might simply ask her, "Did my description make sense?" If she replies that she found it confusing, then you can explain the product again using simpler language. Instead, however, she may reply that she is developing a headache. In that case the expression you deciphered as confusion was actually one of discomfort.

In sum, then, practicing your sensitivity and deciphering skills should help you to improve your ability to interpret the meaning of nonverbal behaviors.¹⁴²



Keep cultural differences in mind when you interpret nonverbal behavior. Although kissing often conveys romantic feelings in Western cultures, it is a common component of routine social greetings in many parts of the world.

Expressing Nonverbal Messages

Some of us are good at *interpreting* nonverbal behaviors but are not particularly good at *expressing* ourselves nonverbally. Skill at expressing nonverbal messages is valuable for the same reason that interpretation skill is: because people communicate more information nonverbally than verbally. If you're skilled at expressing nonverbal messages, therefore, you'll be able to communicate with other people more effectively and more efficiently than someone who is less skilled.

Just as with interpretation skills, some people are naturally more expressive, charismatic, and outgoing than others.¹⁴³ To improve your own skill at expressing nonverbal messages, however, try the following ideas:

Learn from others. Spend time with people who are highly expressive. Some researchers have suggested that we can learn how to become more nonverbally expressive by being around people who are extroverted and charismatic.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps you have friends or co-workers who fit this description. Research also suggests that certain professions attract highly expressive people. These professions include teachers and lecturers, actors and singers, politicians, salespeople, diplomats, customer service representatives, counselors and therapists, and members of the clergy.¹⁴⁵ To perform effectively in any of these professions an individual must be able to communicate clearly and competently with others. Being nonverbally expressive is a key component of competent communication.

Practice being expressive. Take part in games and activities that exercise your nonverbal expression skills. A good example is playing charades, a popular game in which you act out a word or a phrase without speaking while members of your team try to guess the word based on your depiction. Because success in charades depends on your ability to depict your word or phrase nonverbally, this game can be a good exercise of your expression skill. Another activity that can improve your nonverbal expression skills is role playing, which involves acting out the roles of characters in a specific situation the way you would if you were actually in that situation. Role playing is often used in couples' therapy.¹⁴⁶ The therapist asks a couple to act out an argument that is common in their relationship, for instance, but instructs each partner to take the role of the other in the conversation. Like playing charades, role playing may give you an opportunity to exercise your skills in nonverbal expression and improve through practice.

To become skilled at conveying nonverbal messages you need to do more than simply be expressive. You also must learn to express yourself using nonverbal behaviors that other people can interpret accurately. Spending time with people who are skilled at nonverbal expression may help you learn or improve this ability. Similarly, taking part in activities such as charades and role playing can provide you with an opportunity to exercise your skills.

One key strategy to improve your skills at nonverbal interpretation and expression is to assess how skilled you are now. Take a look at the at the “Getting to Know You” box to reflect on and evaluate your interpretation and expression abilities.

Learn It: What is the difference between being sensitive to a nonverbal message and deciphering its meaning? What are some professions in which you would commonly find highly expressive people?

Try It: Record an episode of one of your favorite television shows, then watch a few minutes of it with the sound turned off. Pay attention to the characters' nonverbal behaviors, and try to figure out what emotions they are experiencing. Once you have an idea of a character's emotion, ask yourself what other conclusions you might have come to with the information available to you. Then, watch the same few minutes again with the sound turned on to determine how accurate you were.

Reflect on It: Which nonverbal behaviors are you the most sensitive to, and which ones are you least likely to notice in others? Why is your ability to express yourself nonverbally important?



Getting to Know You

Your Nonverbal Interpretation and Expression Skills

How much do you agree with each of the following statements? Indicate your level of agreement with each statement on a scale of 1 to 7, wherein 1 means you strongly disagree and 7 means you strongly agree.

1. _____ When I feel depressed, I tend to bring down those around me.
2. _____ It is nearly impossible for people to hide their true feelings from me.
3. _____ I have been told that I have “expressive” eyes.
4. _____ At parties I can instantly tell when someone is interested in me.
5. _____ Quite often I tend to be the “life of the party.”
6. _____ People often tell me that I am a sensitive and understanding person.

When you're finished, add up your scores from items 1, 3, and 5. This is your score for expressiveness. Next, add up your scores from items 2, 4, and 6. This is your score for interpretation. Both scores should range from 3 to 21.

If both scores are between 16 and 21, then you are already quite good at nonverbal interpretation and expressiveness. If your scores are between 9 and 15, you have a moderate ability to interpret and express nonverbal behavior, and the suggestions offered in this chapter may help you sharpen these abilities. If your scores are between 3 and 8, then you especially can benefit from the guidance provided in this chapter for improving these skills. You may also find that one of your scores is quite a bit higher than the other. If that's the case, then you know which skill you're already good at and which skill could benefit from more practice.

Source: Riggio, R. E. (1986). Assessment of basic social skills. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 649–660.

Master the Chapter

Section I } The Nature of Nonverbal Communication (page 209)

I. The Nature of Nonverbal Communication

A. What is nonverbal communication?

- Nonverbal communication comprises those behaviors and characteristics that convey meaning without the use of words.

B. Five characteristics of nonverbal communication

1. Nonverbal communication is present in most interpersonal conversations
 2. Nonverbal communication often conveys more information than verbal communication
 3. Nonverbal communication is usually believed over verbal communication
- Nonverbal communication has the following characteristics: (a) It is present in most interpersonal conversations, (b) it usually conveys more information than verbal communication, (c) it is usually believed over verbal communication, (d) it is the primary means of communicating emotion, and (e) it is meta-communicative.

4. Nonverbal communication is the primary means of communicating emotion
5. Nonverbal communication is meta-communicative

Section 2} Ten Channels of Nonverbal Communication (page 218)

II. Ten Channels of Nonverbal Communication

A. Facial displays

1. Identity
2. Attractiveness
3. Emotion

- Facial displays are important for identity, attractiveness, and emotion.

B. Eye behaviors

1. Eye contact
2. Pupil dilation

- Eye behaviors include eye contact and pupil dilation.

C. Movement and gestures

1. Emblems
2. Illustrators
3. Affect displays
4. Regulators
5. Adaptors

- Movement and gestures include emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adaptors.

D. Touch behaviors

1. Affectionate touch
2. Caregiving touch
3. Power and control touch
4. Aggressive touch
5. Ritualistic touch

- Touch behaviors include affectionate, caregiving, controlling, aggressive, and ritualistic touch.

E. Vocal behaviors

1. Pitch
2. Inflection
3. Volume
4. Rate
5. Filler words
6. Pronunciation
7. Articulation
8. Accent
9. Silence

- Voices vary in pitch, inflection, volume, speaking rate, use of filler words, pronunciation, articulation, silence, and accent.

F. The use of smell

1. Memories
2. Sexual attraction

- Smell is particularly important for memories and sexual attraction.

G. The use of space

- People maintain four levels of space: intimate, personal, social, and public.

H. Physical appearance

- Physical appearance is important because we attribute positive qualities to attractive people, a phenomenon called the halo effect.

- I. **The use of time**
 - 1. Messages of value
 - 2. Messages of power
- J. **The use of artifacts**
 - The use of time sends messages of value and power.
 - We use artifacts to communicate through the selection and placement of objects, the use of light, and the use of color.

Section 3} Functions of Nonverbal Communication (page 235)

III. Functions of Nonverbal Communication

- A. **Managing conversations**
 - 1. Inviting conversations
 - 2. Maintaining conversations
 - 3. Ending conversations
 - Nonverbal behaviors allow us to invite, maintain, and end conversations.
- B. **Expressing emotions**
 - 1. Facial expressions of emotion
 - 2. Vocal expressions of emotion
 - Facial and vocal behaviors, in particular, are emotionally expressive.
- C. **Maintaining relationships**
 - 1. Attraction and affiliation
 - 2. Power and dominance
 - 3. Arousal and relaxation
 - To maintain relationships, we use nonverbal messages of attraction and affiliation, power and dominance, and arousal and relaxation.
- D. **Forming impressions**
 - 1. Demographic impressions
 - 2. Sociocultural impressions
 - Nonverbal behaviors help us form demographic and sociocultural impressions of people.
- E. **Influencing others**
 - 1. Creating credibility
 - 2. Promoting affiliation
 - 3. Maximizing attractiveness
 - To influence others, we use nonverbal behaviors to create credibility, promote affiliation, and maximize our attractiveness.
- F. **Concealing information**
 - Nonverbal behaviors—particularly facial, eye, vocal, and kinesic behaviors—help us conceal information from others.

Section 4} Improving Your Nonverbal Communication Skills (page 247)

IV. Improving Your Nonverbal Communication Skills.

- A. **Interpreting nonverbal communication**
 - 1. Be sensitive to nonverbal messages
 - 2. Decipher the meaning of nonverbal messages
 - a. be aware of the situation
 - b. keep culture in mind
 - c. ask for clarification
 - The ability to interpret nonverbal messages is a function of being sensitive to these messages and deciphering their meanings.
- B. **Expressing nonverbal messages**
 - 1. Learn from others
 - 2. Practice being expressive
 - The ability to express nonverbal messages can be enhanced by spending time with expressive people and taking part in activities that exercise your expressiveness.