

7

HERE ARE THE TOPICS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER:

> Characteristics of Nonverbal Communication

- Nonverbal Communication Defined
- Nonverbal Skills Are Vital
- All Behavior Has Communicative Value
- Nonverbal Communication Is Primarily Relational
- Nonverbal Communication Occurs in Mediated Messages
- Nonverbal Communication Serves Many Functions
- Nonverbal Communication Offers Deception Clues
- Nonverbal Communication Is Ambiguous

> Influences on Nonverbal Communication

- Gender
- Culture

> Types of Nonverbal Communication

- Body Movement
- Voice
- Touch
- Appearance
- Physical Space
- Physical Environment
- Time

> Summary

> Key Terms

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION: MESSAGES BEYOND WORDS

AFTER STUDYING THE TOPICS IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- 1 Explain the defining characteristics of nonverbal communication.
- 2 List and offer examples of each type of nonverbal message introduced in this chapter.
- 3 In a given situation, recognize your own nonverbal behavior and its relational significance.
- 4 Monitor and manage your nonverbal cues in ways that achieve your goals.
- 5 Share appropriately your interpretation of another's nonverbal behavior with that person.

MindTap READ AND UNDERSTAND ...

the complete chapter text online in a rich interactive platform.

What’s going on in the photo seen here? You don’t need to be a mind reader to recognize that, along with whatever words are being spoken, other messages are being expressed here. Some social scientists have argued that 93 percent of the emotional impact of a message comes from nonverbal cues. Others have reasoned more convincingly that the figure is closer to 65 percent.¹ Whatever the precise figure, the point remains: Nonverbal communication plays an important role in how we make sense of one another’s behavior.

Recall a recent exchange in one of your important relationships. What kinds of nonverbal behaviors might an observer notice? What might those behaviors say about your relationship?



CHARACTERISTICS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

As you read this chapter, you’ll become acquainted with the field of nonverbal communication: the way we express ourselves—not by what we say but rather by what we do.

Nonverbal Communication Defined

We need to begin our study of nonverbal communication by defining that term. At first this might seem like a simple task: If *non* means “not” and *verbal* means “words,” then *nonverbal communication* means “communicating without words.” In fact, this literal definition isn’t completely accurate. For instance, most communication scholars do not define American Sign Language as nonverbal even though the messages are unspoken. On the other hand, you’ll soon read that certain aspects of the voice aren’t really verbal, although they are vocal. (Can you think of any? Table 7.1 will help.)

For our purposes, we’ll define **nonverbal communication** as “messages expressed by nonlinguistic means.” This rules out sign languages and written

TABLE 7.1 Types of Communication

	VOCAL COMMUNICATION	NONVOCAL COMMUNICATION
Verbal Communication	Spoken words	Written words
Nonverbal Communication	Vocal tone, rate, pitch, volume, etc.	Gestures, movement, appearance, facial expression, touch, etc.

words, but it includes messages transmitted by vocal means that don't involve language—such as sighs, laughs, throat clearing, and other assorted noises. In addition, our definition allows us to explore the nonlinguistic dimensions of the spoken word—volume, rate, pitch, and so on. It also encompasses more abstract factors such as physical appearance, the environment in which we communicate, how close or far we stand from each other, and the way we use time. And, of course, it includes the features most people think of when they consider nonverbal communication: body language, gestures, facial expression, and eye contact.

Nonverbal Skills Are Vital

It's hard to overemphasize the importance of effective nonverbal expression and the ability to read and respond to others' nonverbal behavior.² Nonverbal encoding and decoding skills are a strong predictor of popularity, attractiveness, and socioemotional well-being.³ Good nonverbal communicators are more persuasive than people who are less skilled, and they have a greater chance of success in settings ranging from careers to poker games to romance. Nonverbal sensitivity is a major part of the “emotional intelligence” described in Chapter 5, and researchers have come to recognize that it is impossible to study spoken language without paying attention to its nonverbal dimensions.⁴

All Behavior Has Communicative Value

Suppose you tried not to communicate any messages at all. What would you do? Stop talking? Close your eyes? Curl up into a ball? Leave the room? You can probably see that even these behaviors communicate messages—that you're avoiding contact. One study demonstrated this fact.⁵ When communicators were told not to express nonverbal clues, others viewed them as dull, withdrawn, uneasy, aloof, and deceptive. This impossibility of not communicating is extremely important to understand because it means that each of us is a kind of transmitter that cannot be shut off. No matter what we do, we give off information about ourselves.⁶

Stop for a moment and examine yourself as you read this. If someone were observing you now, what nonverbal clues would that person get about how you're feeling? Are you sitting forward or reclining back? Is your posture tense or relaxed? Are your eyes wide open, or do they keep closing? What does your facial expression communicate? Can you make your face expressionless? Don't people with expressionless faces communicate something to you?

Of course, we don't always intend to send nonverbal messages. Unintentional nonverbal behaviors differ from intentional ones.⁷ For example, we often stammer, blush, frown, and sweat without meaning to do so. Whether or not our nonverbal behavior is intentional, others recognize it and make



20th Century Fox/Allstar

▲ Simian characters in *The Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* behave in ways that are recognizable to moviegoers. Their emotions are easy to gauge from their facial expressions, gestures, and body language, without a word being said. What nonverbal cues can you use to make informed guesses about how others are feeling?

interpretations about us based on their observations. Some theorists argue that unintentional behavior may provide information but that it shouldn't count as communication.⁸ We draw the boundaries of nonverbal communication more broadly, suggesting that even unconscious and unintentional behavior conveys messages and thus is worth studying as communication.

Nonverbal Communication Is Primarily Relational

Some nonverbal messages serve utilitarian functions. For example, a police officer directs the flow of traffic, and a team of street surveyors uses hand motions to coordinate its work. But nonverbal communication more commonly expresses the kinds of relational (rather than content) messages discussed in Chapter 1 and the kinds of identity messages that you read about in Chapter 3.⁹

Consider, for example, the role of nonverbal communication in *impression management*.¹⁰ Chapter 3 discussed how we strive to create an image of ourselves as we want others to view us. Nonverbal communication plays an important role in this process—in many cases more important than verbal communication. For instance, think what happens when you attend a party where you are likely to meet strangers you would like to get to know better. Instead of managing impressions verbally (“Hi! I’m attractive, friendly, and easygoing”), you behave in ways that will present this image. You might smile a lot and perhaps try to strike a relaxed pose. It’s also likely that you dress carefully—even if that requires looking as though you hadn’t given a lot of attention to your appearance.

Along with impression management, nonverbal communication *reflects and shapes the kinds of relationships we have with others*. Think about the wide range of ways you could behave when greeting another person. You could wave, shake hands, nod, smile, clap the other person on the back, give a hug, or avoid all contact. Each one of these decisions would send a message about the nature of your relationship with the other person. Within romantic relationships, nonverbal behaviors are especially important. For example, displays of affection such as sitting close, holding hands, and giving affectionate gazes are strongly connected to satisfaction and commitment in romantic relationships.¹¹

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

- a. You’re tired.
- b. You’re in favor of capital punishment.
- c. You’re attracted to another person in the group.
- d. You think prayer in the schools should be allowed.
- e. You’re angry at someone in the room.

This experiment shows that, short of charades, nonverbal messages are much better at expressing attitudes and emotions (a, c, and e) than other sorts

of messages (b and d). Among other limitations, nonverbal messages can't convey:

Simple matters of fact ("The book was written in 1997.")

The past or future tenses ("I was happy yesterday"; "I'll be out of town next week.")

An imaginary idea ("What would it be like if ...")

Conditional statements ("If I don't get a job, I'll have to move out.")

Nonverbal Communication Occurs in Mediated Messages

As you read in Chapter 2, face-to-face communication is richer in nonverbal cues than mediated messages. Despite that fact, there is plenty of nonverbal information available when we use technology to communicate. Video calls obviously provide nonverbal information, as do photos on social networking sites. However, even text-based electronic communication has nonverbal features.

The most obvious way to represent nonverbal expressions in type is with *emoticons*, using keyboard characters like these:

- :-) Basic smile
- ;-) Wink and grin
- :-(Frown
- :-@ Screaming, swearing, very angry
- :-/ or :-\ Skeptical
- :-O Surprised, yelling, realization of an error

Many programs now turn these keystroke combinations into graphic icons, known as *emoji*. Emoticons and emoji can clarify the meaning that isn't evident from words alone.¹² For example, see how each graphic below creates a different meaning for the same statement:

- You are driving me crazy 😊
- You are driving me crazy 😞
- You are driving me crazy 😍

Just like their in-person counterparts, emoticons and emoji are ambiguous and can communicate a variety of nonverbal messages.¹³ A smiley face could mean "I'm really happy," "I'm only kidding," or "I just zinged you." The same is true of other online communication markers.¹⁴ Exclamation marks (sometimes more than one!!!) can be used at the end of sentences, or even by themselves, to denote a variety of emotional states. Ellipses (...) at the end of a phrase can signal displeasure, thoughtfulness, or bemusement. They can also be turn-taking signals, similar to what might be conveyed nonverbally

with your face or with pauses during in-person conversations. And “lexical surrogates” such as “hmmm” or “ooooh” have meanings ranging from delight to disapproval. Paralinguistic markers like these are best understood within their communicative and relational contexts.

Not only does the content of a nonverbal message matter, but when it is sent matters as well.¹⁵ If you’ve ever been upset by a friend who hasn’t responded punctually to one of your texts, then you know the role that timeliness plays in mediated interpersonal communication. We’ll talk more about *chronemics* later in this chapter, but here we want to note that time management is a vital feature of online interaction. It’s also a good example of the principle that you cannot *not* communicate. Communicators have expectations about when others should reply to their posts, emails, and text messages, and delays can be perceived negatively.

Although nonverbal information can be communicated online, constant use of electronic channels can dull the perception of nonverbal cues. A group of preteens in one study was cut off from all forms of electronic communication for five days at camp.¹⁶ Interaction with their peers during that period took place exclusively in person. When compared with a control group that was free to use electronic devices during that same period, those who were restricted from technology dramatically improved their ability to recognize others’ nonverbal cues of emotion. This serves as a reminder that in-person communication offers greater access to important nonverbal cues than is available through most modes of electronic interaction.

Nonverbal Communication Serves Many Functions

Just because this chapter focuses on nonverbal communication, don’t get the idea that our words and our actions are unrelated. Quite the opposite is true: Verbal and nonverbal communication are interconnected elements in every act of communication. (See Table 7.2 for a comparison of verbal and nonverbal communication.) Nonverbal behaviors can operate in several relationships with verbal behaviors.

Repeating If someone asked you for directions to the nearest drugstore, you might say, “North of here about two blocks,” **repeating** your instructions

TABLE 7.2 Some Differences between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

	VERBAL COMMUNICATION	NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION
Complexity	One dimension (words only)	Multiple dimensions (voice, posture, gestures, distance, etc.)
Flow	Intermittent (speaking and silence alternate)	Continuous (it’s impossible to not communicate nonverbally)
Clarity	Less subject to misinterpretation	More ambiguous
Impact	Has less impact when verbal and nonverbal cues are contradictory	Has stronger impact when verbal and nonverbal cues are contradictory
Intentionality	Usually deliberate	Often unintentional

nonverbally by pointing north. This sort of repetition isn't just decorative: People remember comments accompanied by gestures more than those made with words alone.¹⁷

Complementing Even when it doesn't repeat language, nonverbal behavior can reinforce what's been said. **Complementing** nonverbal behaviors match the thoughts and emotions the communicator is expressing linguistically. You can appreciate the value of this function by imagining the difference between saying "Thank you" with a sincere facial expression and tone of voice and saying the same words in a deadpan manner.

Substituting When a friend asks "What's up?" you might shrug your shoulders instead of answering in words. Many facial expressions operate as substitutes for speech. It's easy to recognize expressions that function like verbal interjections and say "Gosh," "Really?," "Oh, please!," and so on.¹⁸ Nonverbal **substituting** can be useful when communicators are reluctant to express their feelings in words. Faced with a message you find disagreeable, you might sigh, roll your eyes, or yawn when speaking out would not be appropriate. Likewise, a parent who wants a child to stop being disruptive at a party can flash a glare across the room without saying a word (and what child doesn't know the power of "the look" from Mom or Dad?).

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

Regulating Nonverbal behaviors can serve a **regulating** function by influencing the flow of verbal communication.¹⁹ We can regulate conversations nonverbally by nodding (indicating "I understand" or "keep going"), looking away (signaling a lack of attention), or moving toward the door (communicating a desire to end the conversation). Of course, most of us have learned the hard way that nonverbal signals like these don't guarantee that the other party will pay attention to, interpret, or respond to them in the ways we had hoped.

Contradicting People often express **contradicting** messages in their verbal and nonverbal behaviors. A common example of this sort of **mixed message** is the experience we've all had of hearing someone with a red face and bulging veins yelling, "Angry? No, I'm not angry!" In situations like these, we tend to believe the nonverbal message instead of the words.²⁰ A humorous illustration of this concept can be seen in the Cingular cell phone commercial "Mother Love" (available on popular video sites). A mother and daughter appear to be having an argument with raised voices, flailing arms, and scowling faces. Careful listening to their words, however, reveals that they're slinging compliments and praise at each other, including the phrases "I really like it!" and "I love you!" What makes the commercial amusing is that their verbal and nonverbal messages don't match—and it's easy to believe they're angry rather than happy, no matter what their words say.

She dresses in flags
 comes on
 like a mack truck
 she paints
 her eyelids green
 and her mouth
 is a loud speaker rasping out
 profanity
 at cocktail parties
 she is everywhere
 like a sheep dog
 working a flock
 nipping at your sleeve
 spilling your drink
 bestowing
 wet sloppy kisses
 but i
 have received
 secret messages
 carefully written
 from the shy
 quiet woman
 who hides
 in this
 bizarre
 gaudy castle

Ric Masten



© SuperStock/SuperStock

Nonverbal Communication Offers Deception Clues

When message senders are telling lies, their nonverbal behavior sometimes gives them away. Inadvertent signals of deception—often called **leakage**—can come through a variety of nonverbal channels.

Some of these channels are more revealing than others. Facial expressions offer important information,²¹ but deceivers also pay more attention to monitoring these cues in an attempt to maintain a “poker face.” More reliable is pupil dilation, a physiological response that can’t easily be controlled.²² Speech patterns also offer a variety of leakage clues.²³ In one experiment, subjects

TABLE 7.3 Leakage of Nonverbal Cues to Deception**Deception Cues Are More Likely When the Deceiver**

Wants to hide emotions being felt at the moment
Feels strongly about the information being hidden
Feels apprehensive or guilty about the deception
Gets little enjoyment from being deceptive
Has not had time to rehearse the lie in advance
Knows there are severe punishments for being caught

Based on Ekman, P. (2001). *Telling lies*. New York: Norton.

who were encouraged to be deceitful made more speech errors, spoke for shorter periods of time, and had a lower rate of speech than did others who were encouraged to express themselves honestly. Another experiment revealed that the pitch of a liar's voice tends to be higher than that of a truth teller. Liars leak nonverbal cues of deception in some situations more than others. Table 7.3 outlines some conditions under which leakage is more likely.

A variety of self-help books and seminars claim that liars can be easily identified by monitoring their nonverbal cues, but scientific research doesn't support that notion. Communication scholars Judee Burgoon and Tim Levine have studied deception detection for years. In their review of decades of research on the subject, they came up with what they call "Deception Detection 101"—three findings that have been repeatedly supported in studies.²⁴ They are:

- We are accurate in detecting deception only slightly more than half the time—in other words, only a shade better than what we could achieve with a coin flip.
- We overestimate our abilities to detect other's lies—in other words, we're not as good at catching deception as we think we are.
- We have a strong tendency to judge others' messages as truthful—in other words, we want to believe people wouldn't lie to us (which biases our ability to detect deceit).

As one writer put it, "There is no unique telltale signal for a fib. Pinocchio's nose just doesn't exist, and that makes liars difficult to spot."²⁵ Moreover, some popular prescriptions about liars' nonverbal behaviors simply aren't accurate.



Fx Network/Allstar

▲ In the TV series *The Americans*, Russian spies Philip (Matthew Rhys) and Elizabeth (Keri Russell) must carefully monitor their nonverbal cues so as not to give away their identities. This means paying close attention to every detail—their apparel, eye contact, proxemics, accents—in an attempt to seem "American" (and happily married). What do your nonverbal cues reveal about where and how you were raised? In what ways do you change those cues depending on the situation?

For instance, conventional wisdom suggests that liars avert their gaze and fidget more than nonliars. Research, however, shows just the opposite: Liars often sustain *more* eye contact and fidget *less*, in part because they believe that to do otherwise might look deceitful.²⁶ While it's possible to make some generalizations about the nonverbal tendencies of liars, caution should be exercised in making evaluations of others' truth telling based on limited and ambiguous nonverbal cues.²⁷

Nonverbal Communication Is Ambiguous

You learned in Chapter 5 that verbal messages are open to multiple interpretations, but nonverbal messages are even more ambiguous. For example, consider the photo seen here. What do you think is the relationship between the people in it? Can you be sure? Or consider the example of a wink: In one study, college students interpreted this nonverbal signal as meaning a variety of things, including an expression of thanks, a sign of friendliness, a measure of insecurity, a sexual come-on, and an eye problem.²⁸

Even the most common nonverbal behavior can be ambiguous. A group of Safeway supermarket employees filed grievances over the company's "Superior Service" policy that required workers to smile and make eye contact with customers. The grocery clerks reported that some customers took the friendly greetings as come-ons.²⁹ Although nonverbal behavior can be very revealing, it can have so many possible meanings that it's impossible to be certain which interpretation is correct. Law-enforcement officials in California discouraged one motorist group from publicizing a set of hand signals drivers

could use to signal one another with messages such as "Danger ahead" or "There's a problem with your car." They warned that hand signs could be misinterpreted as gang signs that would provoke violent reactions.³⁰

The ambiguous nature of nonverbal behavior becomes clear in the area of courtship and sexuality. Does a kiss mean "I like you a lot" or "I want to have sex"? Does pulling away from a romantic partner mean "Stop now" or "Keep trying"? Communication researchers explored this question by surveying one hundred college students about sexual consent in twelve dating scenarios in order to discover under what conditions verbal approaches (for example, "Do you want to have sex with me?") were considered preferable to nonverbal indicators (such as kissing as an indicator of a desire to have sex).³¹ In every scenario, verbal consent was seen as less ambiguous than nonverbal consent. This doesn't mean that romantic partners don't rely on nonverbal signals; many of the respondents indicated that they interpret nonverbal cues (such as kissing) as signs of sexual willingness. However, nonverbal cues were far less likely to be misunderstood when accompanied by verbal cues.

Some people have more difficulty decoding nonverbal signals than do others. For people with



Jupiterimages/Workbook Stock/Getty Images

a syndrome called *nonverbal learning disorder* (NVLD), reading facial expressions, tone of voice, and other cues is dramatically more difficult.³² Because of a processing deficit in the right hemisphere of the brain, people with NVLD have trouble making sense of many nonverbal cues. Humor or sarcasm can be especially difficult to understand for people—especially children—with NVLD. For example, if they learn the right way to introduce themselves to an unfamiliar adult (by shaking hands and saying “Pleased to meet you”), they may attempt the same response in a group of children where it might be viewed as odd or “nerdy.” When peers do give them subtle feedback, such as raised eyebrows, they miss the information completely and therefore cannot modify their behavior next time.³³

Even for those of us who don’t suffer from NVLD, the ambiguity of nonverbal behavior can be frustrating. The perception-checking skill you learned in Chapter 4 can be a useful tool for figuring out what meanings you can accurately attach to confusing cues.

PAUSE *and* REFLECT

Body Language

MindTap REFLECT ... on body language by answering the following questions, either here or online.

This exercise will both increase your skill in observing nonverbal behavior and show you the dangers of being too sure that you’re a perfect reader of body language. Begin by choosing a partner from your class. You can try the exercise either in or out of class, and the period of time over which you do it is flexible—from a single class period to several days. Follow these directions:

1. For the first period of time (however long you decide to make it), observe the way your partner behaves. Notice movements, mannerisms, postures, style of dress, and so on. To remember your observations, jot them down. If you’re doing this exercise out of class over an extended period of time, there’s no need to let your observations interfere with whatever you’d normally be doing: Your only job here is to compile a list of your partner’s behaviors. In this step, you should be careful *not to interpret* your partner’s behaviors—just record what you see.
2. At the end of the time period, share what you’ve seen with your partner, who should do the same with you.
3. For the next period of time, your job not only is to observe your partner’s behavior but also to *interpret* it. This time in your conference you should tell your partner what you thought his or her behaviors revealed. For example, does careless dressing suggest oversleeping, loss of interest in appearance, or the desire to feel more comfortable? If you noticed frequent yawning, did you think this meant boredom, fatigue after a late night, or sleepiness after a big meal? Don’t feel bad if your guesses weren’t all correct. Remember that nonverbal clues tend to be ambiguous. You may be surprised how checking out the nonverbal clues you observe can help build a relationship with another person.

INFLUENCES ON NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

The way we communicate nonverbally is influenced to a certain degree by biological sex and to a great degree by the way we are socialized. To learn more about these influences, read on.

Gender

It's easy to identify stereotypical differences in male and female styles of nonverbal communication. Just think about exaggerated caricatures of macho men and delicate women that appear from time to time. Many jokes, as well as humorous films and plays, have been created around the results that arise when characters try to act like members of the opposite sex.

Although few of us behave like stereotypically masculine or feminine movie characters, there are recognizable differences in the way men and women look and act. Some of the most obvious differences are physiological: height, depth and volume of the voice, and so on. Other differences are rooted more in socialization. In general, females are usually more nonverbally expressive, and they are better at recognizing others' nonverbal behavior.³⁴ More specifically, research shows that, compared to men, women smile more; use more facial expression; use more head, hand, and arm gestures (but less expansive gestures); touch others more; stand closer to others; are more vocally expressive; and make more eye contact.³⁵

After looking at differences like these, it might seem as if men and women communicate in radically different ways. In fact, men's and women's nonverbal communication is more similar than different in many respects.³⁶ Differences like the ones described in the preceding paragraph are noticeable, but they are outweighed by the similar rules we follow in areas such as making eye contact, posture, gestures, and so on. You can prove this by imagining what it would be like to use radically different nonverbal rules: standing only an inch away from others, sniffing strangers, or tapping the forehead of someone when you want his or her attention. Moreover, male–female nonverbal differences are less pronounced in conversations involving gay and lesbian participants.³⁷ Gender certainly has an influence on nonverbal style, but the differences are often a matter of degree rather than kind.

Culture

Cultures have different nonverbal languages as well as verbal ones.³⁸ Fiorello LaGuardia, legendary mayor of New York from 1933 to 1945, was fluent in English, Italian, and Yiddish. Researchers who watched films of his campaign speeches found that they could tell with the sound turned off which language he was speaking by noticing the changes in his nonverbal behavior.³⁹

Some nonverbal behaviors have different meanings from culture to culture. The OK gesture made by joining the tips of thumb and forefinger to form a circle is a cheery affirmation to most Americans, but it has less positive

meanings in other parts of the world.⁴⁰ In France and Belgium, it means “You’re worth zero.” In Greece and Turkey, it is a vulgar sexual invitation, usually meant as an insult. Given this sort of cross-cultural ambiguity, it’s easy to imagine how an innocent tourist might wind up in serious trouble.

Culture also affects how nonverbal cues are monitored. In Japan, for instance, people tend to look to the eyes for emotional cues, whereas Americans and Europeans focus on the mouth.⁴¹ These differences can be seen in the text-based emoticons used in these cultures. American emoticons focus on mouth expressions, while Japanese emoticons feature the eyes. (Search for “Western and Eastern emoticons” in your browser for examples.)

Even though we recognize that differences exist in the nonverbal rules of different cultures, subtle differences can damage relationships without the parties ever recognizing exactly what has gone wrong. Anthropologist Edward Hall points out that, whereas Americans are comfortable conducting business at a distance of roughly 4 feet, people from the Middle East stand much closer.⁴² It is easy to visualize the awkward advance-and-retreat pattern that might occur when two diplomats or businesspeople from these cultures meet. The Middle Easterner would probably keep moving forward to close the gap, whereas the American would continually back away. Both would feel uncomfortable, probably without knowing why.

Like distance, patterns of eye contact vary around the world.⁴³ A direct gaze is considered appropriate, if not imperative, for speakers seeking power in Latin America, the Arab world, and southern Europe. However, Asians, Indians, Pakistanis, and northern Europeans gaze at a listener peripherally or not at all out of respect rather than a lack of interest.⁴⁴ In either case, deviations from the norm are likely to make a listener uncomfortable.

The use of time depends greatly on culture.⁴⁵ Some cultures (e.g., North American, German, and Swiss) tend to be **monochronic**, emphasizing punctuality, schedules, and completing one task at a time. Other cultures (e.g., South American, Mediterranean, and Arab) are more **polychronic**, with flexible schedules in which multiple tasks are pursued at the same time.⁴⁶ One psychologist discovered the difference between North and South American attitudes when teaching at a university in Brazil.⁴⁷ He found that some Brazilian students arrived halfway through a two-hour class and most of them stayed put and kept asking questions when the class was scheduled to end. A half-hour after the official end of the class, the psychologist finally closed off discussion because there was no indication that the students intended to leave. This flexibility of time is quite different from what is common in most North American colleges!

As Table 7.4 shows, differences in cultural rules can lead to misunderstandings. For example, observations have shown that black women in all-black groups are nonverbally more expressive and interrupt one another



TABLE 7.4 Cultural Differences in Nonverbal Communication Can Lead to Misunderstandings

Behaviors that have one meaning for members of the same culture or co-culture can be interpreted differently by members of other groups.

BEHAVIOR	PROBABLE IN-GROUP PERCEPTION	POSSIBLE OUT-GROUP PERCEPTION
Avoidance of direct eye contact (Latino/Latina)	Used to communicate attentiveness or respect	A sign of inattentiveness; direct eye contact is preferred
Aggressively challenging a point with which one disagrees (African American)	Acceptable means of dialogue; not regarded as verbal abuse or a precursor to violence	Arguments are viewed as inappropriate and a sign of potential imminent violence
Use of finger gestures to beckon others (Asian)	Appropriate if used by adults for children, but highly offensive if directed at adults	Appropriate gesture to use with both children and adults
Silence (Native American)	Sign of respect, thoughtfulness, and/or uncertainty/ambiguity	Interpreted as boredom, disagreement, or refusal to participate
Touch (Latino/Latina)	Normal and appropriate for interpersonal interactions	Deemed appropriate for some intimate or friendly interactions; otherwise perceived as a violation of personal space
Public display of intense emotions (African American)	Accepted and valued as measure of expressiveness; appropriate in most settings	Violates expectations for self-controlled public behaviors; inappropriate in most public settings
Touching or holding hands of same-sex friends (Asian)	Acceptable in behavior that signifies closeness in platonic relationships	Perceived as inappropriate, especially for male friends

more than white women in all-white groups. This doesn't mean that black women always feel more intensely than their white counterparts. A more likely explanation is that the two groups follow different cultural rules. One study found that in racially mixed groups both black and white women moved closer to each others' style.⁴⁸ This nonverbal convergence shows that skilled communicators can adapt their behavior when interacting with members of other cultures or subcultures in order to make the exchange smoother and more effective.

Despite the many cultural differences, some nonverbal behaviors have the same meanings around the world. Smiles and laughter are universal signals of positive emotions, for example, whereas sour expressions are universal signals of displeasure.⁴⁹ Charles Darwin believed that expressions like these are the result of evolution, functioning as survival mechanisms that allowed early humans to convey emotional states before the development of language. The innateness of some facial expressions becomes even clearer when we examine the behavior of children who are born with impaired hearing and sight.⁵⁰ Despite a lack of social learning, these children often display a broad range of expression. They smile, laugh, and cry in ways that are similar to those of seeing and hearing children. In other words, nonverbal behavior—like much of our communication—is influenced by both our genetic heritage and our culture.

TYPES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Keeping the characteristics of nonverbal communication in mind, let's look at some of the ways we communicate in addition to words.

Body Movement

The first area of nonverbal communication we'll discuss is the broad field of **kinesics**, or body position and motion. In this section, we'll explore the role that body orientation, posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact play in our relationships with one another.

Body Orientation We'll start with **body orientation**—the degree to which we face toward or away from someone with our body, feet, and head. To understand how this kind of physical positioning communicates nonverbal messages, imagine that you and a friend are in the middle of a conversation when a third person approaches and wants to join you. You're not especially glad to see this person, but you don't want to sound rude by asking him to leave. By turning your body slightly away from the intruder, you can make your feelings very clear. The nonverbal message here is "We're interested in each other right now and don't want to include you in our conversation." The general rule is that facing someone directly signals your interest and facing away signals a desire to avoid involvement.

You can learn a good deal about how people feel by observing the way people position themselves. The next time you're in a crowded place where people can choose whom to face directly, try noticing who seems to be included in the action and who is being subtly shut out. And in the same way, pay attention to your own body orientation. You may be surprised to discover that you're avoiding a certain person without being conscious of it or that at times you're "turning your back" on people altogether. If this is the case, it may be helpful to figure out why.

Posture Another way we communicate nonverbally is through **posture**. To see if this is true, stop reading for a moment and notice how you're sitting. What does your position say nonverbally about how you feel? Are there any other people near you now? What messages do you get from their current posture? By paying attention to the postures of those around you, as well as your own, you'll find another channel of nonverbal communication that can furnish information about how people feel about themselves and one another.

An indication of how much posture communicates is shown by our language. It's full of expressions that link emotional states with body postures:

I won't take this lying down! (Nor will I stand for it!)

I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders.

He's a real slouch in the office (but he's no slouch on the basketball court).

She's been sitting on that project for weeks.

Posture may be the least ambiguous type of nonverbal behavior. In one study, 176 computer-generated mannequin figures were created, and observers were asked to assign emotions to particular postural configurations. The raters had more than 90-percent agreement on postures that were connected with anger, sadness, and happiness.⁵¹ Some postures seem easier to interpret than others. Disgust was the emotion that was hardest to identify from body posture, and some raters thought that surprise and happiness had similar postural configurations.

Tension and relaxation offer other postural keys to feelings. We take relaxed postures in nonthreatening situations and tighten up in threatening situations.⁵² Based on this observation, we can tell a good deal about how others feel simply by watching how tense or loose they seem to be. For example, tenseness is a way of detecting status differences: The lower-status person is generally the more rigid and tense-appearing one, and the higher-status person appears more relaxed. Research shows that adopting a high-status pose—such as putting your feet up on a desk with hands clasped behind your head—can actually lead to increased feelings of power.⁵³

Gestures Movements of the hands and arms—**gestures**—are an important type of nonverbal communication. Some social scientists claim that a language of gestures was the first form of human communication, preceding speech by tens of thousands of years.⁵⁴

The most common forms of gestures are what social scientists call **illustrators**—movements that accompany speech but don't stand on their own.⁵⁵ For instance, if someone on a street corner asked you how to get to a restaurant across town, you might offer street names and addresses—but all the while you'd probably point with your fingers and gesture with your hands to illustrate how to get there. Remove the words from your directions and it's unlikely that the other person would ever find the restaurant. Think also of people who like to “talk with their hands,” gesturing vigorously even when they're conversing on the phone and can't be seen by the other party. Research shows that North Americans use illustrators more often when they are emotionally aroused—trying to explain ideas that are difficult to put into words when they are furious, horrified, agitated, distressed, or excited.⁵⁶ Studies also show that it is easier to comprehend and learn a second language when it is accompanied by illustrators and other nonverbal cues.⁵⁷

A second type of gestures is **emblems**—deliberate nonverbal behaviors that have a precise meaning and are known to virtually everyone within a cultural group. Unlike illustrators, emblems can stand on their own and often function as replacements for words. For example, all North Americans know that a head nod means “Yes,” a head shake means “No,” a wave means “Hello” or “Goodbye,” and a hand to the ear means “I can't hear you.” And almost every Westerner over the age of seven knows the meaning of a raised middle finger. It's important to remember, however, that the meanings of emblems like these are not universal. For instance, the “thumbs-up” sign means “good” in the United States but is an obscene gesture in Iraq and several other countries.⁵⁸

A third type of gestures is **adaptors**—unconscious bodily movements in response to the environment. For instance, shivering when it's cold and folding

your arms to get warmer are examples of adaptors. Of course, sometimes we cross our arms when we're feeling "cold" toward another person—and thus adaptors can reveal the climate of our relationships. In particular, self-touching behaviors—sometimes called **manipulators**—are often a sign of discomfort, such as fiddling with your hands or rubbing your arms during an interview.⁵⁹ But not *all* fidgeting signals uneasiness. People also are likely to engage in self-touching when relaxed. When they let down their guard (either alone or with friends), they will be more likely to fiddle with an earlobe, twirl a strand of hair, or clean their fingernails. Whether or not the fidgeter is hiding something, observers are likely to interpret these behaviors as a signal of dishonesty. Because not all fidgeters are dishonest, it's important not to jump to conclusions about the meaning of adaptors.

Actually, *too few* gestures may be just as significant an indicator of mixed messages as *too many*.⁶⁰ Limited gesturing may signal a lack of interest, sadness, boredom, or low enthusiasm. Illustrators also decrease whenever someone is cautious about speaking. For these reasons, a careful observer will look for either an increase or a decrease in the usual level of gestures.

On the JOB

Nonverbal Communication in Job Interviews

The old adage "You never get a second chance to make a first impression" is never truer than in job interviews. The impression you make in the first few minutes of this crucial conversation can define the way a prospective employer views you—and thus the path of your career. Research highlights the vital role that nonverbal communication plays in shaping how interviewers regard job applicants.^a

Here's a look at three specific behaviors that have been the subject of studies on employment interviewing:

- *Handshaking*. In American culture, most professional interactions begin with a handshake. As simple as this ritual might seem, research shows that the quality of a handshake is related to interviewer hiring recommendations. Handshakes should be firm and energetic without being overpowering—and this holds true for both men and women.^b
- *Attire and Appearance*. Being well dressed and properly groomed is basic to interview success. A business-appropriate appearance enhances perceptions of a candidate's credibility and social

skills. A rule of thumb is that it's better to err on the side of formality than casualness, and conservative colors and fashion are preferable to being flashy.^c

- *Smiling*. While it may seem obvious, one study found that "authentically smiling interviewees were judged to be more suitable and were more likely to be short-listed and selected for the job."^d The word *authentically* is important—judges in the study made negative appraisals of plastered-on smiles that didn't seem genuine. The key is to smile naturally and regularly, exhibiting a friendly and pleasant demeanor.

It's easy to imagine how other nonverbal cues discussed in this chapter (e.g., eye contact, posture, tone of voice, etc.) are vital in making a good impression in a job interview. For more information, consult the myriad books and websites devoted to employment interviewing. You can also visit your school's career-development center or perhaps even take a course in interviewing. In every case, you'll be coached that what you do and how you look is as important as what you say in a job interview.



THE EYES HAVE IT

Look inside your kitchen cabinet and odds are you have a collection of old friends gazing back at you—the Quaker Oats man, the Sun-Maid girl, Aunt Jemima, and maybe a Keebler elf or two. The reason they are there may have more to do with your subconscious craving for eye contact than the taste of the products.

In a study published in the journal *Environment and Behavior*, researchers at Cornell University manipulated the gaze of the cartoon rabbit on Trix cereal boxes and found that adult subjects were more likely to choose Trix over competing brands if the rabbit was looking at them rather than away.

“Making eye contact even with a character on a cereal box inspires powerful feelings of connection,” said Brian Wansink, one of the study’s authors.

This follows a flurry of recent research on the magnetic and mesmerizing nature of eye contact and its essential role in developing emotional stability and social fluency. Studies show that newborns

instinctively lock eyes with their caregivers. Researchers have also found that children and adults who avoid or are denied eye contact are more likely to suffer from depression and feelings of isolation as well as exhibit antisocial traits such as callousness. This is alarming in a society where people increasingly spend more time looking at their mobile devices than at one another.

Eye contact makes us more socially aware and empathetic. It allows us to make sense of our relationships and social orientation. Avoiding eye contact out of fear or insecurity, or breaking eye contact to read a text, check email, or play Candy Crush, degrades your social facility and emotional intelligence.

Researchers at Northwestern University found that patients of doctors who made more eye contact had better health, adhered more to medical advice and were more likely to seek treatment for future problems. Not surprisingly, doctors who brought laptops into the examining room made less eye contact.

“Eye contact is a really good surrogate for where attention is and the level of accord building in a relationship,” said Enid Montague, a professor of engineering and medicine at Northwestern who used video recordings of 100 patient visits to a primary care clinic for her analysis. “We found eye contact leads to significantly better patient outcomes.”

Which brings us back to the Quaker Oats man and Aunt Jemima gazing out of your kitchen cabinet—not to mention Chef Boyardee, Cap’n Crunch, Uncle Ben, and the Gerber baby. It’s probably no accident that these brands have endured while some competing brands with fancy fonts and clever graphics—but no eye contact—have fallen by the wayside.

Kate Murphy

MindTap[®] ENHANCE ...

your understanding by answering the following questions, either here or online.

- 1 Observe the degree of eye contact others use when they engage with you. Based on your experience, what is the optimal level of eye contact in varying types of relationships and contexts?
- 2 Pay attention to your level of eye contact in important personal relationships. How might adjusting this level change the nature of your interactions?

Face and Eyes The face and eyes are probably the most noticed parts of the body, but this doesn't mean that their nonverbal messages are the easiest to read. The face is a tremendously complicated channel of expression for several reasons.

First, it's difficult to describe the number and kind of expressions we produce with our face and eyes. Researchers have found that there are at least eight distinguishable positions of the eyebrows and forehead, eight of the eyes and lids, and ten for the lower face.⁶¹ When you multiply this complexity by the number of emotions we feel, you can see why it's almost impossible to compile a dictionary of facial expressions and their corresponding emotions.

Second, facial expressions are difficult to understand because of the speed with which they can change. For example, slow-motion films show **microexpressions** fleeting across a subject's face in as short a time as it takes to blink an eye.⁶² Without being aware, liars may leak how they genuinely feel through brief furrows of the brow, pursing of the lips, or crinkling around the eyes.⁶³ Microexpressions like these are more likely to occur during what's known as "high-stakes" lying, such as when there are severe punishments for being caught.⁶⁴ Keep in mind that slow-motion recordings and trained professionals are often required to pick up these brief deception cues.

Despite the complex way in which the face shows emotions, you can still pick up clues by watching faces carefully. One of the easiest ways is to look for expressions that seem too exaggerated to be true. For instance, genuine facial expressions usually last no longer than five seconds—anything more and we start to doubt they are real (contestants in pageants with smiles plastered on their faces often come across as "fake" or "plastic").⁶⁵ Another way to detect feelings is to watch others' expressions when they aren't likely to be thinking about their appearance. We've all had the experience of glancing into another car while stopped in a traffic jam, or of looking around at a sporting event, and seeing expressions that the wearer would probably never show in more guarded moments.

The eyes can send several kinds of messages. Meeting someone's glance with your eyes is usually a sign of involvement, whereas looking away is often a sign of a desire to avoid contact. This principle has a practical application in commerce: Customers leave larger tips when their servers (male and female) maintain eye contact with them.⁶⁶ Research also shows that communicators who make direct eye contact are far more likely to get others to comply with their requests than are those who make evasive glances.⁶⁷ We'll see later in this chapter how the same principle holds true with touching others—which is why the term *eye contact* is relevant. A sense of connection leads to compliance.

Another kind of message the eyes communicate is a positive or negative attitude.⁶⁸ When someone looks toward us with the proper facial expression, we get a clear message that the looker is interested in us—hence the expression "making eyes." At the same time, when our long glances toward someone else are avoided, we can be pretty sure that the other person isn't as interested in a relationship as we are. (Of course, there are all sorts of courtship games in which the receiver of a glance pretends not to notice any message by glancing away yet signals interest with some other part of the body.) The eyes can also communicate both dominance and submission.⁶⁹ We've all played the game of trying to stare down somebody, and there are times when downcast eyes are a sign of giving in.

Looking at DIVERSITY



Photo courtesy of Annie Donnellon

Annie Donnellon: Blindness and Nonverbal Cues

I have been blind since birth, so I've never had access to many of the nonverbal cues that sighted people use. In fact, I think that "sightlings" (a pet name for my friends who are sighted) take for granted how much of their meaning comes through nonverbal channels. When I recently took an interpersonal communication course, the material on nonverbal communication was in some ways a foreign language to me.

For instance, I felt a bit left out when the class discussed things like body movement, eye contact, and facial expressions. I understand how these cues work, but I haven't experienced many of them myself. I have never "stared someone down" or "shot a look" at anyone (at least not intentionally!). While I know that some people "talk with their hands," that's something I've never witnessed and rarely do.

When the subject turned to paralanguage, I was back on familiar territory. I listen very carefully to the way people speak to figure out what they're thinking and feeling. My family and friends tell me I'm more tuned in to these issues than most sightlings are. It's typical for me to ask "Are you okay today?" when friends send messages that seem mixed. They may say everything's fine, but their voice often tells a different story.

I'm a singer and performer, and some of my biggest frustrations have come from well-meaning teachers who coach me on my nonverbals. I remember one acting instructor asking me, "How do you think your character would express herself nonverbally

in this scene?" and I thought to myself "I have no idea." People who are sighted may think that anger cues like clenched fists, rigid posture, or shrugged shoulders are "natural" expressions, but I believe that many of them are learned by watching others.

Let me pass along some keys that can help make communication smoother and more effective. It's important to mention your name when starting a conversation with people who are blind: Don't assume they can figure out who you are from your voice. At the end of a conversation, please say that you're leaving. I often feel embarrassed when I'm talking to someone, only to find out that they walked away mid-sentence.

Most important: Clue in visually-impaired people when something is going on that they can't see. Often at my sorority meetings, something will happen that everyone is laughing about, but I'm left out of the loop because I can't see the nonverbal cues. Over the years my friends and family have learned that whispering a quick description of the events helps me feel more a part of the interaction.

The interpersonal course I took was an enriching experience for me, my professor, and my classmates. I think we learned a lot from each other—especially about the vital and complex role of nonverbal communication in interpersonal relationships.

"Blindness and Nonverbal Cues" by Annie Donnellon. Used with permission of author.

Voice

The voice is another channel of nonverbal communication. Social scientists use the term **paralanguage** to describe nonverbal, vocal messages. The way a message is spoken can give the same word or words many meanings. For example, note how many meanings come from a single sentence just by shifting the emphasis from one word to another:

This is a fantastic communication book. (Not just any book, but *this* one in particular.)

This is a *fantastic* communication book. (This book is superior, exciting.)

This is a fantastic *communication* book. (The book is good as far as communication goes; it may not be so great as literature or drama.)

This is a fantastic communication *book*. (It's not a play or album; it's a book.)

There are many other ways we communicate paralinguistically through tone, rate, pitch, volume—even through pauses. Consider two types of pauses that can lead to communication snags. The first is the *unintentional pause*—those times when people stop to collect their thoughts before deciding how best to continue their verbal message. It's no surprise that liars tend to have more unintentional pauses than truth tellers, as they often make up stories on the fly.⁷⁰ When people pause at length after being asked a delicate question (“Did you like the gift I bought you?”), it might mean they're buying time to come up with a face-saving—and perhaps less-than-honest—response.

A second type of pause is the *vocalized pause*. These range from disfluencies such as “um,” “er,” and “uh” to filler words that are used habitually such as “like,” “okay,” and “ya know.” Research shows that vocalized pauses reduce a person's perceived credibility⁷¹ and negatively affect perceptions of candidates in job interviews.⁷² When Caroline Kennedy was considering running for the Senate, her press tour interviews were filled with vocalized pauses. In one case she used “ya know” 142 times in a single interview with *The New York Times*. Although this wasn't the reason she decided not to run for office, many commentators noted that it certainly didn't help her professional image.⁷³

Researchers have identified the power of paralanguage through the use of content-free speech—ordinary speech that has been electronically manipulated so that the words are unintelligible but the paralanguage remains unaffected. (Hearing a foreign language that you don't understand has the same effect.) Subjects who hear content-free speech can consistently recognize the emotion being expressed as well as identify its strength.⁷⁴ Young children respond to the paralanguage of adults, warming up to those who speak warmly and shying away from those who speak in a less-friendly manner.⁷⁵

Paralanguage can affect behavior in many ways, some of which are rather surprising. Researchers have discovered that communicators are most likely to comply with requests delivered by speakers whose rate was similar to their own: People who spoke rapidly responded most favorably to rapid talkers, whereas slow speakers preferred others whose rate was also slow.⁷⁶ Besides complying with same-rate speakers, listeners also feel more positively about people who speak at their own rate.

Sarcasm is one instance in which we use both emphasis and tone of voice to change a statement's meaning to the opposite of its verbal message. Experience this reversal yourself with the following three statements. First say them literally and then sarcastically.

“Thanks a lot!”

“I really had a wonderful time on my blind date.”

“There's nothing I like better than lima beans.”

As they do with other nonverbal messages, people often ignore or misinterpret the vocal nuances of sarcasm. Members of certain groups—children, people with weak intellectual skills, and poor listeners—are more likely to misunderstand sarcastic messages than others.⁷⁷ In one study, children younger than age ten lacked the linguistic sophistication to tell when a message was sarcastic.⁷⁸

The Way You Talk Can Hurt You?

Women have a distinctive style of speaking: “I was shopping last night? And I saw this wonderful dress? It was so black and slinky?” It’s hard to convey intonation in print, but the question marks indicate a rise in pitch at the end of the sentence, as in a question. Many women, especially younger women, use this intonation in declarative sentences: “This is Sally Jones? I have an appointment with Dr. Smith? And I’d like to change it to another day?”

I cringe when I hear this. The rising intonation sounds timid and lacking in self-confidence; the speaker seems to be asking for approval or permission to speak when there’s no need to. She should make her point straightforwardly, in an assertion that drops in pitch as it ends.

And I worry that rising intonation harms women. It gets them taken less seriously than they should be in public debates; it encourages salesmen and car mechanics to cheat them when they wouldn’t try cheating a man.

A woman friend who studies languages says I’ve got it wrong. Unlike men, who use conversation to fight for status, she tells me, women see it as cooperative. And they use rising pitch to convey this to their audience. Their tone encourages the supportive interjections, such as “Uh-huh,” “Exactly,” and “I know what you mean,” with which women far more than men interlard each other’s speech. And it asks listeners to contribute their ideas on the speaker’s topic.

At the very least, women’s use of rising intonation involves an ambiguity. It uses a sound that in other contexts conveys timidity, for a very different purpose. Given this ambiguity, we shouldn’t be surprised if female speakers who are trying to be cooperative are often heard as hesitant.

It’s clearly idiotic to treat conversation as a contest, as so many men do. We’d all benefit from a more cooperative approach. But we need a new symbol to express this, one with no connotations of weakness.

If we find this symbol, we can all, men and women, speak in friendly but firm tones. We can tell anecdotes without lecturing but also without seeming to kowtow. When we call the doctor’s, we can say: “This is Sally (or Sam) Jones.” (No question about it.) “I have an appointment with Dr. Smith.” (I’m reminding you of a fact.) “And I’d like to change it to another day.” (Now, can you help me?)

Thomas Hurka

MindTap ENHANCE ...

your understanding by answering the following questions, either here or online.

- 1 Can you identify people in your life who speak the way the author describes in this reading? If so, what is your reaction to them?
- 2 Describe the role that tone of voice plays in getting you to comply with requests and directives from others.
- 3 Are there changes you might consider making in your paralanguage to become a more effective communicator?

Some vocal factors are perceived more positively than others. For example, communicators who speak loudly and without hesitations are viewed as more confident than those who pause and speak quietly.⁷⁹ People with more-attractive voices are rated more highly than those with less-attractive voices.⁸⁰ Just what makes a voice attractive can vary. As Figure 7.1 shows, culture can make a difference. Surveys show that there are both similarities and differences between what Mexicans and Americans view as the ideal voice. Accent plays an important role in shaping perceptions. Generally speaking, accents that identify a speaker's membership in a group lead to more positive evaluations (if the group is high status) or to negative evaluations (if the group is low status).⁸¹

Touch

Shortly after her husband was elected U.S. president, First Lady Michelle Obama violated diplomatic protocol by returning the hug of Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth II. Some observers were appalled, and others delighted. Regardless of their reaction, everyone would have agreed that touch is a powerful way of communicating.

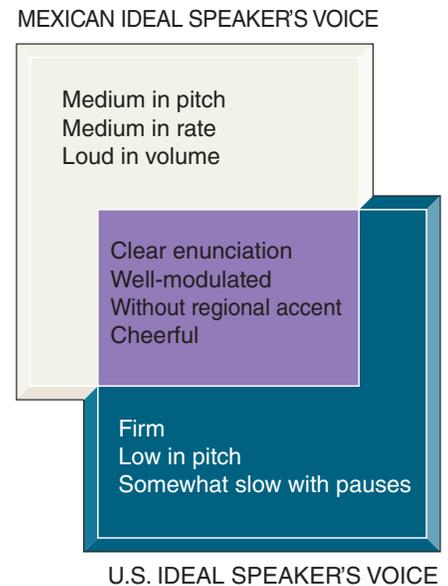
Social scientists use the word **haptics** to describe the study of touching. Touch can communicate many messages and signal a variety of relationships, such as the following:⁸²

- Functional and professional (dental exam, haircut)
- Social and polite (handshake)
- Friendship and warmth (clap on back, Spanish *abrazo*)
- Sexual arousal (some kisses, strokes)
- Aggression (shoves, slaps)

Some nonverbal behaviors occur in several types of relationships. A kiss, for example, can mean anything from a polite but superficial greeting to the most intense arousal. What makes a given touch more or less intense? Researchers have suggested several factors:

- Which part of the body does the touching
- Which part of the body is touched
- How long the touch lasts
- How much pressure is used
- Whether there is movement after contact is made
- Whether anyone else is present
- The situation in which the touch occurs
- The relationship between the people involved⁸³

From this list you can see that there is, indeed, a complex language of touch. Because nonverbal messages are inherently ambiguous, it's no surprise that this language can often be misunderstood. Is a hug playful or suggestive of stronger feelings? Is a touch on the shoulder a friendly gesture or an



▲ FIGURE 7.1
A Comparison of the Ideal Speakers' Voice Types in Mexico and the United States

Adapted from "Communicative Power: Gender and Culture as Determinants of the Ideal Voice," in *Women and Communicative Power: Theory, Research and Practice*, edited by Carol A. Valentine and Nancy Hoar. ©1988 by SCA. Reprinted by permission.

attempt at domination? The ambiguity of nonverbal behavior often leads to serious problems.

Touch plays a powerful role in shaping how we respond to others. For instance, in a laboratory task, subjects evaluated partners more positively when they were touched (appropriately, of course) by them.⁸⁴ Besides increasing liking, touch also increases compliance. A restaurant server's fleeting touches on the hand and shoulder result in larger tips.⁸⁵ Touching customers in a store increases their shopping time, their evaluation of the store, and also the amount of shopping.⁸⁶ When an offer to try samples of a product is accompanied by a touch, customers are more likely to try the sample and buy the product.⁸⁷

Some of the most pronounced benefits of touching occur in medicine and the health and helping professions. For example, patients are more likely to take their medicines when physicians give a slight touch while prescribing.⁸⁸ Massage can help premature children gain weight, help colicky children to sleep better, improve the mood of depressed adolescents, and boost the immune function of cancer and HIV patients.⁸⁹ Research shows that touch between therapists and clients has the potential to encourage a variety of beneficial changes: more self-disclosure, better client self-acceptance, and more positive client–therapist relationships.⁹⁰

Touch also has an impact in school. Students are twice as likely to volunteer and speak up in class if they have received supportive touch on the back or arm from their teacher.⁹¹ Even athletes benefit from touch. One study of National Basketball Association players revealed that the “touchiest” teams had the most successful records while the lowest-scoring teams had the least amount of touch among teammates.⁹²

Of course, touch must be culturally appropriate. Furthermore, touching by itself is no guarantee of success, and too much contact can be bothersome, annoying, or even downright creepy. But research confirms that appropriate contact can enhance your success.

PAUSE *and* REFLECT

The Rules of Touch

MindTap REFLECT . . . on the rules that govern touch by answering the following questions, either [here](#) or [online](#).

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

1. An adult and a five-year-old child
2. An adult and a twelve-year-old
3. Two good friends
4. Boss and employee

Appearance

Whether or not we're aware of the fact, how we look sends messages to others. There are two dimensions to appearance: physical attractiveness and clothing.

Physical Attractiveness There is little dispute that people who are deemed physically attractive receive many social benefits.⁹³ For example, females who are perceived as attractive have more dates, receive higher grades in college, persuade males with greater ease, and receive lighter court sentences. Both men and women perceived by others as attractive are rated as being more sensitive, kind, strong, sociable, and interesting than their less-fortunate brothers and sisters.

The influence of physical attractiveness begins early in life.⁹⁴ Preschoolers were shown photographs of children their own age and asked to choose potential friends and enemies. The researchers found that children as young as three agreed as to who was attractive and unattractive. Furthermore, the children valued their attractive counterparts—both of the same and the opposite sex—more highly. Teachers also are affected by students' attractiveness. Physically attractive students are usually judged more favorably—as being more intelligent, friendly, and popular—than their less-attractive counterparts.⁹⁵ Teacher–student assessments work in both directions—research shows that physically attractive professors receive higher evaluations from their students.⁹⁶

Physical attractiveness is also an asset in the professional world, affecting hiring, promotion, and performance evaluation decisions.⁹⁷ This bias has been referred to as “lookism” and can lead to the same kinds of prejudice as racism and sexism.⁹⁸ For instance, research shows that women gain an 8 percent wage bonus for above-average looks; they pay a 4 percent wage penalty for below-average appearance. For men, the attractiveness wage bonus is only 4 percent; however, the penalty for below-average looks is a full 13 percent. Occasionally physical attractiveness has a negative effect: Interviewers may turn down good-looking candidates because they're perceived as threats.⁹⁹ While attractiveness generally gets rewarded, glamorous beauty can be intimidating.¹⁰⁰

Fortunately, attractiveness is something we can control without having to call a plastic surgeon. If you aren't totally gorgeous or handsome, don't despair: Evidence suggests that, as we get to know more about people and like them, we start to regard them as better looking.¹⁰¹ Moreover, we view others as beautiful or ugly not just on the basis of their “original equipment” but also on the basis of how they use that equipment. Posture, gestures, facial expressions, and other behaviors can increase the physical attractiveness of an otherwise unremarkable person. Finally, the way we dress can make a significant difference in the way others perceive us, as you'll now see.



Warren Brothers/Alistar

▲ When his wife dumps him, Cal Weaver (Steve Carrell) turns to hunky Jacob Palmer (Ryan Gosling) for advice about how to act to attract women in *Crazy, Stupid Love*. Jacob overhauls Cal's appearance: shoes, shirts, suits, jeans, hair. And as happens in the movies, Cal emerges with a new sense of confidence and dating success. How much does your appearance affect how you feel about yourself? Can it change the way you interact with others?

Clothing Besides being a means of protecting us from the elements, clothing is a means of communicating nonverbally. One writer has suggested that clothing conveys at least ten types of messages to others:¹⁰²

- Economic background
- Economic level
- Educational background
- Educational level
- Level of sophistication
- Level of success
- Moral character
- Social background
- Social position
- Trustworthiness

Research shows that we do make assumptions about people based on their clothing.¹⁰³ For example, experimenters dressed in uniforms resembling police officers were more successful than those dressed in civilian clothing in requesting pedestrians to pick up litter and in persuading them to lend money to an overparked motorist. Likewise, solicitors wearing sheriff's and nurse's uniforms increased the level of contributions to law-enforcement and healthcare campaigns. We are also more likely to follow the lead of those in more formal attire when it comes to violating social rules. Eighty-three percent of the pedestrians in one study copied the action of a jaywalker dressed in higher-status clothing who violated a "wait" crossing signal, whereas only 48 percent followed a confederate dressed in lower-status clothing.



George Doyle/Stockbyte/Getty Images

Physical Space

Proxemics is the study of the way people and animals use space. There are at least two dimensions of proxemics: distance and territoriality.

Distance Each of us carries around a sort of invisible bubble of personal space wherever we go. We think of the area inside this bubble as our private territory—almost as much a part of us as our own bodies. To appreciate this, take a moment to complete the “Distance Makes a Difference” exercise in this section. As you move closer to your partner, the distance between your bubbles narrows and at a certain point disappears altogether: Your space has been invaded, and this is the point at which you probably feel uncomfortable. As you move away again, your partner retreats out of your bubble, and you feel more relaxed.

Of course, if you were to try this experiment with someone very close to you—a romantic partner, for example—you might not have felt any discomfort

at all, even while touching. The reason is that our willingness to get close to others—physically as well as emotionally—varies according to the person we’re with and the situation we’re in. And it’s precisely the distance that we voluntarily put between ourselves and others that gives a nonverbal clue about our feelings and the nature of the relationship.

As you read earlier in this chapter, appropriate proxemic distances differ from culture to culture. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall has defined four distances that most North Americans use in their everyday lives.¹⁰⁴ He says we choose a particular distance depending on how we feel toward the other person at a given time, the context of the conversation, and our interpersonal goals.

- The first of Hall’s four spatial zones begins with skin contact and ranges out to about 18 inches. We usually use **intimate distance** with people who are emotionally the closest to us and then mostly in private situations—making love, caressing, comforting, protecting.
- The second spatial zone, **personal distance**, ranges from 18 inches at its closest point to 4 feet at its farthest. Its closer range is the distance at which most couples stand in public. The far range runs from about 2½ to 4 feet. As Hall puts it, at this distance we can keep someone “at arm’s length.” This choice of words suggests the type of communication that goes on at this range: The contacts are still reasonably close, but they’re much less personal than the ones that occur a foot or so closer.
- The third spatial zone, **social distance**, ranges from 4 to about 12 feet. Within it are the kinds of communication that usually occur in business. Its closer range, from 4 to 7 feet, is the distance at which conversations usually occur between salespeople and customers and between people who work together. We use the far range of social distance—7 to 12 feet—for more formal and impersonal situations. Sitting at this distance signals a far different and less-relaxed type of conversation than would pulling a chair around to the boss’s side of the desk and sitting only three or so feet away.
- **Public distance** is Hall’s term for the farthest zone, running outward from 12 feet. The closer range of public distance is the one that most teachers use in the classroom. In the farther ranges of public space—25 feet and beyond—two-way communication is almost impossible. In some cases, it’s necessary for speakers to use public distance because of the size of their audience, but we can assume that anyone who voluntarily chooses to use it when he or she could be closer is not interested in having a dialogue.

Choosing the optimal distance can have a powerful effect on how we regard others and how we respond to them. For example, students are more satisfied with teachers who reduce the distance between themselves and their classes. They also are more satisfied with a course itself, and they are more likely to follow a teacher’s instructions.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, medical patients are more satisfied with physicians who operate at the closer end of the social distance zone.¹⁰⁶

Territoriality Whereas personal space is the invisible bubble we carry around as an extension of our physical being, **territory** remains stationary.

PAUSE *and* REFLECT

Distance Makes a Difference

MindTap REFLECT ... on how distance makes a difference in communication by answering the following questions, either [here](#) or [online](#).

1. Choose a partner, and go to opposite sides of the room and face each other.
2. Very slowly begin walking toward each other while carrying on a conversation. You might simply talk about how you feel as you follow the exercise. As you move closer, try to be aware of any change in your feelings. Continue moving slowly toward each other until you are only an inch or so apart. Remember how you feel at this point.
3. Now, while still facing each other, back up until you're at a comfortable distance for carrying on your conversation.
4. Share your feelings with each other or the whole group.

Any geographical area such as a work area, room, house, or other physical space to which we assume some kind of “rights” is our territory. What’s interesting about territoriality is that there is no real basis for the assumption of proprietary rights of “owning” many areas, but the feeling of ownership exists nonetheless. Your room at home probably feels like yours whether you’re there or not, unlike personal space, which is carried around with you. In the same way, you may feel proprietary about the seat you always occupy in class, even though you have no illusions about owning that piece of furniture.¹⁰⁷

The way people use space can communicate a good deal about power and status.¹⁰⁸ Generally, we grant people with higher status more personal territory and greater privacy. We knock before entering the boss’s office, whereas she can usually walk into our work area without hesitating. In traditional schools, professors have offices, dining rooms, and even toilets that are private, whereas students, who are presumably less important, have no such sanctuaries. Among the military, greater space and privacy usually come with rank: Privates sleep forty to a barrack, sergeants have their own private rooms, and generals have government-provided houses.

Physical Environment

Physical settings, architecture, and interior design affect our communication. The impressions that home designs communicate can be remarkably revealing. Researchers showed students slides of the insides or outsides of twelve upper-middle-class homes and then asked them to infer the personality of the owners from their impressions.¹⁰⁹ The students were especially accurate after

glancing at interior photos. The decorating schemes communicated information about the homeowners' intellectualism, politeness, maturity, optimism, tenseness, willingness to take adventures, and family orientations. The home exteriors also gave viewers accurate perceptions of the owners' artistic interests, graciousness, privacy, and quietness.

Besides communicating information about the designer, an environment can shape the kind of interaction that takes place in it. In one experiment, subjects working in a "beautiful" room were more positive and energetic than those working in "average" or "ugly" spaces.¹¹⁰ In another experiment, students perceived professors who occupied well-decorated offices as being more credible than those occupying less-attractive offices.¹¹¹ Doctors have shaped environments to improve the quality of interaction with their patients. Simply removing a doctor's desk makes patients feel almost five times more at ease during office visits.¹¹² In another study, redesigning a convalescent ward of a hospital greatly increased the interaction between patients. In the old design, seats were placed shoulder to shoulder around the edges of the ward. By grouping the seats around small tables so that patients faced each other at a comfortable distance, the amount of conversations doubled. And in office cubicles, occupants who face out (rather than in) send the message that they're open to communication—and it also allows them to better protect their work's confidentiality.¹¹³

Time

Social scientists use the term **chronemics** to describe the study of how humans use and structure time. The way we handle time can express both intentional and unintentional messages.¹¹⁴ For instance, sending a delayed response—or no response at all—to a work email can create the impression of untrustworthiness, especially from a subordinate or peer.¹¹⁵

In a culture that values time highly, waiting can be an indicator of status. "Important" people (whose time is supposedly more valuable than that of others) may be seen by appointment only, whereas it is acceptable to intrude without notice on lesser beings. A related rule is that low-status people must never make high-status people wait. It would be a serious mistake to show up late for a job interview, whereas the interviewer might keep you cooling your heels in the lobby. Important people are often whisked to the head of a restaurant or airport line, while presumably less-exalted masses are forced to wait their turn.

Time can be a marker not only of power and status but also of relationships. Research shows that the amount of time spent with a relational partner sends important messages about valuing that person.¹¹⁶ In one study analyzing 20 nonverbal behaviors, "spending time together" was the most powerful predictor of both relational satisfaction and perceived interpersonal understanding.¹¹⁷ Time is also measured and valued in mediated communication. Studies show that the length of time it takes for someone to respond to email messages or to postings in virtual groups has a strong correlation with perceptions of that person.¹¹⁸ As you might guess, quick responses get positive appraisals, while tardy or neglected replies can have an adverse effect on trust and effectiveness in virtual groups.¹¹⁹

In REAL LIFE

Recognizing Nonverbal Cues

You can appreciate how nonverbal cues reflect attitudes by reading the following transcript twice. The first time, imagine that Kim's nonverbal behavior signals that she is glad to meet Stacy and looking forward to getting to know Stacy better. For your second reading, imagine that Kim feels just the opposite: She is put off by Stacy and feels uncomfortable around her.



© John Harris/Cengage Learning

Think about all the ways Kim's nonverbal behaviors might change, depending on her attitude toward Stacy. Even though she speaks the same words, imagine how her posture, gestures, facial expressions, voice, and use of distance might differ and how these nonverbal cues would reflect her feelings about her new neighbor.

Stacy: Hi. I'm new here. Just moved into Unit 14 yesterday. My name's Stacy. *(Extends her hand, ready to shake)*

Kim: Hi! I'm Kim. I'm your next-door neighbor in number 12.

Stacy: Great! This looks like a nice place.

Kim: It is. Everybody's friendly, and we all get along really well.

Stacy: *(Glancing down at a magazine in Kim's mail)* Hmm. *American Songwriter*. Are you a musician?

Kim: Yeah, I'm a singer-songwriter. Mostly acoustic. I play around town. Nothing too big yet, but I'm hoping ...

Stacy: *(Excitedly)* Whoa! I'm a musician too!

Kim: Really!

Stacy: Yeah. I play rhythm guitar with The Festering Sores. Have you heard of us?

Kim: Yeah, I think so.

Stacy: Well, you'll have to come hear us some time. And maybe we could even jam together, since we're both guitarists.

Kim: That would be interesting!

Stacy: Wow! I can already tell I'm going to like it here. Hey ... what's the attitude around here about pets?

Kim: They're pretty strict about the "No dogs or cats" policy.

Stacy: No problem! Jezebel isn't either.

Kim: Well, what is Jezebel?

Stacy: *(Proudly)* She's a green iguana. A real beauty.

Kim: You're kidding, right?

Stacy: Nope. You'll probably meet her one of these days. In fact, she's kind of a runaway, so you might find her in your place if you leave the door open. Especially when the weather cools down. *(Semi-kidding)* She really likes to snuggle up to a warm body.

Kim: Well, I'm more of a bird person, so ...

Stacy: She makes friends with everybody. You'll love her!

Kim: Look, I've gotta run. I'm already late for a practice session.

Stacy: I'll see you around. Really glad we're gonna be neighbors!

Kim: Me too.

MindTap APPLY ... this situation to your life by answering questions online.

SUMMARY

Nonverbal communication consists of messages expressed by nonlinguistic means such as body movement, vocal characteristics, touch, appearance, physical space, physical environment, and time.

Nonverbal skills are vital for competent communicators. Nonverbal communication is pervasive; in fact, it is impossible to not send nonverbal messages. Although many nonverbal behaviors are universal, their use is affected by both culture and gender. Most nonverbal communication reveals attitudes and feelings; in contrast, verbal communication is better suited to expressing ideas. Even mediated messages carry nonverbal cues. Nonverbal communication serves many functions. It can repeat, complement, substitute for, accent, regulate, and contradict verbal communication. When presented with conflicting verbal and nonverbal messages, communicators are more likely to rely on the nonverbal ones. For this reason, nonverbal cues are important in detecting deception. It's necessary to exercise caution in interpreting such cues, however, because nonverbal communication is ambiguous.

KEY TERMS

accenting	mixed message
adaptors	monochronic
body orientation	nonverbal communication
chronemics	paralanguage
complementing	personal distance
contradicting	polychronic
emblems	posture
gestures	proxemics
haptics	public distance
illustrators	regulating
intimate distance	repeating
kinesics	social distance
leakage	substituting
manipulators	territory
microexpression	