

Nonverbal Communication

Don W. Stacks

Mark Hickson III, Jessica Deyo, & Price Walt

University of Miami

University of Alabama-Birmingham

To many people, nonverbal communication focuses primarily on kinesics (gestures and facial expressions) that are frequently referred to as body language. Few realize that nonverbal communication also includes the use of time, space, and territory, physical appearance, the use of the voice, touching behavior, and olfaction. It is largely responsible for the emotional “meaning” attributed to a message. As such, nonverbal communication functions as a multiple message, multiple channel of communication that creates norms of expected communication or communicative behavior. Not all behavior is nonverbal communication, but most of what we call nonverbal communication yields normative expectations that are either met or violated.

When introduced to nonverbal communication many students say they “already knew that,” but when pressed cannot explain why they knew what they thought they did. The sources listed below provide activities and research replications that provide insight into what nonverbal communication is and the expectations that we have in our daily communication. Where possible (and many of the earlier published studies would not pass IRB approval), observational studies are provided.

Following an introduction about the relationships between verbal and nonverbal codes that comprise almost all human communication, the authors provide sources for each of the nonverbal subcodes. These subcodes represent how we communicate through space and territory, our physical appearance and dress, kinesics, the voice, the use of time and olfaction. The relationship between these subcodes can be explained in several ways, from a functional approach whereby we look how each operate to a social approach that begins with self presentation and moves to “larger” venues, such as space and territory or time. A more complete explication can be found in Moore, N. J., Hickson, M., & Stacks, D. W. (2010). *Nonverbal communication: Studies and applications* (5th Ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Other approaches to the study of nonverbal communication can be found in the following

volumes, each of which takes a slightly different approach:

- Burgoon, J. K., Guerrero, L. K., & Floyd, K. (2010). *Nonverbal communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Ivy, D. K., & Wahl, S. T. (2009). *The nonverbal self: Communication for a lifetime*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Knapp, M. L., & Hall, J. A. (2009). *Nonverbal communication in human interaction* (7th Ed.). Boston: Wadsworth/Cengage.
- Leathers, D., & Eaves, M. H. (2008). *Successful nonverbal communication: Principles and applications* (4th Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Richmond, V. P., McCroskey, J. C., & Hickson, M. L. (2008). *Nonverbal behavior in interpersonal relationships* (6th Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

It should be noted that each of these texts have suggested activities tied to textual materials that can be used in the classroom.

NonVerbal/Verbal Relationship

Verbal and nonverbal communication differ in many ways. While verbal communication can refer to itself (we can talk about a spot left by a spot remover), nonverbal communication is more immediate (what does a smile “mean”)? Verbal communication is not restricted to the immediate (we can talk about the past or future), while nonverbal communication focuses on the present. And while verbal communication is often perceived as intentional and manipulated, nonverbal communication is often seen as unintentional and “true.” Students are often aware of their verbal communications much more than their nonverbal.

The following exercise brings those differences into play and serves as a discussion starting point.

- Devito, J. A., & Hecht, M. L. (1990). *The nonverbal communication reader*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. (pp. 20).

A reader of various nonverbal communication articles grouped by subcode.

- Manusov, V. (Ed.) (2005). *The sourcebook of nonverbal measures: Going beyond words*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

An exercise book that provides the student with an idea of how stereotypes are created and their informational and predictive values.

- Pfeiffer, W. J., & Jones, J. E. (1979). *A handbook of structured experiences for human relations training* (Vol. VII). La Jolla, CA: University Associates. (pp. 34-35).

A set of evaluative measures across the nonverbal subcodes is found in this source.

- Rubin, B. D. (1978). *Human communication handbook: Simulations and games* (Vol. 2). Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden.

Although old, this book provides a number of activities across theory and practice areas of nonverbal communication engaging students in their own interpretations of nonverbal communication in general and specific subcodes in particular.

Subcodes

Proxemics: The Spatial Dimension of Territory and Personal Space

All nonverbal communication occurs in some sort of space. That space has been defined two ways—as the territory the individual carves out for herself and as the amount of space within that territory in which she feels comfortable communicating with others. Territory ranges from public—open to all—to body—that which is the most inviolate of all. Personal space is that “bubble” or “sphere” that surrounds your body in interaction and is defined in terms of privacy or intimacy; it ranges from public—open to all—to intimate. Both territory and personal space are highly influenced by a number of variables, including sex, age, culture, status, physical appearance, and so forth.

Classroom activities that demonstrate this dimension range from projective tasks, such as doll placement studies, to violations of spatial expectations. Outside of class activities should avoid violation of spatial norms and focus on observation of territorial claims or spatial distancing while attempting to explain how the norm was established.

Annotated Bibliography

Environment and Territory

Provide the metrics for environmental analyses that influence communication on three dimensions of self-presentation, power, and instructional information. First, self-presentation and identification (how you set up your environment) influences others

perceptions of you. Regulation and the relationship to others (through the environment we establish, for instance) communicates power on how an office is structured. Third, the display of instructional information, which represents the placement of objects in the environment, establishes perceptions of credibility or knowledge or personality. This task can be administered in the classroom as one environment and territory and then in other environments (dorm, apartment, home, etc.).

- Lorenz, J. (1976). Cultural variations in personal space. *Journal of Social Psychology, 99*, 21-27.

Classic study that examines perceptions of personal space through the use of dolls dressed according to different cultures.

- Moore, N. J., Hickson, M., & Stacks, D. W. (2010). *Nonverbal communication: Studies and applications* (5th Ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. (pp. 116-118).

Personal Space:

Classroom Assignment. Using dolls of varying races, sexes, and dressed in different cultures, have students place the dolls in interaction spaces and then measure the distances they observe between the dolls. Doll placement studies correlate highly with actual personal spacing preferences.

- Burgoon, J. K., & Aho, L. (1982). Three field experiments on the effects of violations of conversational distance. *Communication Monographs, 49*, 70-88.

Examines how violations of personal space affect perceptions of credibility and influence in a non-laboratory context.

- Lerner, R. M. (1973). The development of personal space schemata toward body build. *Journal of Psychology, 84*, 229-235.

Examines how body build (height and weight) impact selection of personal spacing between interactants.

- Madden, S. J. (1999). Proxemics and gender: Where's the spatial gap? *North Dakota Journal of Speech & Theatre, 12*, 41-46.

Examines how an individual's gender influences personal spacing expectations and outcomes.

- Sommer, M. R. (1969). *Personal space: The behavioral basis of design*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

A classic book that examines how personal space expectations and manipulation impact an individual's communication style.

- Strodbeck, F. L., & Hook, L. H. (1961). The social dimensions of a twelve man jury table. *Sociometry, 24*, 397-415.

A classic study of how personal spacing and territorial claims in a small group setting impact communication and outcome.

Haptics: The Zero-Space Dimension of Touch

The most inviolate of all nonverbal dimensions is that of touch or, as Moore, Hickson, and Stacks (2010) note, it may be called “zero Proxemics” (p. 55). Also referred to as “haptics” or “tactics,” touch is a difficult dimension to work with in the classroom. Indeed, in terms of either classroom activity or outside research-type activity, observational assignments are best assigned and conducted in or out of the classroom. As with proxemics, there are a number of variables that influence touch norms. Sex, age, and culture may be most influential, but status and behaviors that substitute for touch can be examined, particularly when examining expectations.

These sources provide a measure of touch avoidance. Students complete the measure and use it to discuss how their understanding of their own touch expectations and substitutions impact on their daily relationships.

- Andersen, P. A., & Leibowitz, K. (1978). The development and nature of the construct touch avoidance. *Environmental Psychology and Nonverbal Behavior*, 3, 89-106.

The creation and validation of a measure of haptic expectations that can be recreated in the classroom and compared against expected touch behaviors.

- Andersen, P. A., & Sull, K. K. (1985). Out of touch, out of reach: Tactile predispositions as predictors of interpersonal distance. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 49, 57-72.

An extension of the impact of touch avoidance whereby touch expectations predict personal spacing expectations.

- Andersen, J. F., Andersen, P. A., & Lustig, M. W. (1987). Opposite-sex touch avoidance: A national replication and extension. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 11, 89-109.

A test of the touch avoidance construct only with opposite sex touching.

- Argyle, M. (1975). *Bodily communication*. New York: International Universities Press.

A classic study of how people interpret touch.

Classroom Assignment. Duplicate the diagram and student, list of the types of touch, and ask students to place the type in the specific location. A variation would be to indicate that the figure was male/female, older/younger, American/British/Middle Eastern, etc.

- Hall, J. A. (1966). Touch, status, and gender at professional meetings. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 20, 23-44.

Classic study of how touch is influenced by perceived status and sex of interactants in a non-laboratory setting.

- Hall, J. A., & Veccia, E. M. (1990). More “touching” observations: New insights on men, women, and interpersonal touch. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 1155-1162.

Examines how gender touching is interpreted.

- Jourard, S. M. (1966). An exploratory study of body-accessibility. *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 5, 221-231.

A classic example of how people perceive where touch is appropriate or inappropriate.

- Patterson, M. L., Powell, J. L., & Lenihan, M. G. (1986). Touch, compliance and interpersonal effect. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 10, 41-50.

A study that examined the impact of simple touch and how it leads to compliance and perceptions of others.

Physical Appearance: The Social Dimension of Body and Artifacts

Physical appearance is often the first thing people observe when meeting people. Physical appearance is a social dimension—that is, it is something that we instinctively associate with interpersonal attraction, socioeconomic status, and success. This dimension can be broken into several important areas: body shape and size, physical appearance and attractiveness, and the use of artifacts (body alterations such as hair, cosmetics, tattoos, body piercing, clothing, and accessories). All impact the first impressions we have of others.

- Cortes, J. B., & Gatti, F. M. (1965). Physique and self-description of temperament. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 29, 432-439.

A survey of body-type and how it influences behavior and communication.

- Richmond, V. P., McCroskey, J. C., & Hickson, M. L. (2008). *Nonverbal behaviors in interpersonal relationships*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. (p. 21).

This source provides a measure of body image fixation.

- White, S. E., Brown, N. J., & Ginsburg, S. L. (1999). Diversity of body types in network television programming: A content analysis. *Communication Research Reports*, 16, 386-392.

This study looked at the diversity of body types in real life and as portrayed on television.

Classroom Assignment: Have students complete the body image fixation measure and then replicate with videos of soap operas and then discuss how body image demonstrates the effect of stereotyped role models.

Physical Appearance & Attractiveness

An area of interest to students is dealing with physical appearance and stigma, typically attributes associated with appearance and attractiveness that detract from initial impressions. Stigmas include being too short or too tall, too obese or too thin, or who have disfigurement. The original work on stigmas stems from Goffman (1963), but there have been several studies that can be used to structure discussion around the problems associated with body type, appearance, attractiveness, as well as social role stigma that are not within normative expectations.

- Barrios, B. A., Corbitt, L. C., Estes, J. P., & Topping, J. S. (1976). Effect of a social stigma on interpersonal distance. *Psychological Record*, 26, 343-348.

Different spatial expectations found based on whether someone has a social stigma or not.

- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

The classic study on how stigmas influence interpersonal communication.

- Merrill, E., & Grassley, J. (2008). Women's stories of their experiences as overweight patients. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 64, 139-146.

A qualitative study of how a physical stigma impacts other's perceptions of a stigmatized individual.

Classroom Assignment. Create a scenario where two people are interviewing for a job and the student is to decide which to hire. In one case, the individual is overweight and in the other the individual is underweight. Which would they choose and why? (Do they compare against the "average" weight individual?)

Artifacts

The effect of clothing choice has an impact on stereotypical judgments of such things as success, status, prestige, and attraction. Although it may seem contradictory, interpersonal impressions are based on such things as hair, clothing, or jewelry have not changed much over time. Discussion around artifacts can be conducted around interpersonal or professional (e.g., interviewing) expectations and behaviors.

- Hickson, M. L., Powell, L., Hill, S. R., Holt, G. B., & Flick, H. (1970). Smoking artifacts as indicators of homophily, attraction, and

credibility. *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 44, 191-200.

A study of how cigarette and pipe smokers are perceived by others in terms of sameness, attraction and credibility.

- Horne, J., Knox, D., Zusman, J., & Zusman, M. (2007). Tattoos and piercings: Attitudes, behaviors, and interpretations of college students. *College Student Journal*, 41, 1011-1020.

This study examines the degree to which individual tattoos and body piercings impact others' attitudes and interpretations of behavior.

- Molloy, J. T. (1995). *The new dress for success book*. New York: Warner Books.

The classic on the impact of dress in the business world and how dress impacts interpersonal decision-making.

Classroom Activity. Have students discuss the role of personal tattooing in self-presentation.

- Bickman, L. (1974). Social roles and uniforms: Clothes make the person. *Psychology Today*, 7, 48-51.

A classic study that examined the power of uniforms in compliance-seeking situations.

- Hewitt, J., & German, K. (1987). Attire and attractiveness. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 64, 67-78.

A study that reinforced the findings that less attractive and low authority people are not complied with as much as attractive and high authority people.

- Wispe, L., & Kiecolt, J. (1980). Victim attractiveness and nonhelping. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 112, 67-74.

A study that found that helping or not helping a victim was related to the victim's attractiveness.

Kinesics: The Movement Dimension of Body Language

Kinesics, or more commonly known as "body language," is the study of the body as it communicates to others. Although usually associated with gestures, kinesics also includes facial expression, eye behavior, and gross body orientation such as forward lean and posture. Kinesics is influenced by a number of variables, such as sex, culture, age, handedness, and language. The study of kinesic emblems (substitutes for words or phrases in language, usually 60-90 per culture) is about as close to semantic analysis as is possible in nonverbal communication, while illustrators are gestures that supplement or complement the verbal stream of communication. Kinesics also includes the study of affect displays (specific emotions and their intensity).

- DeVito, J. A., & Hecht, M. L. (1990). *The nonverbal communication reader*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. (p. 20)

A set of general and kinesic-specific rating scales where one student talks to another and then rates that individual on his or her conversational skills that includes many kinesic variables: A good way to introduce the concept of kinesics and its impact on conversation.

- Manusov, V. (2005). *The sourcebook of nonverbal measures: Going beyond words*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (pp. 260-264)

An activity that examines different gestures that have different meanings across cultures. Discussion around regional, national, and international interpretations.

- Klopff, D.W., & McCroskey, J.C. (2007). *Intercultural communication encounters*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. (pp. 237-239)

A fun activity that demonstrates the differences between male and female uses of kinesics. Discussion around differences in power, status, and culture.

- Henley, N. M. (1977). *Body politics: Power, sex, and nonverbal communication*. New York: Touchstone.

The role of understanding and interpreting emotions is underscored in an activity employing dyads. Discussion focuses on ability to encode and decode 17 different emotions and intensity.

- Manusov, V. (2005). *The sourcebook of nonverbal measures: Going beyond words*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (pp. 160-161)

The role of kinesics in quasi-courtship behavior has been studied since Schefflen first noted it in 1965. The following sources can be used to demonstrate different kinesic quasi-courtship behaviors.

- Schefflen, A. E. (1965). Quasi-courtship behavior in psychotherapy. *Psychiatry*, 28, 245-257.
- Moore, M. M. (1995). Nonverbal courtship behaviors in women: Context and consequences. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 6, 237-247.
- Moore, M. M. (1995). Courtship signaling and adolescents: "Girls just want to have fun?" *The Journal of Sex Research*, 32, 319-328.
- Moore, M. M. (2002). Courtship communication and perception. *Perceptual & Motor Skills*, 94, 97-105.
- Moore, M. M., & Butler, D. L. (1989). Predictive aspects of nonverbal courtship behavior in women. *Semiotica*, 3, 205-215.

Classroom Assignment: Students enjoy discussing and demonstrating quasi-courtship behaviors. Demonstrate several quasi-courtship behaviors and then lead the discussion of what such

behaviors may indicate in terms of expected behaviors.

- Hess, E. H., Seltzer, A. L., & Schlien, J. M. (1965). Pupil responses of hetero- and homosexual males to pictures of men and women: A pilot study. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 70, 165-168.

A classic study of reactions to others based on pupil size.

- Hewig, J., Trippe, R., Hecht, H., Straube, T., & Miltner, W. (2008). Gender differences for specific body regions when looking at men and women. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 32, 27-78.

A study of gaze that finds differences for males and females initial gaze location and time spent on body region.

- Patterson, M.L., & Tubbs, M.E. (2005). Through a glass darkly: Effects of smiling and visibility on recognition and avoidance in passing encounters. *Western Journal of Communication*, 69, 219-231.

A study that found differences for smiling behavior in responding to a stranger and that males wearing sunglasses invoked more responsiveness for males than females.

The Vocal Dimension of the Voice

The study of the voice and vocal expression are closely related to kinesics. Paralanguage (sometimes referred to as "vocalics") refers to how we say words or do not say anything in a conversation. Communicators' use of voice is often complimentary to, or contradictory of, the semantic, verbal message being communicated. As such, paralanguage can be examined from its sound and articulation (vocal qualities) and from its functional use, such as self-presentation, impressions based on stereotypes, interaction control (conversational "synchrony"), and one's interpersonal relationship with another person with whom he or she is interacting.

A set of general and vocalic specific rating scales can be used by students to evaluate one another's conversation skills as it relates to how they use their voices. A good way to introduce the concept of paralanguage and its impact on conversation.

- DeVito, J. A., & Hecht, M. L. (1990). *The nonverbal communication reader*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. (p. 20)
- Heinberg, P. (1964). *Voice training for speaking and reading aloud*. New York: Ronald.

Interactant sex or gender also has particular impact on interpersonal expectations. The following studies provide vocal characteristics for both males and females. Discussion can be facilitated around

which are appropriate stereotypes and how they may have changed over time.

- Kramer, C. (1974). Women's speech: Separate but unequal. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 60, 14-24.
- Kramer, C. (1977). Perceptions of male and female speech. *Language and Speech*, 20, 151-161.
- Kramer, C. (1978). Women's and men's ratings of their own and ideal speech. *Communication Quarterly*, 26, 2-11.
- Manusov, V. (2005). *The sourcebook of nonverbal measures: Going beyond words*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (pp. 261-263)

What impact does the type of voice have on perceptions of the source? This study found that there are 11 different types of voice that range from good (1 voice type) to bad (10 voice types). Obviously, people hold stereotypes based on the voice-type a person employs. Discussion can be facilitated around what these voice-types are and their intentional use.

Classroom Activity. Using Heinberg's (1965) 11 types of speech examine a soap opera and a comedy for use of the voice to establish stereotypical behavior. Discuss how the voice can be manipulated to imply a particular personality type.

- Duncan, S. (1983). Speaking turns: Studies of structure and individual differences. In J. M. Wiemann & R. P. Harrison (Eds.), *Organization of behavior in face-to-face interaction* (pp. 199-212). The Hague: Moutin. Examines how the use of the voice can structure conversations.
- Engstrom, E. (1994). Effects of nonfluencies on speaker's credibility in newscast settings. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 78, 739-743. Examined the impact of nonfluencies on newscasters' competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism.
- Roy, G. B., & Floyd, K. (2006). Nonverbal expressions of liking and disliking in initial interaction: Encoding and decoding perspectives. *Southern Communication Journal*, 71, 45-65. Vocal pitch variation and time spent talking were found to be related to liking and disliking in an initial interaction among strangers.

Chronemics: The Covert Dimension of Time

Chronemics is the study of how we use and structure time. It is a subcode we take for granted. But, it has been important from sociological and anthropological approaches to nonverbal communication since at least 1959. Time orientations and structures are influenced most often by culture or subculture (Hall, 1984).

This source provides an interpersonal perspective on individual use of time. It provides a measure of time orientations and is a good way to discuss of how time impacts decision making as well as how the perception of time differs, depending on one's culture chronemics expectations.

- Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (2004). *Nonverbal behavior in interpersonal relations*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. (p. 186)

This study breaks time into different levels and codes. It proposes that chronemics can be studied as a structured "language," similar to kinesics. Discussion focuses around what is time and how we orient to it.

- Bruneau, T. J. (2007). Time, change, and sociocultural communication: A chronemics perspective. *Sign Systems Studies*, 35, 89-117.

This source provides a classification device that shows a visual relationship between ideas, concepts, or variable of time. Discussion may focus on relationships between time and ideation.

Classroom Activity. Have students get into groups and discuss how knowledge of a person's chronemics orientation impacts on expectations of behavior. For instance, if someone is always early to an event or party, what sort of problems might that create? How would the students overcome this chronemics orientation? Discussion of regional or cultural differences in time orientations can evolve from the activity.

- Ballard, D. I., & Seibold, D. R. (2006). The experience of time at work: Relationships to communication load, job satisfaction, and interdepartmental communication. *Communication Studies*, 57, 317-340.

A study of how time affects perceptions on the job finding that future orientations toward time were related to more job satisfaction.

- Bruneau, T. J. (1973). Communicative silences: Forms and functions. *Journal of Communication*, 52, 17-46.

An article that focuses on the microstructure of time through the study of chronemics processes and duration.

- Hall, E. T. (1984). *The dance of life: The other dimension of time*. New York: Anchor.

A classic introduction to the chronemics subcode from a social and cultural perspective.

- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Garden City, NY: Anchor.

A book that sets the cultural paradigm that resides in three time systems: informal time, formal time, and technical time.

Olfaction: The Covert Dimension of Smell

Probably the least understood but one of the most important from a survival perspective is the subcode associated with smell. Olfaction is a process that deals with the perception of odors, their influence and how they become part of our olfactory memory.

This study suggests that odor can influence product evaluations. Discussion can be facilitated around how marketers use subtle scents to manipulate purchasing intents and behaviors.

- Bosmans, A. (2006). Scents and sensibility: When do (in)congruent ambient scents influence product evaluations? *Journal of Marketing, 70*, 32-43.

This study suggests that social preferences, such as attraction of others, are influenced by how we smell and are perceived to smell. Discussion can be facilitated around such things as perfume, pheromones, and body odor.

- Wen, L., Moallem, I., Paller, K. A., & Gottfried, J. A. (2007). Subliminal smells can guide social preferences. *Psychological Science, 18*, 1044-1049.

Classroom Activity. Assign students to wear a cologne or perfume that they personally dislike for a day. In class discuss how they felt during the day, how long the odor stayed with them, and how it affected their behavior. A second day, have them wear the cologne or perfume they like and then compare their feelings with the disliked odor.

- Ellen, P. S., & Bone, P. F. (1998). Does it matter if it smells? Olfactory stimuli as advertising executional cues. *Journal of Advertising, 27*, 29-39.

A study that tested the notion that odor in advertising (scratch and sniff) impacts on brand attitudes; found no effect on attitude toward the brand.

- Waskul, D. D., & Vannini, P. (2008). Smell, odor, and somatic work: Sense-making and sensory management. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 71*, 53-71.

A study on how odor works as a subtle but significant component of the culturally normative and aesthetic rituals of expressive and impressive everyday life.