

Nonverbal communication is a powerful message system that can be defined in various ways and can be both intentional and unintentional.

A. Most scholars make a distinction between nonverbal behavior and nonverbal communication.

A. Nonverbal behavior refers to any nonverbal behavior regardless of its communicative impact.

B. Nonverbal communication is a subset of nonverbal behavior and can be defined as behavior that is:

a. Perceived consciously by either the sender or receiver

b. Intended as a message by the sender, or

c. Interpreted as a message by the receiver

C. Some scholars do recognize unintended and unconsciously perceived nonverbal interaction as having communicative value.

a. Spontaneous communication fits this bill. This refers to nonvoluntary displays of emotion by a sender and direct sensory awareness by a receiver.

b. The term symbolic communication is reserved for intentional, conscious nonverbal interaction.

B. Nonverbal codes are powerful.

A. They are often more trusted than verbal codes.

B. Emotional connections and feelings are more easily conveyed in nonverbal modes.

C. Nonverbal codes can sometimes be used to express more universal meanings that cut across cultural differences.

D. Nonverbal codes are often perceived as more natural than verbal messages.

E. Part of the power of nonverbal communication is experienced when multiple codes send essentially the same message.

II. Nonverbal codes serve multiple functions.

III. They can express meanings such as liking or attentiveness in a direct way.

IV. They often modify or accentuate verbal messages.

V. They regulate turn-taking and other aspects in the flow of conversation.

VI. Nonverbal codes can be thought of as a structure of interlocking systems.

VII. One of these systems is the visual communication system, which consists of proxemics, kinesics, and artifacts.

A. Proxemics involves the use of space to communicate. Proxemic communication ranges from marking and defending one's territory to manipulating the physical distance at which people feel comfortable during conversations.

B. Kinesics refers to a broad range of visual codes involving the movement of the human body. Among these codes are gestures, posture, eye gaze, and facial expressions.

- C. Artifacts represent the various ways that we adorn or manipulate the body to communicate cultural or personal meanings. How we interpret this information depends on cultural stereotypes of beauty, but may also draw upon more universal aspects of body symmetry and proportionality.
- VIII. The auditory communication system involves clusters of vocal characteristics that accompany verbal messages and help us interpret them. These include:
- A. vocal qualities such as pitch, volume, intensity, rhythm, and tempo.
  - B. vocal characterizers like laughing, crying, and whining which sometimes stand on their own as messages.
  - C. vocal segregates such as stuttering, long pauses, or other disfluencies that interrupt the flow of speech.
- IX. A third, more invisible communication system involves chronemics, olfactics, and haptics.
- A. Chronemics refers to how people use and interpret the concept of time in their interactions.
  - B. Olfactics involves communicative functions associated with the sense of smell, such as body odors, use of perfumes, etc. These may be genetically defined and rely on a more spontaneous form of communication.
  - C. Haptics refers touch as a means of communication, including various kinds of touching, touch avoidance, and the contexts in which touching occurs.
- X. Nonverbal immediacy refers to behaviors that signal physical or psychological closeness. The typical response to an increase in nonverbal immediacy is either to reciprocate by engaging in similar behavior or to compensate by reducing the level of immediacy in one's own behavior.
- XI. Expectancy Violations Theory is one attempt to explain how people respond to increases or decreases in nonverbal immediacy. According to the theory, reciprocity or compensation depends upon:
- A. Violation valence; if increases in touching, prolonged eye gaze, or any other nonverbal code are perceived positively, the behavior is likely to be reciprocated. In contrast, we are likely to compensate if the behavior is perceived negatively.
  - B. Reward value of the other; when another is attractive or rewarding, we may reciprocate (express greater immediacy ourselves) in response to behavior that might otherwise be perceived as negative.
- XII. Cognitive Valence Theory is an alternative explanation for response to changes in nonverbal immediacy. It includes violation valence and reward value of the other, but considers additional factors as well:
- A. Perception; whether or not the behavioral violation is actually perceived by the other person.
  - B. Physiological arousal; violations tend to produce some level of arousal. When arousal is low to moderate, violations are perceived positively, and result in reciprocity. However, high levels of arousal may cause fear or anxiety and result in compensatory behavior.
  - C. Cognitive analysis; moderate levels of arousal usually facilitate a cognitive search for possible interpretations of the violation. Several cognitive schemata may be employed,

including the nature of the situation, cultural appropriateness, personal predispositions, relationship expectations, rewardingness of the other, and temporary mood states.

- XIII. Using nonverbal codes to communicating feelings is a significant communication skill.
- XIV. There are several steps one can take to express feelings more effectively:
  - A. Learn to monitor and analyze how you experience various emotions.
  - B. Ask others to give you feedback about the way you express your feelings.
  - C. Assume ownership of your own feelings.
  - D. Express feelings in ways that are consistent with the nature of the situation and your personal and relational goals.
- XV. Helping others express their feelings is important, too.
  - A. Use active listening and reflecting to carefully assist others who may have difficulty demonstrating how they feel.
  - B. Help others clarify their own feelings by gently pointing out contradictory or ambiguous nonverbal behaviors.
  - C. Draw attention to observable behavior first, then search for underlying feelings.