Nonverbal Communication

Second Edition

Judee K. Burgoon, Valerie Manusov, and Laura K. Guerrero

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This text follows a long lineage of books by Judee K. Burgoon. When she developed the idea for the first version of a nonverbal textbook, *The Unspoken Dialogue*, there were no textbooks on nonverbal communication. By the time it was published, however, two books were already on the market, and several others soon followed. Now there are upwards of 60 books, both popular and scholarly, dedicated to this topic, attesting to the intense interest that nonverbal communication has attracted.

Judee soon realized that tackling the literature on nonverbal communication would require a team effort and invited Thomas Saine to join her in writing the first book. Thomas was not primarily a nonverbal communication scholar, but he *was* a scholar whose deep interest in interpersonal communication topics led him to take a leap of faith to team up with a junior author whose interest *was* deeply steeped in nonverbal communication. We are all deeply grateful to his recognition that this area would bear so much fruit.

When it came time to revise *The Unspoken Dialogue*, Thomas, who had moved on to new interests, was replaced by two new scholars who, as former PhD advisees, matched Judee's tireless interest in this topic and whose extensive research efforts had taken them into many applied facets of nonverbal communication. The new team of Judee K. Burgoon, David B. Buller, and W. Gill Woodall authored three editions of *Nonverbal Communication: The Unspoken Dialogue* that greatly expanded the coverage of the functions of nonverbal communication and introduced extensive comparison of verbal to nonverbal signals. To Dave and Gill, we are indebted for further solidifying our theoretical and research foundations and for taking us into many important applications.

As new interests drew Dave and Gill to different research opportunities, it was time to reconstitute the team. This time, Judee was joined by two veteran nonverbal communication scholars, Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd, who brought to the first edition of *Nonverbal Communication* the broadening of the bio-evolutionary and sociocultural underpinnings of nonverbal communication as well as a deep understanding of interpersonal communication that further strengthened our foundations. We thank Kory deeply for the substantial insights he brought to the volume, in particular to the biological, physiological, and evolutionary aspects of nonverbal communication. Like his predecessors, Kory found himself in demand elsewhere, which opened the possibility of adding a new author to the team, hence the addition of another long-time nonverbal expert, Valerie Manusov.

This new version of *Nonverbal Communication* continues our commitment to a research-rich but student-engaging approach to the ever-growing, multidisciplinary area of nonverbal communication. This edition is a significant update of the last one, removing one chapter, combining two others, and adding a third. It reflects significant technological and social changes in our world and includes more scholarship from researchers around the globe. Chapters offer measures to allow students to be a part of the research we cite and include nonverbal

communication "in the news" that reflects how central nonverbal communicating is to our very humanness.

The volume could not have been completed without the editorial and technical assistance of our new editor, Brian Eschrich; editorial assistant Grant Schatzman; production editor Alf Simmons; and copyeditor Kate Fornadel. We are grateful to the entire team for making the process timely and as effortless as possible. We also thank Ben Compton for his work on the indices and the instructor's manual. And, as ever, we thank our families for their patience as we crafted this new edition.

Part 1
Foundations

1 Introduction and Overview

The word not spoken touches us as music does the mind.

—William S. Cohen

Humans are social creatures. We spend most of our waking hours in contact with other people—learning, working, playing, dating, parenting, negotiating, buying, selling, persuading, or just plain talking. We not only communicate with people face to face; we watch them on television and videos, listen to them on talk radio, interact with them through cell phones and chat rooms, and meet with them on Zoom. With so much of our daily lives consumed by communication, our ability to navigate the waters of daily living—and our prospects for happy, healthy lives—depends on the ways in which we (and others) communicate. And our ability to communicate is enhanced when we know more about the communication process. A major part of that process is the "unspoken dialogue": the nonverbal aspects of communication to which former Senator Cohen's poem alludes.

This textbook is about that unspoken dialogue: all those messages that people exchange beyond (and alongside) the words themselves, with an emphasis on the intricacies of the communicative forms. Be it mundane greetings at the grocery store or delicate international negotiations, the nonverbal aspect of communication plays a crucial role in our lived experiences. Human relating hinges on the ability to express ourselves nonverbally and to understand the nonverbal communication of others.

Despite the awareness of the importance of communication generally, and nonverbal communication specifically, some consider the study of nonverbal communication trivial or suspect. This sardonic observation by Aldous Huxley (1954) reflects such a view:

> [T]he subject is for academic and ecclesiastical purposes, non-existent and may be safely ignored altogether or left, with a patronizing smile, to those whom the Pharisees of verbal orthodoxy call cranks, quacks, charlatans and unqualified amateurs.
>
> (pp. 76–77)

Such cynicism is belied by the publication of thousands of articles, books, documentaries, and investigative reports on the subject, however. In contrast to Huxley's gloomy assessment, there is a strong body of knowledge about nonverbal communication that springs from the academic disciplines of communication, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, geography, anthropology, linguistics, semiotics, and biology, among others. This body of information is so vast and diverse, in fact, that making sense of it is no small task, especially given that scholars from different fields may approach nonverbal behavior with diverse perspectives, assumptions, and methodologies. To capture this complexity as well as possible, it is important to take a

multidisciplinary approach (that is, drawing not just from the communication discipline), and the ideas and research that we discuss in this book do so.

In this text, we explore multiple facets of nonverbal communication, first through some important *foundations*: (1) the complex nature of nonverbal communication and (2) the various codes (systems of cues) that constitute it and then through an investigation of the primary *functions* or (3) the many purposes nonverbal cues can serve. We embed it in a larger framework about what are called *cultural codes* in which all of our communication with others exists. This view helps to make sense of some of the variety in nonverbal communicating while also accepting its biological and evolutionary foundations. It also explains the ways in which nonverbal cues become patterned, the meanings that they are given, the ways in which they are complicated, and how all of this changes overtime, at least to some extent. Importantly, we ground our conclusions in the large body of multidisciplinary research, providing some explanation of what forms this research can take, and we bring in real-world examples to illustrate the ideas. Our hope is that you come away from reading it with an understanding that the unspoken dialogue *matters in fundamental ways* and that having this understanding and knowledge enhances your experience with nonverbal communication.

The Importance of Nonverbal Communication

You may have heard that 93% of all meaning is derived from nonverbal behavior. As scholars of nonverbal communication, and as people who value its communicative importance, you might think that statistic would be something we'd want to claim is accurate. Yet, if true, the estimate would mean that only 7% of meaning comes from verbal content (i.e., the words themselves), and a quick observation of communication shows that the statistic does not apply to most of our exchanges nor to what we see and hear from TV, films, and online. More specifically, this claim was based on specific results from a few early studies by Mehrabian and his colleagues (e.g., Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967) yet talked about as if it applies to all communication.

To help set the record straight, we want to explain their claim a bit more. In those studies, the researchers' purpose was to (1) see how people determined the attitude of the speaker or (2) assess what cues influenced the persuasiveness of a message by comparing what behaviors people used to make their determination (brief and/or scripted words, vocal cues, and body cues that are tied to the social influence function, covered in Chapter 13). The study on attitudes, for example, used only a single word alongside changing voice and body cues to get estimates about what a speaker was feeling about a topic. As such, the nature of the studies' design worked to overstate the importance of the nonverbal cues (even if their findings were accurate for the specific applications the authors were testing), and it should not be applied outside of those studies in the broad way that it is. So, the 93% estimate is *not* the way to show the importance of nonverbal cues in an overall sense.

But there are many other ways of doing so. As we will see throughout this book, nonverbal communication is *consequential*. By that we mean that nonverbal cues play a role in some of the most glorious and most devastating aspects of our lives. They are key in bonding with partners and with babies (positively consequential), and they play a role in bias against other groups, abuse, and sexual harassment (negatively consequential). As such, Huxley's (1954) view that nonverbal cues are "fluff" is simply not accurate. Rather, the power of nonverbal messages is indisputable. There are several possible reasons why by their very nature they are so central to our lives.

Photo 1.1 The omnipresence of nonverbal communication is present in interactions such as this. What nonverbal behaviors do you see?

Nonverbal Communication Is Omnipresent

Nonverbal cues pervade virtually every communicative act. In face-to-face (FtF) interactions, all the nonverbal forms come into play. Body, face, voice, appearance, touch, distancing, timing, and physical surroundings all have a part in creating messages, with or without anything being said. A friend's gestures, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact may reveal interest. A supervisor's vocal pitch, loudness, and tempo may signal dominance. A political candidate's physical attractiveness, dress, and grooming may connote credibility (or its lack). A lover's close proximity and touch, and the environment in which they chose to interact with you, may establish intimacy. A group leader's temporal behaviors, such as verbal pacing, and giving undivided attention may create conversational coordination. A religious sanctuary's architecture, furnishings, and artifacts may dictate what degree of decorum and formality is to be followed and how we feel and communicate within that space.

Even in mediated communication, such as television broadcasts, online conversations, or telephone calls, where some nonverbal features are not available, several important ones remain. The decision to talk to someone by phone rather than in person (that is, the choice of *communication modality*) can, for example, itself be a nonverbal message of detachment or non-urgency, and people have been found to make strategic modality choices based on the nature of the message they want to send to another (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Nowak, 2018). Chronemic (temporal) and vocalic (sound) features are also still present when we call someone on the phone.

Even text-only communication can have nonverbal elements, as emails and text chats have features embedded in them to capture some nonverbal nuances: Use of different font colors, punctuation, and capitalization are all instances of adding nonverbal cues back into an otherwise verbal medium (Luangrath et al., 2017, call this *textual paralanguage*). In particular, researchers have found that, similar to nonverbal cues in FtF settings, emoticons have *illocutionary force* (that is, they function to clarify what a person's words mean or how they

are meant to be taken; Dresner & Herring, 2010). Online classes and group meetings allow people to see one another's faces (and choice of backgrounds/environments; see Box 1.1), such that some kinesic (body movements) and environmental cues are still present. Further, social media provide opportunities to use photographs about what is important to us; we also show our approval or anger about a post with nonverbal likes, hearts, and "caring" or angry faces.

Box 1.1 Books as Backdrops

In a May 2020 *New York Times* article, Amanda Hess discussed the greater use of TV broadcasts based in people's houses. She asserted that the new norms dictated by COVID-19 meant that people could be strategic as to what environmental cues they used during a broadcast. In particular, Hess said that as "industry shelters in place, the bookcase has become the background of choice for television hosts, executives, politicians and anyone else keen on applying a patina of authority to their amateurish video feeds."

As examples, Hess noted that then-presidential candidate Joe Biden went quiet for a while but, when he "re-emerged, it was in front of a carefully curated wall-length bookshelf punctuated with patriotic memorabilia like a worn leather football and a triangle-folded American flag." Migrants' rights activist Minnie Rahman's background featured her *Encyclopaedia Britannica* collection, and British politician Liam Fox's "bold grab at credibility is somewhat undermined by the hardback copy of *The Da Vinci Code*."

This link between bookcases and credibility appears to be a feature of many chosen backgrounds. There was even an anonymous Twitter account, called Bookcase Credibility, which emerged to comment on its use. Its tagline is "What you say is not as important as the bookcase behind you."

Whereas we might take issue with the strength of that claim, according to Hess, the "bookcase offers both a visually pleasing surface and a gesture at intellectual depth. Of all the quarantine judgments being offered right now, this one feels harmless enough. One gets the sense that for the bookcase-background type, being judged by their home libraries is a secret dream finally realized."

Excerpts from Amanda Hess, "The 'Credibility Bookcase' Is the Quarantine's Hottest Accessory," May 1, 2020, *New York Times*.

Nonverbal Behaviors Are Multifunctional

One of the basic arguments in this text is that nonverbal communication serves important functions for communicators. In the examples we have given already, we talked about how we use nonverbal cues to instigate judgments or assessments of others (impression formation), to let others know they are important to us (these are called relational messages), to reveal aspects of ourselves (identity displays), and to persuade others about something in which we believe (social influence). These are just some of the many communicative functions in which nonverbal cues are central.

Functions are the purposes, motives, outcomes, or goals of communication. They are different than the specific meanings nonverbal cues can have. If someone you like sits close to you, you may determine that their behavior means they like you (depending on other cues in the setting). But the underlying function of the nonverbal cue is to (potentially) send a relational message. Or you may want to show others that you belong to a particular political

group and wear a t-shirt with its name in order to do so. The particular message you are displaying is more akin to the meaning, but the function served is an identity display. Most of the specific meanings we may have for one or more nonverbal cues usually fit into these larger purposes, outcomes, goals, or motivations. We will continue to make this distinction clear as we move through the book. Importantly, however, part of their importance is not just their personally or socially relevant functions: They may also do several of these things at once. Because many different nonverbal channels can be used to send simultaneous messages, they are often pressed into service to do just that: handle multiple responsibilities in conjunction with, or as a substitute for, verbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication Can Lead to Misunderstanding as Well as Understanding

Although nonverbal signals can aid us greatly in making sense out of the world, they are equally important because of the misunderstandings they can cause. These can sometimes be tragic, as this true anecdote illustrates.

A young photographer, accustomed to working alone, was flown into a remote part of Alaska for the summer. He so prized his solitude that on a previous survival retreat, he had chastised his father for sending a search party after him. On this trip, however, he failed to make clear arrangements for being flown back out of the wilderness. When the weather began turning cool, his father reluctantly sent a plane looking for him. The pilot soon located the camp. As he neared it, the young man waved a red jacket liner, which to pilots is a signal to wave someone away. The young man then gave a thumbs-up gesture and walked casually to his campsite. The pilot concluded that everything was okay and flew away.

A diary the young man kept revealed a very different interpretation of the encounter. He was thrilled to see the plane and, to ensure being seen, waved his jacket in the air. He gave the thumbs-up gesture as a sign of his elation and his victory over his growing fears. He then jaunted to his campsite, expecting the plane to land, and was totally disbelieving when it flew on. Weeks later, when the weather turned bitter cold, and he ran out of firewood, the young photographer used his last bullet to take his own life. The diary was found with his frozen body.

Not all nonverbal misunderstandings have fatal or even serious consequences. But the potential for nonverbal cues to mislead and be misread is there, and such misreadings can often have a more profound impact than accurately exchanged messages.

Nonverbal Communication Has Phylogenetic Primacy

Nonverbal communication predated language in the evolution of human communication. That is, nonverbal expressions were our first form of communication to develop for us as a species (phylogeny), and this origin is still the basis of our contemporary use of the cues (Frank & Solbu, 2020). Although numerous theories have been proposed as to whether vocalizations (e.g., grunts) preceded gestural communication or vice versa, there is no question that nonverbal forms of expression preceded verbal ones in human evolution (Dew & Jensen, 1977). According to ethologists (researchers who study animal behavior, as a comparison to humans, or those who study human behavior and social organization from a biological, evolutionary perspective), many forms of nonverbal expression, through an evolutionary history spanning perhaps 150 million years, became specialized as communication signals.

In that nonverbal communication came first to the species, it can be argued that we are programmed to attend first and foremost to nonverbal signals. This primacy of nonverbal cues (especially approach or contact cues and avoidance or non-contact cues) often leads us to give them more weight in interpreting communicative events, especially in times of stress, when we are likely to revert to more primitive (phylogenetically older) response patterns. If we as

Photo 1.2 Infants rely on nonverbal cues before they learn language, giving nonverbal communication ontogenetic primacy.

humans rely more heavily on nonverbal than verbal messages under certain conditions, it may be because we are innately predisposed to do so.

Nonverbal Communication Has Ontogenetic Primacy

Just as the species first turned to nonverbal forms to communicate with one another, so, too, do infants rely first on nonverbal means to interact with their caretakers, and they are the first to arise across our individual lifespans (ontology). Before birth, the fetus in utero develops awareness of its mother through the senses of touch and hearing. At birth, the infant's primary interactions with caregivers continue to center around sounds and touches. Nursing, grasping, rocking, holding, crying, cooing, and singing all contribute to the infant's awakening recognition that humans communicate with one another, and the cues, particularly sound, are vital in the development of language (Netelenbos et al., 2018). The importance of nonverbal modes of expression at this critical and vulnerable stage of life doubtless contributes to our continued dependence on them even though we acquire additional means of expression. We do not abandon the nonverbal system; rather, as we mature, we broaden our communicative repertoire to include more complex verbal and nonverbal forms. Moreover, our early gestures help in the acquisition of language (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014).

Nonverbal Communication Has Interaction Primacy

Besides being the first form of communication in the history of the species and in the lifespan of the individual, nonverbal behavior also precedes verbal behavior in the opening minutes of most human encounters. Before people start to speak, their nonverbal behaviors supply a wealth of information to onlookers. Everything from posture and gait to hair style and voice quality "paints a picture" for the observer and provides a frame of reference for interpreting what is later said verbally. Especially important are the visual nonverbal cues such as physical appearance and gestures (and sometimes vocal cues) that are available at a distance. These begin working before a communicator is within speaking range.

Environmental nonverbal cues may also set the stage before an interaction otherwise begins. For instance, when the US President holds a news conference, the national flag, the red carpet, and all the other symbols of the White House create an image of power and of the nation.

Photo 1.3 How do the environmental elements in the White House Oval Office shape the kinds of communication that take place there?

This ability of nonverbal cues to "get in the first word," so to speak, gives them a temporal primacy that may also mean their meanings take precedence over verbal ones (or least work to shape our interpretation of them). Even when language and nonverbal cues co-occur at that start of an interaction, nonverbal cues may have primacy, as they have been found to be processed faster in the brain than is language (Lamy et al., 2009).

Nonverbal Communication Can Express What Verbal Can't or Shouldn't

There are many occasions when to verbalize our thoughts and feelings would be risky, rude, or inappropriate (or just not possible), so we use nonverbal channels instead. In the case of a budding romance, people may be hesitant to commit themselves too quickly for fear of being rejected. If a friendly smile is unreturned, we can retreat to a less intimate level without embarrassment. People can also deny the meaning of nonverbal cues (this has ethical issues to which we will return later); that is, you may have meant to show romantic interest but, if asked, can claim you were just being friendly, as admitting to a greater interest might make you feel open to rejection. Similarly, nonverbal cues can be used to satirize, criticize, or leak information without the communicator being held accountable for their acts. An example is the use of the eye roll to signal disbelief or scorn for what someone is saying (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2 Intentional Disregard

Ray Birdwhistell, one of the "grandfathers" of the field of nonverbal communication, was fond of giving anecdotes about how people can express themselves nonverbally in ways they can't get away with verbally. One is in the courtroom, where attorneys sometimes try to introduce "illicit" messages to influence the jury:

> The present system of restricting admissible evidence to exhibits and words still leaves the way open for the introduction of nonadmissible ideas and attitudes. The trial lawyer often is a master of the raised eyebrow, the disapproving headshake and the knowing nod. In many cases, these gestures if translated into words, would be

inadmissible as evidence. Yet, as presented, they have a definite effect on the judge and jury.

Lawyers aren't they only masters of flouting the formal requirements of the system. Soldiers, too, know how to get their message across while still appearing to conform to the rules:

The salute, a conventionalized movement of the right hand to the vicinity of the anterior portion of the cap or hat, could, without occasioning a court martial, be performed in a manner which could satisfy, please or enrage the demanding officer. By shifts in stance, facial expression, the velocity or duration of the movement of salutation, and even in the selection of inappropriate contexts for the act, the soldier could dignify, ridicule, demean, seduce, insult, or promote the recipient of the salute. By often imperceptible variations in the performance of the act, they could comment upon the bravery or cowardice of their enemy or ally, could signal their attitude toward army life or give a brief history of the virtuosity of a lady from whom he had recently arisen.

(Birdwhistell, 1970, pp. 79–80)

Birdwhistell, R. (1970). *Kinesics and context: Essays on body motion communication*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Nonverbal Communication Is More Trusted

Sometimes people believe that all nonverbal behaviors are spontaneous and uncontrolled and that the cues are the "windows to the soul," because we think we can't manipulate how we act. As such, people believe that our nonverbal cues will reflect the accuracy of who we are, what we believe, and how we feel. As we shall see later in this chapter, there are different forms of nonverbal cues (some that are not tied at all to our internal states), and many nonverbal behaviors are used intentionally, some for deceptive and some for social purposes. This ability to use nonverbal cues intentionally relies on our ability to control those cues. Nevertheless, there is a prevailing faith in the authenticity, truthfulness, and candor of nonverbal behaviors, at least as compared to what people say. In support of this, the bulk of research shows that when verbal messages contradict nonverbal ones, adults usually believe the nonverbal message (Burgoon, 1985) because they are often seen to be more "authentic." Young children do this same thing (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2017).

There Is Universality to Some Nonverbal Cues and Their Meanings

Another prevailing belief is that nonverbal cues make up a "universal language." As such, they are given importance because they can be used regardless of whether we share a language with another person. To some extent, this belief is accurate, and in Chapter 2, we will discuss further the biological and evolutionary factors that make nonverbal cues (or at least their origins) *pancultural* (that is, found across cultures). We return to this more specifically with how it applied to nonverbal expressions of emotions in Chapter 9. But in Chapter 3, we also make the argument that nonverbal cues are deeply affected by and reflective of the culture in which the behaviors occur (see, also, Manusov, 2017). As such, cultural (and co-cultural) differences contribute to our use of and our misreading of some nonverbal actions, because if we think nonverbal cues are all used and understood the same across cultures, we may misinterpret someone else's behavior. But, just like our tendency to trust nonverbal cues more than what people say, the belief that nonverbal cues are used and understood pan-culturally makes them uniquely influential, even if our beliefs are not fully accurate.

Photo 1.4 Although some nonverbal cues are pancultural, other nonverbal cues reflect people's unique cultural and co-cultural backgrounds.

These nine reasons for the significant impact of nonverbal communication highlight the need to understand how nonverbal communication works together with verbal communication and independently of it. Given that few people receive formal training in this subject in their primary or secondary school education (most attention being devoted instead to language use), this text may serve to remediate "nonverbal illiteracy." Although this text is about nonverbal communication, because your authors are committed to a more integrated approach to verbal and nonverbal communication, you will find a variety of general communication principles and some specific findings about verbal communication interspersed throughout the book that are relevant to understanding nonverbal communication.

Definitional Issues

So far, we have been referring to nonverbal communication as if there were some commonly accepted definition for it. In reality, there may be as many definitions of it as there are textbooks and classrooms (virtual or in-person) where nonverbal communication is taught. It is important that we come to a common understanding of the terminology being used, however, as it will guide the rest of this book and how you think about nonverbal communication going forward.

Defining Communication

A starting point for arriving at a sound definition of the unspoken dialogue is the concept of "communication" itself. People use the term to refer to many actions: communing with nature, dialoguing with oneself, linking computers, animal interaction, cells "talking" to one another in the body, and transmissions via satellite. We limit the domain to *human* communication (exchanges between two or more people), though it does not have to be FtF. Apart from philosophical justifications for such exclusions, this restriction is pragmatic. It makes it far more likely that we will uncover general principles if the kinds of communication phenomena to be explained have some commonality. Nevertheless, we may learn some things about human

communication processes by studying nonhuman interactions, and your authors will draw upon these observations where they serve as useful illustrations or analogues.

We define human communication as the *process of creating meanings between people through the exchange of signs*. This complex enterprise involves *encoding* by senders (transforming something internal into commonly understood signs) and *decoding* by receivers (the recognition, interpretation, and evaluation of signs used by others), though in human interaction, we typically engage in both encoding and decoding simultaneously. When communicating, we also rely on shared knowledge about what certain behaviors or cues mean, an idea we return to shortly.

In this definition, we borrow the term "signs" as it is used in semiotics (Broekman, 2017; Saussure, 1959; semiotics is the study of signs). A sign (another word that is sometimes used in place of sign is *signal*) is anything that stands for something else (e.g., the word "wolf" can be used to represent the animal; a sigh can express/represent that a person is feeling exasperated). The sign is referred to as the *signifier* (the thing that reflects something; e.g., a word, an object, or a posture), and the *signified* is the thing the sign represents (i.e., a concept, object, feeling, or other meaning; this is also sometimes called the *referent*, as it what is referred to by a sign). So, a smile could be a sign or signifier for happiness, whereas the emotion of happiness is the signified. The smile is itself not happiness; it is the way in which happiness (or pretending to feel happy) is revealed to others.

That we use signifiers, our own (as encoders) or others' (as decoders), to reflect or determine what is signified is part of what makes communication, particularly nonverbal communication, challenging, because signals act as a sort of mediator or conduit to carry and create meaning. To make this even more complex, all signs may be the conduit or carrier for more than one possible meaning. A smile, for example, can be a greeting or social nicety, or it can be a (real or feigned/faked) emotional display. This is true for language as well: The word "wolf" can signify the animal, but it can also stand for a particular kind of person, or it can refer to when a person eats quickly and "wolfs" something down. So, the same cue or signifier can carry multiple meanings. The phenomenon behind this is called *polysemy* (one cue or a set of cues can communicate more than one meaning; see Ceccarelli, 2020, who showed how Dr. Anthony Fauci's "face palm" at a press conference during the COVID-19 pandemic was given different interpretations). We will see this idea come up often in our text. But we provide one real-life example here to help illustrate it.

Photo 1.5 When interpreting the nonverbal behavior of public figures, such as Hillary Rodham Clinton, people often come to very different conclusions about what that behavior means.

In the 2008 Democratic presidential primary, then-Senator Hillary Clinton was running against then-Senator Barack Obama for the party's nomination. After the Iowa caucuses, Clinton was campaigning in New Hampshire. She was talking to a group of people in a coffee shop when one of them asked her how she handles all that she has on her plate (being a Senator, campaigning, being a mom). Senator Clinton's eyes teared up when she responded to the question-asker. Whereas only the people at the event saw the moment, and no photograph was taken, Clinton's nonverbal response became news.

A study of the mediated "talk" about the event (articles, blogs, and responses) showed a range of descriptions of what happened ("her eyes welled up"; "got misty"; "she broke down") and of *what the tears signified* ("they showed she cares"; "she has a soft side"; "she's too emotional"; "they were crocodile tears; she'd do anything to get elected") (Manusov & Harvey, 2011). These different interpretations for her behavior no doubt reflect different political positions; they also reflect different assessments of what makes a good leader and whether women should/can be president of the United States. But for our purposes here, what they show are a range of meanings that could all be accurate (the tearing up *could* be a signifier of personality, concern, emotionality, strategic falsehood, etc.).

Manusov and Harvey also noted a range of different meanings for and ways to conceptualize the nature of the "fist bump" that Michelle and Barack Obama used when he won the nomination that same year. In both cases, the variations of meanings seen in the cues reflect the reality and complexity of (and polysemy inherent in) signs as part of communication. They also reflect that, despite beliefs in nonverbal cues being innate "authentic" reflections of internal experiences, people also sometimes understand that they can be employed strategically, and this awareness goes into their decisions about what the cue meant.

Defining Nonverbal Communication

Not all signs are considered communication, however, and this is where things get even trickier when we turn toward defining *nonverbal* communication more specifically. Whereas using symbol systems that people create (e.g., spoken or written languages, American Sign Language, and Morse code) are inherently communicative, in part because they were designed to be communication systems, the same cannot be said about all nonverbal signs. Using Erving Goffman's (1959) terms, nonverbal behavior can both be *given off* (unconscious and not meant to be a message) rather than *given*. "Given," on the other hand, implies that a behavior is enacted with some level of consciousness to be sent to, seen/heard by, or given to another (or the meaning *was given to* the behavior by the larger cultural code in which it exists, an idea we come back to later in this chapter). For some, if communication is the exchange of signs between people to create meaning, only those cues that are given should be considered communicative.

Buck (2003; see, also, 1988) provides further grounding for the idea that nonverbal cues have different forms, only some of which should be seen as communicative:

> I think of communication as proceeding in two simultaneous streams, one of which is symbolic in which there is an encoding process; information is encoded into symbols and is decoded by the receiver. Then the other way is a spontaneous process where emotion is displayed and is picked up by pre-attunements in the receiver. This is very different because the emotional, the spontaneous process is based upon evolved sending and receiving mechanisms. The sender is not consciously aware of sending an intentional message. The receiver is often not intentionally aware of receiving a message. They often get the message in terms of vibes and feelings.

Going back to Goffman's (1959) terms, behaviors that are given off are *spontaneous cues* (Buck & VanLear, 2002) or *symptoms* (Remland, 2017). (Sometimes the term "sign" is used here for the same thing, but, in this book, we generally use the term in the broader way that semioticians use it.) Other labels include informative, expressive, indicative, or incidental behavior. Such cues have an inherent connection between the signifier and the signified. Tearing up, for instance, may occur automatically when we feel sad or something gets in our eyes or because we have a "soft side," as in the Clinton example. Your shaking hand can indicate nervousness or fear as a natural embodiment of your internal state. Importantly, such cues can be part of the communicative context (that is, they can occur and be meaningful when people are interacting with one another), but on their own, they are not communication (just information about the person or the situation).

Cues that are given meaning, on the other hand, are communicative in that they are oriented to an audience, at least to some degree. Extending what Buck (2003) said, such cues can be one of two forms. As Buck notes, one of these is *symbols*, which are those signs that have an *arbitrary* relationship between the signified and the signifier. By "arbitrary," we mean that the connection was chosen at some point to mean something: There is no natural connection between the signifier and the signified. So, in language, words and their combination are arbitrary (human-made) stand-ins for what they represent, and we have to learn that connection in order to understand what they mean. Likewise, nodding your head to show agreement or using a "V" sign to show victory or peace are only meaningful because at some point people decided that those signs would have those meanings. Moreover, they are only meaningful if we know what the signs have been chosen to represent (but given the example of the tragic misreading we presented earlier, even such symbols can be the signifier of more than one referent, so they are not always as easy to interpret as we may think or desire).

The other form that given cues can take are called *pseudo-spontaneous* (Buck & VanLear, 2002), *semblances* (Remland, 2017), or *iconic* cues. These are a little more confusing, though they are very common. These sign types have at their base a natural connection to their signifier, but in the moments when they are used, that natural tie does not exist (or it does, but the behaviors are exaggerated in some way and therefore not completely a function of our biology). For example, when someone says something sad, you may sigh in response to be sympathetic, even though you do not feel sad. The sigh is not coming directly from an actual feeling, but it still resembles (hence the terms used for it) a sign someone might use if actually feeling sad.

In another case, you might feel shocked at what a friend said, and your eyes and mouth open and your brows go up as a result of the feeling of surprise, but you exaggerate them (usually not knowing you are doing so), which helps the other person recognize the feeling your face is expressing. This might occur without you intending to send a message that is more readable, but it only occurs because you are in a communicative situation. You could also make an "annoyed" look when you really feel happy with what someone has said; you might do that to hide your actual feeling, or you may be doing so ironically or sarcastically. People may also laugh more when they are together, in part to show others that they are part of the group and having the same experience. When people said that Clinton's tears were not real but instead fake "crocodile" tears to manipulate an audience, the characterization suggests the behavior is a semblance. All of these are versions of pseudo-spontaneous nonverbal communication, and they are common in our interactions with others.

So, right off the bat, it is clear that nonverbal signs or signifiers (we will often refer to them broadly as "cues" in this book) do not just take one form. They can have a variety of relationships with their signified or referent. That variety makes them a very rich system for using as

Photo 1.6 In response to something funny, people laugh more when in a group than when alone, in part to create a sense of connection with one another.

part of communication. But we argue that to be communication, only those that are *other-directed* (targeted to a receiver or receivers; Motley, 1991) and *volitional* (purposeful to some degree) are considered. Being other-directed and volitional may seem somewhat straightforward, but the concepts are actually somewhat murky, particularly when applied to nonverbal cues. When we speak, we can safely say that communicating our message to others was our purpose. On the other hand, most nonverbal expressions and patterns become well-learned habits that require little forethought or conscious awareness. Just as we apply a car's brake automatically when approaching a red light so, too, do we perform many of our nonverbal behaviors without thinking much about them. Most of the time we do not have to remind ourselves to smile and make eye contact when greeting a friend, for instance.

This low level of awareness of routine activity raises the question of whether such activity is consciously other-directed and volitional. In some cases, it may be more accurate to say that our larger communication goals and plans are purposeful but that the particular behaviors used to achieve them are more likely to be enacted automatically (Bargh, 1989). For instance, we may have a (at least somewhat) conscious goal to make someone else like us, but we may not pay attention to the particular nonverbal behaviors we use to try to achieve our goal. Nonetheless, even though we may not think about directing our behaviors and performing them purposefully, they still have underneath them some sense of enacting the cues to be seen by others as part of message creation.

From this perspective, spontaneous cues or symptoms are therefore not communication (though, as noted, they can be part of a larger communicative context, and choosing not to hide them may also be communicative), but semblances and symbols are used at some level of awareness to be seen or heard by others, and therefore they are considered communicative. *Nonverbal communication, then, is the exchange of signs, other than words, that are other-directed and used with some degree of volition as part of a message.*

Box 1.3 Do Definitions Matter?

For those involved in legal matters, the answer is a resounding "yes." Consider the matter of James B. Daniels, an attorney before the Union County Superior Court, whose nonverbal actions earned him a contempt citation. It seems that during early proceedings, he responded to a judge's repeated denial of his motions by shaking his head and smiling. The judge declared his behavior disrespectful and warned him that further displays of disapproval would land him in jail. The attorney apologized, excusing his behavior as "a very human response" and not intended as disrespect. But the next day, when he was overruled again, his reaction prompted the judge to hold him in contempt of court. The ruling was not based on anything the attorney said but on what he did—"laughing, rolling his head, and throwing himself back in his chair"—all of which were recorded in the court records. The attorney appealed the ruling, but it was upheld by the New Jersey Supreme Court.

This ruling is consistent with recent court decisions that many nonverbal behaviors qualify as "symbolic expressive conduct," in other words, as behavior that is communicative. Often considered in the context of what behaviors are protected as free speech, the courts have ruled that such widely varying forms of "expressive conduct" as burning the US American flag, engaging in sit-ins, wearing black armbands, and shaving one's head in protest qualify as "free speech" (i.e., they are equivalent to verbal acts and therefore covered by the First Amendment).

Tiersma (1993) suggests that such acts qualify as communication if they (1) are conducted within view of an *audience* (with whom eye contact is usually established), (2) are done in a *ritualistic* or exaggerated way, (3) are *repetitive* (occur more than once), (4) are of longer than normal *duration*, (5) have no other evident *function* than a communicative one, and (6) occur within a *communicative context*.

Tiersma, P. M. (1993). Nonverbal communication and the freedom of "speech." *Wisconsin Law Review*, *6*, 1525–1589

Determining Communicative Content

The idea of "ascribing meaning" and being volitional and other-directed (and therefore communicative) as part of our definition of nonverbal communication points to another complexity in the use and study of nonverbal communication: Who decides on meaning and whether something counts as communicative? In our discussion of communication, we mention senders (encoders) and receivers (decoders). Which of these parties to the process chooses what a particular cue or set of cues means, and who discerns whether it was other-directed and volitional communication rather than just information about someone? If a boss frowns whenever their employees express a concern, are they communicating or not, and if they are, what is their communicative meaning? The boss might say no, their behavior was not communication (or it was communication, but the meaning was to show that they were paying attention); the employees might say yes and that the boss was trying to be negative toward them.

Both of these interpretations can be accurate, so where does the assessment lie? In the frowning employer or the disgruntled employees? Do they decide together? Does someone else make that decision, or does the decision lie elsewhere? Researchers have taken a range of perspectives on answering these questions, and their decision about where it is best to place the arbiter of meaning and what is or is not communication is known as their *orientation*. Box 1.3 shows part of why these questions matter.

Photo 1.7 Chris Christie's explanation of his facial expression differed from the media's interpretation. In this case, do you think taking a source or receiver orientation would be best?

Some scholars take what is called a *source orientation*: That is, whether something is communicative (and what it means) is up to the person engaging in the cues. If Hillary Clinton was asked whether her tears were communicative and what they meant, and she gets to decide as the source of the behavior, it would reflect this orientation. Another real-world example of this had to do with media coverage of then-New Jersey Governor Chris Christie. After dropping out of the 2016 Republican presidential primary, Christie gave a press conference with and endorsing candidate Donald Trump, the likely nominee. After introducing him, Christie stood behind Trump and had a "marked" (non-normative or non-neutral) facial expression as compared to what a person usually does in that kind of context. This time, the media portrayals were pretty consistent: They described Christie's face as disappointed and reflecting (perhaps purposefully) his internal challenge in endorsing Trump. But Christie countered this: He said something akin to it was "just his face" and "how else does one look when listening to someone else?" Christie was privileging the source (himself) as the person deciding what a cue meant ("nothing") and whether it was communicative (no, it was not).

Others take a *receiver orientation*, which holds that anything a receiver interprets as a message is communication, regardless of source intent or awareness, such that the meaning that the receiver interprets is what is most important. This orientation originated with the highly popularized axiom of interpersonal communication that "one cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick et al., 1967), which quickly became translated into "all nonverbal behavior is communicative if it is seen as such." For example, if a classmate sees you squint and interprets it as other-directed disbelief about what they are saying, the receiver orientation would say communication has taken place. When the media used their own interpretation rather than Christie's and determined he was showing his unhappiness with the situation in which he found himself, they were using a receiver orientation.

Still others take an *interaction orientation*. Stamp and Knapp (1990) asserted that people in communication typically work together to determine the intent and meaning of a message. This orientation is the basis of a lot of interpersonal communication scholarship, as it centers on the ways that people can dialogue or talk to one another, with meaning arising from that interaction. So, rather than having two perspectives, a shared meaning will emerge jointly as people work together to decide what behaviors meant. If the media and Christie sat down and

talked about his facial expressions, they may have together come up with a shared understanding about what his cues relayed. This idea of co-constructing meaning (Stewart & Koenig Kellas, 2020) is more likely to occur at the individual-to-individual level rather than in the mediated sphere.

Finally, the *message orientation* (Burgoon & Hoobler, 2002) moves the determination of meaning and whether a cue was communicative from individuals and toward the larger communicative system in which the behaviors occurred. Following Wiener and his colleagues' (1972) distinction between nonverbal communication and nonverbal behavior, the message orientation views communication as arising from only those behaviors that form a socially shared coding system. From this perspective, only behaviors that (1) are typically sent with intent; (2) are used with regularity among members of a given social community, society, or culture; (3) are commonly interpreted as intentional; and (4) have consensually recognized meanings will count as communicative. The properties of a message orientation form the foundation for the *social meaning model* of nonverbal behavior (Burgoon & Newton, 1991), which holds that many nonverbal cues (alone or alongside other cues as a message "constellation") have meanings that largely transcend context. This view would likely concentrate on Christie's facial expressions and what such cues mean typically (i.e., that the person is displeased, and given that they were done in public in front of cameras, they were likely communicative).

Importantly, meaning (and determinations of whether cues were acting as communication) can be generated in *any* of these places; that there are multiple ways to determine what nonverbal cues "really mean" and whether they are communicative is part of the challenge (and opportunity) for communicating nonverbally. Throughout this book, we will cite studies that take source, receiver, interaction, and message orientations. But to get at the richness and depth of nonverbal communication, there is another way to think about the messages that nonverbal cues can send and how they do so. It is most similar to the message orientation or the social meaning model, as it centers on the use of nonverbal cues among members of a social community, society, or culture, and it deals primarily with consensually recognized meanings shared between those members. Although most research does not take this perspective directly, we offer it here as a way to see a "bigger picture" of the message value of nonverbal cues, particularly those deemed communicative.

At the end of this chapter, we describe some of the primary ways that people study nonverbal communication. This is important for understanding where many of the claims in this book come from and to help determine whether the claims are accurate and mean what we think they do (remember the 93% of all communication being nonverbal?). One of these is the ethnography of communication, an approach to studying communication as reflective of larger cultural patterns, beliefs, values, and meanings (Philipsen, 2010). We use this not as a research method that we privilege but rather as a useful way to frame issues around meanings for and use of nonverbal cues.

The approach is grounded in the idea that people belong to *speech* or *communication communities* (we use these terms interchangeably here). Communication communities are any group of people who share a communication or cultural code. Such communities do not need to be based on national boundaries; rather, they are any group that shares a code that is at least in part distinctive from others. A *communication* or *cultural code* (again, we use both of these terms in this textbook) is defined as an "historically enacted, socially constructed system of terms, meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 126). Often studied as part of speech codes theory, we use it here to draw attention to the ways in which our interpretations and use of nonverbal communication are embedded in larger social or cultural understandings. We offer several aspects of communication or cultural codes next.

Shared Meanings

Within any cultural code, there are agreed-upon meanings for behavior that are understood and used within that speech community. Usually, for almost any behavior or set of cues, there are multiple possible meanings (as the idea of polysemy makes clear) that are all legitimate, possible, or accepted within the community. In the United States, a national-level speech community, for instance, a slightly raised hand could mean we want to be called on, that we want another person to stop, or we need a minute to remember what we wanted to say before another person starts speaking.

Sometimes the context lets us know which meaning is accurate; other times, the meaning may be ambiguous and open to (mis)interpretation. In Malayasia's and Singapore's national communication codes, the same action may be used instead to "hail" or get someone's attention, such as a waiter, and, as such, the behavior signifies somewhat different meanings within these speech communities. In the United States, stretching out the hand gesture toward another has a more recent meaning: "talk to the hand" (i.e., "I'm not listening to you"). In the cultural code of Greece, the same gesture is called the *moutzah* and is a deep insult (SocialMettle.com). Thus, the cultural code dictates which meanings are possible and which ones are not.

Importantly, because within each speech community there is usually more than one meaning for any nonverbal cue or set of cues (polysemy), we can say that there is typically a repertoire or menu of meanings for certain cues that are understandable within any communication community. This set of known cultural meanings exists for symptoms (often shared more universally across communities), semblances, and symbols. That there is typically a range of accepted meanings in a larger community helps us understand why there is sometimes disagreement in that community (not just across communities).

Kneeling on one knee rather than standing at attention during the US national anthem, for example, has at least two possible meanings: (1) bringing awareness to inequities and (2) disrespect for the flag (and the groups that it may be said to represent). When there is a speech community as large as a country, it is common for people to disagree on what a behavior means. That is due in part to the fact that the same cue can, depending on the context, mean multiple things, but it can also show that there may be smaller speech communities (i.e., regional, political, professional) inside of larger ones that vary from one another to some extent on the meanings they give to nonverbal cues and the values they espouse.

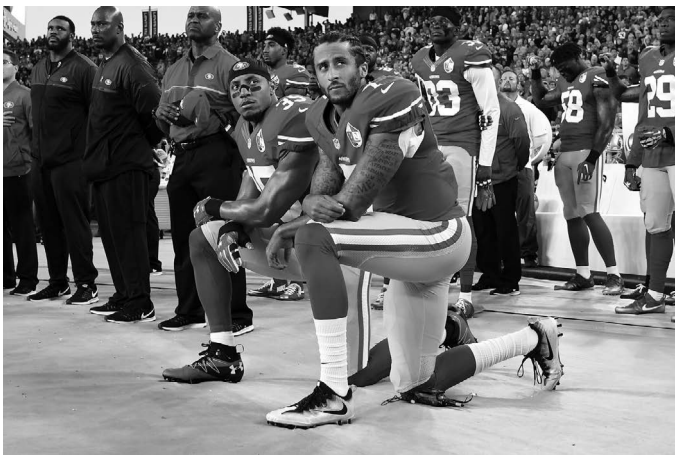

Photo 1.8 What do you interpret Colin Kaepernick's kneeling during the US national anthem to represent? What speech communities are likely to agree or disagree with your interpretation?

Importantly, when there are multiple, accepted meanings for behaviors, people can deny that another's interpretation for their behavior was accurate, or they can be "strategically ambiguous" in how they talk about it (Ceccarelli, 2020). We saw that when then-Governor Christie told the press that their interpretation of his facial expression was inaccurate. This *deniability of meaning* (or plausible deniability) for nonverbal cues can be a part of deception, or it can be used to "set the record straight." But it can also be employed for more nefarious reasons, as when the meaning of what in the United States is a gesture signifying that things are "okay" was used by alt-right groups to signify group identity (or just to "trigger" other groups into thinking that that was what they were doing) and then deny the meaning those groups were attributing to the gesture. This example also shows that a speech community can change or add meanings for behavior, in that a group within the larger culture decided upon a new use and interpretation (see Box 1.4).

Box 1.4 A New Use for an Old Gesture

US Americans have long used a hand gesture of touching the tip of the forefinger to the tip of the thumb in an "o" shape with the other three fingers upright or slightly curved behind them. This has come to mean "okay" in the United States. But about 2016, white nationalist groups started to use the symbol in a new way. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, alt-right members say that they do this just to troll or "trigger the libs" into overreacting to a well-known and agreed-upon symbol.

But whether they deny it or not, these groups are still using it as a signal (sometimes in an upside-down form) to others that they have certain political positions and belong to certain groups.

The SPLC (par. 18) asserts that "[d]ismissing the spread of the hand signal as a hoax overlooks two hard realities: first, that its increasing use gives open license to actual racist ideologues to operate and recruit under the cover of 'plausible deniability' established by less ideological young trolls; and second, that any kind of wink-and-nudge interaction with the racist right is a direct route to normalization."

Excerpt from David Neiwert, "Is That an OK Sign? A White Power Symbol? Or Just a Right-Wing Troll?" Southern Poverty Law Center, Sept. 19, 2018.

Rule-Based

In addition to a repertoire of meaning, each speech community has a set of rules for the use of nonverbal communication. Rules can be understood two ways: (1) as observable patterns of behavior and (2) as what is taught about what people should or should not do. Nodding one's head while listening to another person speak is an observable pattern of behavior and as such reflects the "rule-governed" ways in which people in a particular community may act (1); not smiling at a funeral could be an example of a given community's rule on how to be "appropriate" (2).

Both of these ways to think about "rules" reference what is considered normative within that speech community, and when people in that community act in a normative way, their behavior is said to be *unmarked* (i.e., it does not have any additional meaning beyond what it does typically). That doesn't mean people don't break the rules (by mistake or purposefully), and when they do, their behavior is said to be *marked* as deviating from norms. Marked behavior is thought to have some additional communicative power that unmarked behavior does not. So, when Christie used negative facial expressions in a situation where people do/should

not usually do so, his behavior would be considered "marked" and led to the debate about just what it was that it was signifying. If people break the rules often, because they don't really know the patterns or prohibitions, they are usually seen to lack communicative competence, a concept we talk more about later in this chapter. But breaking the rules on purpose can be done to, for example, make a point about something that people want to be different in the larger community than it is at present. The rules and meanings of speech communities usually change slowly, but they do and can change (for better or worse).

Values

The values of a speech community can also explain some of the use of behaviors and their related repertoire of meanings, and, as such, we can learn about what matters to a speech community by the meanings and rules they have for nonverbal communication. In cultures where bowing is a normative behavior, for instance, the behavior likely arose as a way to demonstrate the values of respect and deference. Shaking hands in greeting can instead reflect the importance of equality, as the same behavior is enacted similarly by both individuals. Talking in hushed tones may be a way not to draw attention to an individual in cultures that place greater value on the collective; encouraging loud and boisterous behavior may be more common in speech communities where individuality and being center stage are preferred. Moreover, sometimes when people or groups within a speech community (or from more than one community) disagree about the meanings of or rules for nonverbal cues, it can be understood as a difference in the values that underlie their reactions (Haidt, 2012).

The values within a speech community also affect what behaviors (and groups) are seen as better than others. That is, the behaviors that people use exist within a sort of hierarchy (see Figure 1.1). In the United States, for instance, some accents are valued (by the larger community though perhaps not the communities within the larger community) more than are others; some ways of sitting or walking may also be seen as better or worse, given the underlying values reflected in them. The ones that get the highest evaluation within the community can be said to be *lauded* (the highest) or *preferred* (the next highest in the value hierarchy).

Physical attractiveness, certain types of homes or objects, a strong voice, and particular body types can all be seen as more valued (lauded or at least preferred) than others within a speech community. Those behaviors and cues that are more *typical* and "ordinary" would be one rung further down on the value hierarchy (not good—just "normal"—but not bad, unless they are used in the "wrong" way or by the "wrong" people, such as women using a more "masculine" sitting position). These include ordinary or unmarked ("neutral") vocal cues, movements, and gestures. At the bottom of a cultural community's hierarchy are those behaviors deemed bad or *problematic* (stigmatized, taboo, or against the law).

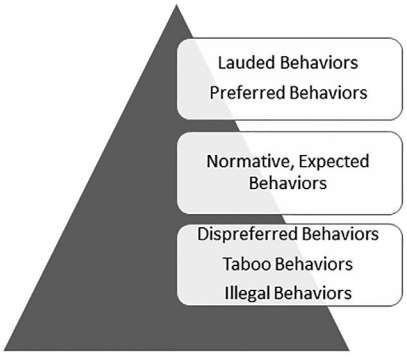

Figure 1.1 The value hierarchy for communication behavior

This differential evaluation of nonverbal cues within a larger speech community reflects both what is valued and what is devalued in that community, although we don't always recognize it as such. The cues may also link to groups that are more or less valued by the "dominant" culture (the primary forces that work to define the cultural code). Importantly, the behaviors or groups are not inherently more or less valuable. Rather, the speech community treats them as if they are more one or the other.

This differential valuing can be the site of many inequities and social problems, but it may have a somewhat invisible quality, unless we understand nonverbal cues as having this capacity. Importantly, as noted, whereas speech communities often change slowly (in part because we enact these communities—their meanings, rules, and values—when we engage in normative ways), they can and do change over time, as other communities' norms are adopted by a group or through people pushing back on the meanings, rules, and values as they are expressed nonverbally. A somewhat recent study on attitudes toward and group associations of tattoos in the United States, for instance, found that most people still had negative associations of tattoos and thought that those who had them were more likely to be "deviant," but these judgments were less pronounced than they were at one time, given changes to tattoo norms and acceptability (Adams, 2009). Indeed, in the years since Adam's article, the norms have changed even further, as have many of the negative associations, with tattoos becoming a new, well-accepted norm for many.

Overview of Nonverbal Codes

The framework just presented gives a more developed picture of the ways in which people use nonverbal communication and deepens a sense of why the cues are important to learn about. We use the term communication or cultural code, as doing so is consistent with existing scholarship. But doing so is also confusing, as the word "code" (without the communication or cultural term preceding it) is used in another important way by nonverbal scholars. Specifically, the term code is employed to define the set of signals that is transmitted via one particular medium or channel. Nonverbal codes are often defined by the human sense or senses they stimulate (e.g., the visual sense) and/or the carrier of the signal (e.g., the human body or

Photo 1.9 When you look at this interaction, what types of nonverbal communication can you identify?

artifacts). The various codes in combination form the structure of nonverbal communication. We overview several code types here, and they are the subject of Chapters 4 through 7. As we will see in those chapters, each code (or signal or cue type) is itself very complex.

Most textbooks differentiate nonverbal codes according to the medium being used to transmit the signal. The body, for example, is a vehicle for conveying messages through physical appearance, adornments, and olfactics (or smells). Included in the body-as-code are natural features of the body as well as grooming, hair styling, clothing, adornments such as tattoos, personal objects or artifacts such as jewelry, and use of fragrances. We discuss the body as a code in Chapter 6. Kinesics, or what is known in the popular vernacular as "body language," refers to body movements that are used to convey messages. Included in this code are facial expressions, head movements, eye behavior, gestures, posture, and gait (how one walks). Some people use a separate category of oculesics for eye behavior, though we include it as a part of kinesics. Vocal activity forms another category of performance codes known variously as paralanguage, prosody, or vocalics. This code includes such features of the voice as dialect, pitch, tempo, resonance, pauses, dysfluencies, and intonation patterns. Kinesics and vocalics are the subject of Chapter 4.

Two codes closely related to kinesics are haptics and proxemics. Haptics refers to the use of touch as a communication system (it is also sometimes referred to as tacesics), whereas proxemics refers to the use of space and distance to communicate (these are the subjects of Chapter 5). Proxemics refer to both personal space use and territories. Together, these form what we call the contact codes. Two additional codes are chronemics, which is the use of time to communicate, and artifacts (sometimes called objectics) and environment, or the use and arrangement of architecture and objects to communicate. Together these form the time and place codes, which we will talk more about in Chapter 7.

In this text, we will first examine these nonverbal codes separately, defining each in more detail, discussing various taxonomies of their constituent parts, and considering norms related to their use. But, as Cherry (1957), rightly observed a long time ago, "[t]he human organism is one integrated whole, stimulated into responses by physical signals; it is not to be thought of as a box, carrying independent pairs of terminals labeled 'ears,' 'eyes,' 'nose,' et cetera" (pp. 131–132).

The various nonverbal codes simultaneously send forth a stream of information, and it is the totality of all the codes, or their juxtaposition to one another and their degree of congruence or incongruence, that produces meaningful patterns. Moreover, nonverbal communication is a *process*. That is, we need to understand nonverbal communication as an ongoing, dynamic "unfolding" rather than just a static snapshot of cues or final outcomes at one moment in time. The media's tendency to use photographs, for example, takes the cue out of the larger process and context in which it was embedded and may therefore inaccurately skew what actually occurred. The second half of this textbook will take an integrated and process-based view by looking at how the codes work together to perform specific communication functions.

Overview of Functions

As we have noted, *functions* are the purposes, motives, or goals of communication (Patterson, 1991). An analysis of social or communication functions answers the question, what does nonverbal communication *do*? The idea that nonverbal cues serve functions involves several assumptions. First, the nature of the specific communication function determines the nonverbal behaviors to be observed. Some nonverbal codes may be irrelevant or inconsequential for some functions. For example, hair style would typically be a "bit player" in expressing emotions (though not having combed your hair may be one way you show you are unhappy). Second, every function has situational characteristics. Certain contexts tend to be associated with certain functions and have associated verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Impression management

(a function) may occur within an interview (context), for example, which typically occurs FtF (unless social distance is required) and has a fairly structured turn-taking pattern. Intimacy cues may show how we feel about another person, and they are likely to refer in (the context of) close relationships.

Third, functions are dynamic and transcend single time frames. Although it is convenient to study episodes that cover a finite period of time, a given function rarely begins or ends in a single occasion. This is part of what it means to say that nonverbal communication is a process. It may be influenced by previous interactions, may evolve as the transaction unfolds, and may influence subsequent episodes. That said, the immediate situational features and the behaviors of other participants that might elicit one's own nonverbal behavior are considered more revealing about communication than are "initial" causes, such as a traumatic childhood.

Fourth, a single nonverbal cue may serve multiple functions. Direct gaze, for example, may express relational involvement, and it may also facilitate behavioral change (social influence). Because nonverbal cues may have many meanings (i.e., they are polysemous), they may also be a part of more than one communicative function.

Fifth, a single function may be accomplished through multiple nonverbal cues. Fear may be expressed vocally, facially, posturally, proxemically, haptically, or through any combination of these channels. This ability is known as *equifinality* and can be the source of both communication richness and misunderstanding when people think the behaviors are serving one function but might in fact be serving another one. So, someone may think that their vocal cues are signifying intimacy, but their partner is looking toward where they are sitting to determine intimacy and may therefore miss the vocal sign.

Sixth, and perhaps most importantly, a single function typically requires the coordination of verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Communication is usually a cooperative venture among several nonverbal channels and the verbal channel (Dresner & Herring, 2010). As such, though they may get separated out in classes and textbooks, nonverbal cues and language are part of a larger integrated system.

To understand how communication goals are enacted through nonverbal and verbal cues working in tandem, it is necessary to study how the various codes may align. Early analyses of functions focused on the subsidiary or "supportive" role of nonverbal behavior to verbal communication (that is, they looked only at how nonverbal communication functions *as part of language*). Ekman and Friesen (1969) proposed five such functions: *redundancy* (duplicating the verbal message), *substitution* (replacing the verbal message), *complementation* (amplifying or elaborating on the verbal message), *emphasis* (highlighting the verbal message), and *contradiction* (sending opposite signals of the literal meaning of the verbal message). This set of specific functions highlights the close linkage between verbal and nonverbal communication and the ways in which nonverbal cues can clarify and amplify verbal meanings. But it should not be confused with the larger functions that nonverbal communication can serve with or without language accompanying it.

Scholars have proposed a variety of such functions that nonverbal behaviors fulfill. The ones we will cover in this textbook represent a synthesis of the primary categories that have been identified and studied. In Chapter 8, we talk about two of these functions: (1) image management or identity display and (2) impression formation. The first of these (also sometimes called impression management) involves the way we signal to others who we think we are and who we would like them to think we are, including our personality, sex/gender, age, racial/ethnic identity, culture or nationality, and socioeconomic status, through our nonverbal behavior. This function also includes how people present themselves to foster attraction and credibility, including how it might pertain to interviews and other professional contexts. The second of these, impression formation, involves the ways in which people form initial assessments of others, which judgments are accurate and which stereotypic, and which nonverbal cues are responsible for our impressions of or beliefs about others. This is sometimes called person perception.

In Chapter 9, we look at how nonverbal cues are enacted in expressing emotions. Kinesics (body movements), vocalics (sound-based cues), and haptics (touch) play a starring role in expressing people's various affects (another word for more general emotions), so much so that people often associate nonverbal communication exclusively with showing how people feel. It is certainly an important function served by nonverbal cues, but it is not the only one. We will review the cues that are responsible for these expressions and the accuracy with which emotional messages are sent and received as part of the emotion function. Also included are the ways in which people manage or fail to manage those expressions and the role of nonverbal cues in the "dark side" of communication: conflict, aggression, jealousy, and the like.

Relational messages concern how people nonverbally define their interpersonal relationships, signaling how they regard one another and the nature or type of relationship they have. Because this topic is so large and one of the primary jobs or functions of nonverbal cues, we have subdivided into one chapter on the closeness (i.e., involvement, affection, and intimacy) aspects of relational communication (Chapter 10) and another on exerting power, dominance, and status (Chapter 11). If the former captures the horizontal dimension of human relationships (because it deals with showing similarity and equality, to some degree), the latter captures the vertical dimension, as it implies a hierarchy in human relating. The vertical dimension includes the range of nonverbal behaviors that are used to reflect relative power with others.

Coordinating interaction, the function that is the centerpiece of Chapter 12, involves how nonverbal cues "oversee" conversations from the first hello to the last good-bye and all the ways in which nonverbal cues regulate interaction in between. Greeting rituals, turn-taking, departures, and patterns of matched or mismatched interaction patterns are part of this function. Also included here are the ways in which the environment can be structured to produce different kinds of interactions: Before communication even begins, nonverbal cues can define the setting and serve as implicit guidelines for how to behave. They can tell participants what roles are expected, how formal the setting is, what behaviors are proscribed, and so forth.

When people use nonverbal cues as part of their attempts to persuade others, they are being used as part of the social influence function, which we cover in Chapter 13. Whereas we may think that what we say is our primary influencing behavior, what we do nonverbally is also central (and sometimes more important). Finally, Chapter 14 involves (1) how nonverbal cues can help people deceive one another and (2) how people use cues to try to detect deception in others. This two-sided (encoding and decoding) deception function is a culmination of emotional expression, relational communication, impression management, interaction management, and influence principles. Although we typically expect people's communication to be the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," much communication falls short of that standard. In this last chapter, we consider how actual deception and suspicion of deception are expressed nonverbally, how receivers utilize nonverbal cues to make truth and credibility judgments, how accurate those judgments are, and how deceptive interactions are likely to be played out.

Although we have selected the previous functions for analysis here, we want to emphasize that these do not represent an exhaustive list. But they are particularly central to understanding the importance of nonverbal cues in navigating our lives.

Skills and Abilities Associated With Nonverbal Communication

We have all had experiences interacting with individuals who are impolite or socially inept. They may be people who don't understand the larger cultural code, or they do not seem to have certain skills or abilities to communicate as we might wish they would. We have also been around people who are charming and charismatic, drawing others to them like moths to light (and research supports us doing so; e.g., Friedman et al., 1988). Individuals clearly

have their own communication style, and they differ in their capacity to use nonverbal cues (i.e., they are more or less skilled). We also may know people who don't seem to pick up our cues or interpret them in the way we want them to (or that the cultural code would suggest they do). Moreover, when two or more people are paired together, their joint interaction pattern takes on additional uniqueness, with some people more likely than others to be part of smooth-flowing interactions.

Many of the differences between people are what Berger (1977) referred to as *irrelevant variety*. That is, there are many interesting differences that actually don't make a difference as far as communication goes. But when people have consistent issues with either encoding or decoding, it makes interacting with them a constant challenge, and it can lead to a range of poor outcomes for them (and when they are particularly skilled, it can make communicating with them a great experience, and they often reap the benefit of their skills).

Given this, we turn now to the various skills and abilities that people may have (or not have) that are tied to nonverbal communication. We wish to make three important points before we begin, however. First, nonverbal communication (or any communication, for that matter) is not a skill. But we can be more or less skilled as we engage in the communication process, with important consequences for the communicator. Second, there are many different types of skills that people can have (or not); being skilled in one way does not guarantee that we are good at other aspects, and we ought not to say that we *are* skilled or *not* skilled as an overall statement. Third, there are some underlying abilities that people have that can aid in being skilled or capable nonverbal communicators, but there are other conditions that people have that make nonverbal communicating challenging. We discuss each of these points in more detail next.

Forms and Importance of Skills

Nonverbal skills encompass specific competencies that "enhance the course of a social interaction [so that] the goals [or functions] of the interaction are more likely to be achieved" (Feldman et al., 1991, p. 321). Riggio (1992) grouped nonverbal skills into categories, the primary two of which are *expressivity* (or encoding skill) and *sensitivity* (decoding skill). We discuss each of these briefly along with some of the outcomes associated with the skill types. Riggio's third category, *control* (ability to regulate nonverbal displays), and a fourth, *interaction skills* that rely on the coordination of our behavior with others, will be talked about in Chapter 12.

Encoding

Nonverbal sending abilities or expressivity entail the capacity to encode and express oneself in ways that can be received and decoded accurately by others. Encoding abilities may be rooted in a biologically based system of temperament, which is further shaped by social learning processes (Buck, 1984). Encoding skills include the ability to send "readable" nonverbal cues of, for example, affect and intention to others and to select and implement communicative acts in a socially appropriate manner (Riggio, 1992), including the communication of social presence in online classrooms (Kelly & Claus, 2015).

Being able to encode through nonverbal cues can be important for healthcare providers and their patients. One study (Griffith et al., 2003) found that the patients of caregivers who had been trained to use body lean, open versus closed body posture, eye contact, smiling, tone of voice, nod, and facial expressivity had greater satisfaction with the healthcare encounters. Indeed, the role that caregivers' nonverbal cues play in enhancing patient comfort and its tie to patient satisfaction and, perhaps more importantly, adherence to medical instructions and positive therapeutic outcomes has made some people advocate for consistent nonverbal training in the medical context (Mithawala et al., 2018).

Fortunately, encoding skills may be improved. In a study with medical students, Ishikawa et al. (2010) gave some of the students a "nonverbal intervention" where they were taught how to use more involved torso angles and interpersonal distance; less self-touching and unpurposive movements, more body leaning, nodding, and gazing; greater facial expressivity and distribution of gaze; and better pacing with patients while also matching voice tone and intonation with their verbal contents. The authors found that teaching the students to encode these behaviors (all of which had been found to be more patient centered) increased the students' goals for their nonverbal communication but not necessarily their use of it, reflecting some limits to training. On the other hand, getting online feedback on their nonverbal cues has been found to help medical students' encoding skills (Liu, 2016).

Nonverbal skills are important in other contexts as well. Olszewski et al. (2017) worked with a group of adolescents to prepare them for job interviews. The authors noted how important nonverbal cues can be to being perceived well in an interview. As such, the researchers trained the teens in their use of eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and stance. They found that the training was effective and that the students could alter their behavior in the interviews; that is, they encoded those cues that they were taught would help them come across well to interviewers. As we will talk about later in more detail, people who have a condition where they cannot use their facial cues can be taught other nonverbal means of encoding interest and engagement (Michael et al., 2015). Even practicing emoji use through playing games can help people better encode online messages where nonverbal cues are not otherwise available (Brody & Caldwell, 2019).

Decoding

Nonverbal receiving abilities—also called *nonverbal sensitivity*—entail the capacity to notice and/or accurately decode others' nonverbal cues (Rosenthal et al., 1979), and they are especially subject to social learning and cultural practices (Buck, 1984). Decoding skills include interpreting nonverbally expressed emotions, interpersonal orientations, and intentions; integrating verbal and nonverbal meanings to detect verbal meanings, sarcasm, joking, and discrepancies; and understanding social contexts and roles. Hall's (1998) meta-analytic summary (this is when the researcher statistically assesses findings from an array of studies) showed that individuals scoring higher on nonverbal sensitivity also exhibit such markers of skillful performance as being more proficient at role-playing (a control skill) and being more accurate in judging others' social competence and decoding the behavior of familiar others.

Decoding skills and their related cues translate into positive outcomes for people with greater nonverbal sensitivity. Based on their social media accounts, for example, people higher in nonverbal decoding skill were also more central to their online network (Ivan & Duduciuc, 2011). Ivan and Duduciuc noted previous work that found higher decoding skills were also related to greater popularity and better grades. People who are better at decoding facial and vocal cues are also less likely to be depressed and more likely to have positive relationships (Carton et al., 1999).

Given these positive outcomes or correlates ("outcomes" assume that the decoding caused the outcome, and "correlates" mean that decoding skill and the other positive constructs co-occur, in that people have high or low levels of both variables but that one did not necessarily bring about the other), it is useful to know that some decoding skills can be improved. A study on interpreting nonverbally expressed emotions, for instance, found that pre-teens' skills improved when away from screens and at an outdoor camp interacting FtF for five days (Uhls et al., 2014). Kelly et al. (2019) observed that participating in a drama class can enhance nonverbal decoding skill, as drama training draws greater attention to sight, sound, proxemics, and touch. Molinuevo et al. (2011) created a program to enhance medical students' decoding of their patients' nonverbal cues. Matsumoto and Hwang (2011) found people can even

be taught to improve their ability to read *microexpressions* (facial displays of emotions that are half a second or less in duration). Importantly, however, people can at times be too sensitive nonverbally, when, for instance, they have high levels of *emotional contagion*, and feeling too much of what others do can be deleterious for a highly sensitive communicator (Lo Coco et al., 2014), a concept we come back to in Chapter 9.

Overall Claims About Skills

The last section shows that there are a variety of overall skill types and a lot of variety within these skill types (and some ability to get better in their use). We can, however, draw a few generalizations about the role of skills related to nonverbal communication from over 100 studies that have been summarized in several volumes (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003; Hall, 1998; Rosenthal, 1979). The primary claims we make come from these sources, though we add or highlight some sources that speak to particular claims.

People May Not Always Be Aware of Their Skill Level

Curiously, subjective judgments of ability do not show a high correspondence with objective measures of ability (Marangoni et al., 1995): People who report being empathic (subjective measure), for example, may not actually score higher on empathic accuracy than others (objective measure). Conversely, people who are very accurate in judging the emotions and intentions of others may not rate themselves as particularly sensitive or empathic. Still, both types of measures predict communicative performance with some reliability and correlate with a wide range of measures that conceptually should relate to social skills (Riggio, 1992).

Individuals Vary Substantially in Their Encoding and Decoding Ability, and Encoding Skills, Like Decoding Skills, May Go Hand in Hand

Some people are very expressive and easy to read (Friedman et al., 1988); others are "opaque." Some people have excellent ability to interpret the expressions of others accurately; others are very poor interpreters (Rosenthal, 1979). This may have to do with certain requirements that individuals may have. Pianists who play duets, for instance, must know how to decode their partner's nonverbal cues to perform successfully (Bishop & Goebl, 2015) and may therefore be higher on that skill than others by virtue of what is required of their profession. Moreover, when people are good (or bad) at either encoding or decoding, they are often good (or bad) at a range of skills within that type. Thus, people who are better at encoding facially tend to be better at encoding vocally, and people who are good at decoding messages of liking and disliking tend to be more accurate in judging ambivalent messages and deception.

Sometimes it is the cluster of specific decoding or encoding skills that make up a larger capacity that people may have. For example, Schlegel et al. (2017) found a phenomenon that they called *interpersonal accuracy* ("the ability to accurately judge others' emotions, intentions, traits, truthfulness, and other social characteristics" p. 103), which is made up of a range of nonverbal decoding skills, all of which must be done well to be accurate in forming impressions of others.

Encoding and Decoding Skills May Be Correlated; However, the Relationship Is a Modest One

Good encoders are not necessarily the same people who are good decoders overall (Hall, 1998). But the ability to encode in one channel tends to be correlated with ability to decode in that same channel. Although it is often reported that encoding and decoding skill go hand

in hand, research findings have actually been all across the board, with the most likely conclusion being a relatively weak positive correlation. Some constructs take this into account by showing how they may be connected. Halberstadt and his colleagues' (2002) model of *affective (emotional) social competence*, for example, is composed of three integrated components: sending affective messages, receiving affective messages, and experiencing affect. The model suggests that all three aspects can co-occur, and people may do them all well (or not). There is also evidence that helping students be better decoders of emotions in online learning can make them better encoders under the same circumstance (Kelly & Claus, 2015).

Women Tend to Be More Skilled at Nonverbal Communication Than Are Men (But Not Always)

Women are typically more expressive nonverbally than men are when in public or social settings, and their expressions are usually read more accurately by others. Put differently, women are likely to have an advantage over men in sending ability, an advantage that is especially true for facial cues. This difference between males and females is not very pronounced in early childhood but becomes more so past preschool. A recent study, for instance, found female medical students encoded more positive nonverbal cues and empathy than did male students (Vogel et al., 2018), a finding that the researchers interpreted as a skill advantage for female students in healthcare contexts.

Women also tend to better decoders of nonverbal cues than are men, regardless of age and sex of sender, and this may have to do with women developing greater *emotional intelligence* (Gulabovska & Leeson, 2014), though scholars argue over the cause of this difference. Women's enhanced decoding is greatest for facial expressions, followed by body movements, vocal cues, and brief visual cues. Women may have *less* of an advantage in identifying discrepant, deceptive, or negative messages, however. Rosenthal and DePaulo (1979) conducted three series of studies of high school students, college students, and adults that showed that women tended to lose their ability to "eavesdrop" on others' nonverbal behaviors over time, were more likely to rely on visual than vocal signals, and were especially likely to believe what deceivers wanted them to believe.

Other Individual Differences Show (Weak) Relationships to Encoding and Decoding

The review of studies showed that encoding skill is somewhat related to occupation in that more nonverbally skilled individuals gravitate to people-oriented jobs (though actors have been found not to be better at encoding "real-seeming" emotions than are other people; indeed, they may be worse; Jürgens et al., 2015). Encoding skill is unrelated to race, education, or intelligence. Decoding skill shows a modest positive relationship to mental abilities as measured by IQ, standardized tests, or amount learned from a teacher, and it is "curvilinearly" related to age (that is, it is poorer among the very young and the elderly and highest in middle adulthood). Of course, identification of skills isn't the whole picture: People also differ in their preferences, goals, and level of motivation for communicating well, which will introduce considerable variability from one interaction to the next.

General Abilities

The research literature on particular nonverbal skills sometimes refers to larger capacities that a person may have. Like specific skills, general ability brings with it a lot of positive outcomes. We discuss two such more "gestalt" (i.e., a larger whole that is more than its individual parts) capacities here.

Communication Competence

Communication competence is knowledge of what behaviors are expected, appropriate, and effective in a given context along with specific skills to puts that knowledge into practice (Hymes, 1966; Spitzberg, 2013; to assess your own communication competence, see Table 1.1). Communicative competence relies on knowing the larger communication or cultural code, and it involves a range of understandings and behaviors. Some of these are nonverbal cues and skills. Waldeck et al. (2012), for example, assert that nonverbal decoding skills are part of what it means to be communicatively competent in a business setting. Moreover, communication competence is tied to an array of positive outcomes, including greater self-compassion and hope (Umphrey & Sherblom, 2018); increased ability to express oneself online with difficult topics (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017); and employees' satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment (Mikkelson et al., 2015).

Table 1.1 Assessing Your Communication Competence

Interpersonal Communication Competence Self-Assessment
Instructions: Answer each item honestly as it currently applies to you in typical conversations with others.
Use the following scale:

1	2	4	5	5
strongly disagree	slightly disagree	unsure	slightly agree	strongly agree

____ 1. I want to adapt my communication behavior to meet others' expectations.
____ 2. I have enough knowledge and experiences to adapt to others' expectations.
____ 3. I use a wide range of behaviors, including self-disclosure and wit, to adapt to others.
____ 4. I want to be involved in the conversations I have with other people.
____ 5. I know how to respond because I am perceptive and attentive to others' behaviors.
____ 6. I show my involvement in conversation both nonverbally and verbally.
____ 7. I want to make my conversations with others go smoothly.
____ 8. I know how to change topics and control the tone of my conversations.
____ 9. It is easy for me to manage conversations the way I want them to proceed.
____10. I want to understand other people's viewpoints and emotions.
____11. I know that empathy means to try to see it through their eyes and feel what they feel.
____12. I show my understanding of others by reflecting their thoughts and feelings to them.
____13. I am motivated to obtain the conversational goals I set for myself.
____14. Once I set an interpersonal goal for myself, I know the steps to take to achieve it.
____15. I successfully achieve my interpersonal goals.
____16. I want to communicate with others in an appropriate manner.
____17. I am aware of the rules that guide social behavior.
____18. I act in ways that meet situational demands for appropriateness.
____ *Overall Total*

Scoring: Possible "overall totals" range from 18–90; higher values indicate more communication competence, and lower values indicate less communication competence.
To find out more specific competencies, use this scoring:
Motivation: add items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 16 =
This is your desire to approach or avoid conversation and/or social situations.
Knowledge: add items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, and 17 =
This involves knowing how to act.
Skill: add items 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18 =
This involves the behaviors you actually perform.
Adaptability: add your scores on items 1, 2, 3 =
These scores reflect your ability to change behaviors and goals to meet the needs of the interaction, also known as "flexibility."

(*Continued*)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Conversational involvement: examine your scores on items 4, 5, 6:
These scores reflect your ability to become cognitively involved in the conversation and demonstrate involvement through interaction behaviors like head nods, vocal cues, and so on.
Conversation management: examine your scores on items 7, 8, 9:
These scores reflect your ability to regulate conversation through controlling the topic, adjusting to a change in topic, interrupting, and asking questions.
Empathy: examine your scores on items 10, 11, 12:
These scores reflect your ability to show your conversational partner that you understand their situation or that you share his/her emotional reactions to the situation.
Effectiveness: examine your scores on items 13, 14, 15:
These scores reflect your ability to achieve the objectives you have for conversations.
Appropriateness: examine your scores on items 16, 17, 18:

These scores reflect your ability to uphold the expectations for a given situation by behaving in ways other people expect of you. If you achieve your goals but violate the expectations the other has for you and your relationship, then you are less than competent.

Source: Derived from Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (1984). *Interpersonal communication competence*. Sage.

Part of being communicatively competent is the ability to use nonverbal communication effectively and appropriately (Roso-Bas et al., 2017). For example, being competent means being able to use chronemic cues well when communicating (e.g., how long people use eye contact or silences before speaking; Bolotova, 2012). Given that what is competent relies on the knowledge and enactment of cultural codes, intercultural communication can be a place where people struggle to be competent. In a study of immigrant women seeking healthcare in Canada, for instance, Higginbottom et al. (2015) found that a lack of nonverbal competency showed up in the inability for immigrant women and Canadian healthcare workers to use nonverbal cues to develop needed warmth and trust.

Emotional Intelligence

A second overarching concept that groups together an array of skills around a particular nonverbal communication function, emotional expression, is called *emotional intelligence* (EI: Mayer et al., 1999), which Kong (2014) referred to as the ability to recognize, use, understand, and manage emotions, a concept we will revisit in Chapter 9. Goleman (1995), in his best seller on the topic, proposes five dimensions of emotional intelligence. *Self-awareness* is one's ability to know and follow one's feelings. *Self-regulation* is the ability to manage one's emotions in a facilitative manner that includes delaying gratification and handling stress well. *Motivation* is the ability to strive and persevere toward one's goals. *Empathy* is the ability to recognize others' feelings, to establish rapport, and to take another's perspective. *Social skills* (for Goleman) is the ability to handle emotions well and accurately in interpersonal relationships. Elfenbein et al. (2017) added *emotional attention regulation* (the ability to pay attention to nonverbal cues when needed and tuning them out when they are unneeded) to the EI construct.

All of these aspects of emotional intelligence rely on specific skills related to nonverbal communication or related constructs. For example, Morand (2001) said that a key part of emotional intelligence is the ability to decode others' emotions from their nonverbal cues. Jacob et al. (2013) found that people with greater emotional intelligence are more "nonverbally dominant," meaning that they are particularly likely to rely on nonverbal rather than verbal cues in decoding. The authors found that those high in nonverbal dominance were also more likely to rely on nonverbal cues when such cues contradicted verbal ones in cases where encoders were being ironic (using language that normally signifies the opposite of what

they mean, typically for humorous or emphatic effect), and they were therefore more likely to be accurate in their decoding of another's meaning. Further, Kong (2014) found that EI is related to nonverbal intelligence (a form of intellect that does not rely on language), and Lee and Ok (2012) learned that emotional intelligence helps to ameliorate the challenges that can come with too much emotional labor as part of one's job (for more on this, see Chapter 9).

Social Intelligence

Like Goleman (1995), other researchers have made the argument that people vary in a range of "intelligences." Specifically, Sternberg and Li (2020) noted that, whereas being "book smart" is often thought to be the most valuable predictor of success, "being competent at conventional intelligence tests or good at school work is not a guarantee that one can adjust to different environments and succeed in the real world. For that, a person also needs social intelligence" (p. 1). Social intelligence is adaptive intelligence and relies substantially on nonverbal communication. It is a central component in the conceptualization of intelligence across the world. For example, in Taiwan, one of five factors that have been found to underlie intelligence involves understanding and dealing with other people. In Zimbabwe, the concept of intelligence (*ngware*) "signifies a person who is prudent, balanced, and cautious, especially in relationships with others" (Sternberg & Li, 2020, pp. 10–11). Riggio et al. (2020) call it *savoir faire*, or the ability to know what to do.

General Deficits

We have just discussed what may be general characteristics that are likely to aid in the use of nonverbal forms of communicating. Given the importance of being able to use nonverbal cues effectively as encoders, decoders, and interactants, scholars have also examined what conditions may make people *less* skilled by virtue of their condition. We discuss some of these here.

Autism

Perhaps the most studied condition related to nonverbal skill deficits is *autism spectrum disorder* (ASD). ASD is a neurodevelopmental condition that is characterized by impairments in social interaction and atypical (non-normative) repetitive body movements and interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Given that it can be displayed in part nonverbally, and it can also affect nonverbal encoding and decoding skills, ASD has been of great interest to nonverbal communication scholars, particularly given the social and developmental challenges that the condition can bring. For instance, Chiang et al. (2008) documented that the autistic children they studied were less able to use nonverbal cues as part of "joint interaction" (engaging with others rather than solo) and in turn-taking (a fundamental part of the interaction function) than were those not on the spectrum. Shic et al. (2019) discussed that people with ASD do not attend to others' faces as much as do typically functioning people. Additionally, Nuber et al. (2018) found that, even in "high-functioning" people with ASD, it can be difficult to interpret irony from inconsistent nonverbal and verbal cues.

Klintwall et al. (2015) observed that toddlers with autism varied from one another in terms of their capacity to develop nonverbal awareness, however, with those showing greater interest in objects at an early age being more likely to have more developed nonverbal ability later. Researchers have worked to find ways to limit any communicative deficits that can come with ASD, and children with ASD are often taught adaptive skills they lack, using highly structured training and typically in one-to-one settings (Klintwall & Eikeseth, 2014), though individual outcomes vary considerably. Wang and his colleagues (2017), for example, found interacting

online in a 3D collaborative learning environment can increase the nonverbal interactions skills of people with ASD.

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities

Autism is defined in part as a nonverbal learning disability (Semrud-Clikeman et al., 2014). But there is a related construct, known specifically as *nonverbal learning disorder* (NVLD), and people with this neurological condition tend to have strong verbal ability coupled with poor nonverbal cognition (i.e., the ability to use visual and spatial cognitions; Lepach & Petermann, 2011; Margolis et al., 2018). Whereas, like ASD, NVLD originates in the brain, it also has significant effects on people's ability to use nonverbal cues. For example, people with NVLD have a hard time encoding the nonverbal cues that are part of coordinating interactions (Chapter 12). Researchers argue that poor socio-emotional and communicative skills (and specifically the recognition of anger from nonverbal cues) are inherent to NLVD (Yalof, 2006). Just as with ASD, children with NVLD are often bullied by their siblings and peers (Little, 2002), in part because of these nonverbal skill deficits.

NVLD shows up in both the encoding and decoding of nonverbal cues. *Dyssemia*, on the other hand, is a more specific nonverbal learning disability that centers on decoding skills (or the ability to "read" someone else's nonverbal cues; Nowicki & Duke, 1994). Interestingly, however, dyssemia can be diagnosed by watching children's behaviors (Love et al., 1994), and teachers are encouraged to pay attention to their students' nonverbal behavior to help discern which children may have it. As with many conditions, children with dyssemia may be affected by it negatively, particularly in their ability to interact and form friendships. Nowicki and Carton (1997), for example, found that all children with this condition tend to have lower perceptions of their own competence, with boys specifically more likely to have depression. Darrow (2016) offers teachers advice for how to work with students that have dyssemia and who may miss the nonverbal components involved in learning, and Nowicki and Duke (1994) offer additional ways to help people with this condition ameliorate the hardships they may face.

Other Conditions

There are a range of other conditions or circumstances that have been found to have an effect on skill acquisition and/or use, even if they are not specifically conditions related to nonverbal communication explicitly. One of these is *specific language impairment* (SLI). Reflecting the often-interrelated use of language and nonverbal communication, this condition shows up primarily in nonverbal decoding skill deficits (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2012). SLI is defined as "the presence of language deficits in the context of adequate nonverbal skills" (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2012, p. 1716). Children with this condition plateau or level out as compared to peers in terms of language development, but, even more debilitating, nonverbal decoding skills continue to decline over time.

Other conditions affect encoding. One of these, *Möbius syndrome*, is a neurological condition that affects people's ability to move their faces and usually emerges over a person's lifespan. One result of the syndrome is that people appear to not be engaged with others when they interact with them, as they are not able to be facially responsive. Cole (1999) documents just how challenging this condition can be. Michael et al. (2015), however, trained teenagers with Möbius syndrome to increase their use of other nonverbal cues, such as gestures, to compensate for their lack of facial expressivity and found that doing so increased the perception of rapport in interactions in which they took part.

Likewise, people with schizophrenia may have a specific encoding skill deficit that involves their ability to gesture appropriately (Wüthrich et al., 2020) and to be able to

Photo 1.10 Some people, such as this woman with Möbius syndrome who is trying to smile for the camera, face special challenges when trying to encode nonverbal messages.

engage in interactional synchrony, a topic for Chapter 12 (Kupper et al., 2015). Males with *fragile-X* (a genetic condition that affects the X-chromosome and leads to various developmental cognitive and behavioral problems) have overall lower nonverbal communication skill and are particularly poor in their development of normative gesturing (Rague et al., 2018).

Importantly, these are just a few of the many physical and neurological conditions that may affect people's ability to be skilled in the use of nonverbal cues. But they do help to reflect how much most people rely on certain underlying capacities to communicate as well as we do. Not everyone can take these capacities for granted.

Research Streams

The claims that we have made thus far in this chapter, and that we continue to assert throughout this book, are based largely in the multi-disciplinary research studies we mentioned at the start of the chapter. In 2016, Manusov brought together some of the many traditions (what she calls "heritages") that have shaped the nature of nonverbal scholarship today. The *rhetorical heritage* goes back to early writings on what nonverbal cues help make someone a good orator, and it also includes nonverbal cues, such as the body, and environmental features, such as memorials, that have persuasive value. The *linguistic heritage* brought with it attempts to find the components and structures of individual nonverbal codes. The *sociological heritage* calls attention to the ways in which nonverbal cues work as integral to our shared humanity, often at either a macro level (social commentary) or a micro one (the specifics of interaction). The *cultural heritage* focuses on how nonverbal cues are used and given meaning within larger societal frames. The *ethological heritage* centers on nonverbal cues as an extension of us as biological beings. Finally, the *psychological heritage* moves research largely into the mind to look for ways in which nonverbal cues are signs of internal states (or affect those states).

Together, these traditions help scholars weave the rich tapestry of our joint knowledge about nonverbal communication. Each of these heritages also tends toward using certain kinds of research methods to make their claims. To aid your "nonverbal literacy" further, it helps if you know a bit more about the types of studies that people do in order to get to the points we make in this book. This is not an exhaustive list, but it provides an overview of some of

the primary ways in which scholars form the claims that they make. We also note whether each research type tends to use more qualitative/descriptive or quantitative/statistical data and analysis, as both forms are important to the study of nonverbal behavior.

Social Science Experiments

When researchers want to make causal claims about nonverbal communication (either that nonverbal cues bring about some outcome or nonverbal cues change because of some variable), they typically undertake a laboratory or field experiment, and they do so largely using quantitative data. This form of study follows from the field's psychological heritage but is also present in the fields of affective computing, computer science, information systems, and criminal justice. Researchers using experiments create controlled situations in which only a particular variable of interest can be said to be the cause of a certain outcome, and these studies can be done in a controlled setting such as a laboratory or in "the real world" (i.e., settings in which the behavior typically occurs).

One example of a field (regular life) experiment was in a study by Aranguren (2017) who was interested in nonverbal reactions to a person wearing Romani clothing in the Paris Metro, as Roma migrants from Eastern Europe are often stigmatized. The author found that most people used more "visual dominance" with the confederate (a person in the study who is acting as if they are not part of the study) when she was wearing Romani clothing than when she was in an "inconspicuous middle-class style"; men tended to also keep a physical distance, but women were found to do a form of reverse racism reflected in closer distances to the confederate wearing clothes from the Romani culture.

Observational Research

The more general category of observational research is typically a quantitative set of methods that usually relies on a large set of observations (usually assessed by trained research team members) to draw claims. As with experiments, and also based more in the psychological heritage, observational studies may occur in a lab setting or in the "field." Gottman and colleague's work on couples' communication (e.g., Shapiro et al., 2015) is primarily observational, and they look at a large array of interactions to determine what behaviors tend to lead to relational decline in couples (we will talk more about this work in Chapter 10). Some of this work may also include physiological measures (e.g., heartrate or hormone levels as indicators of stress or well-being).

Although not common to all observational work, scholars may investigate a particular treatment or therapy that can help with individual or couple/family communication (but without comparing them to people who do not receive the treatment). Following the same line of research, Garanzini et al. (2017) found that Gottman Couples' Therapy (based in years of observational research and involving changing behavior, including nonverbal cues, when interacting with partners) improved relational quality for gay and lesbian couples. Other scholars are using new technologies to model large numbers of nonverbal behavior observations (e.g., Gunes et al., 2020).

Ethological Studies

Some researchers are interested primarily in the "ontogeny, survival value and evolutionary trajectories" (Geerts & Bruene, 2009, p. 1007) of nonverbal behavior, and they tend to engage in ethological studies. Typically, ethological research is primarily observational and

can be made up of case studies or include many observations that have a focus on behavior that has bio-evolutionary origins. In some cases, researchers make a comparison between humans and other species in their use of nonverbal cues (particularly signals; Mehu & Scherer, 2012); in others, the concern is with capturing patterns of development in humans (Camras, 1982).

Geerts and Bruene (2009), for instance, make the argument that ethological approaches often look for any "proximate causes" (something sufficiently related) that explain nonverbal behaviors; they advocate doing such work for psychiatric patients as a way to recognize cues that may make early diagnosis and intervention more effective. In addition to work on nonverbal communication in mental health, many ethological studies center on the development and explanation of nonverbal behavior in children. Zeifman (2001), for instance, wanted to understand the evolutionary basis for why human babies cry.

Discourse Studies

It may seem strange to think of discourse (talk or written words) as a way to study nonverbal communication. But, as we've discussed, nonverbal cues occur alongside language. Moreover, people *talk about nonverbal cues*, either explicitly or implicitly. Discourse studies, most typically aligned with the rhetorical, linguistic, and sociological heritages, are typically qualitative, descriptive accounts of what is occurring in this talk. Manusov and Harvey's (2011) analysis of media coverage of Hillary Clinton's tears and the Obamas' fist bump is an example of analyzing talk or discourse about nonverbal cues.

An illustration of how nonverbal cues work alongside language is in Robinson's (2006) *conversation analytical* approach. In that study, the author looked in close depth at interchanges between patients and their doctors to reveal the nuanced ways in which doctors and patients "secure" the gaze of the other before they begin their speaking turns and also how physicians look toward a patient (and away from their computer screens) when they want the patient to answer questions. Other discourse-based work takes a more critical perspective, including Davis' (2019) study on how Black women support each other when they have been the target of (sometimes nonverbal) microaggressions.

Ethnography

Earlier in this chapter, we brought in the idea of communication communities and cultural codes, drawn from speech codes theory. Researchers with this background often do ethnographies as their means for getting data and drawing conclusions, and it is part of the cultural heritage. Ethnography is a largely qualitative research tradition that has at its core the belief that behavior needs to be studied *in situ*, that is, situated in its original place. Typically, ethnographic work involves researchers being in the place or community that they are studying for some time, observing, talking to people in the community, learning about its history and practices, and taking and then analyzing extensive field notes to develop ideas about communicative meanings, rules, and practices occurring in that community (Murchison, 2010). This can even be done in online communities (Antonijevic, 2008).

We referenced one such ethnographic study (Higginbottom et al., 2015) when we talked about nonverbal competence issues for immigrant women seeking healthcare in a small town in Canada. In this real-life setting, Higginbottom and her colleagues used observations and interviews to determine where communication problems arose, noting the "unshared meanings" between patients and caregivers that arose from different languages and diverse understandings and rules for use of nonverbal communication.

Self-Reports/Surveys

There are times in which researchers cannot (or choose not to) look at nonverbal behaviors directly in their research. Instead, they rely on self-reports or surveys about what behaviors they or another enacted and/or the meanings that they gave to the cues. These self-reports are usually gathered either in interviews, questionnaires, or focus groups, though these forms are also used occasionally as part of other methods (particularly ethnographies and experiments). But at times, they are the primary research method. Interview and focus group data are often assessed qualitatively, and questionnaires are typically analyzed quantitatively.

Often, self-reports are used to assess an internal disposition or state that is relevant to nonverbal communication, such as people's likelihood of emotional contagion (e.g., Lo Coco et al., 2014); these may then be analyzed in relationship to another self-report measure to look for correlations between them or to find group differences (e.g., how do emotional contagion scores relate to self-esteem or are males and females different in their tendency to catch others' emotions?). Occasionally the "self-report" is in nonverbal form itself, as when people use animated figures to identity what emotion they are feeling (Laurans & Desmet, 2017). The rise of Amazon Mechanical Turk (a crowdsourcing website with an enormous cadre of respondents hired for pennies through Amazon) has propelled the popularity of survey research.

Summing Up

Nonverbal behaviors are a central and essential part of the communication process. They contribute significantly to the meaning that is extracted from communicative episodes, and they influence communication outcomes. Possible reasons for this powerful impact include nonverbal cues being omnipresent; forming a sort of basic universal language system (but also influenced strongly by culture); adding to misunderstanding as well as understanding; expressing what verbal communication can't or shouldn't; having phylogenetic, ontogenetic, and interaction primacy; and being a trusted system of communication (whether it should be or not!).

The strength of this form of communicating derives from multiple nonverbal codes (e.g., kinesics, chronemics) that work together to enact a wide range of communication functions; these also exist in a larger communicative or cultural code that helps both explain and give greater depth to how people use and understand nonverbal cues. Within the cue or code types are also different forms of behavior, which we refer to as symptoms, semblances, and symbols. To gain the fullest understanding of how these codes coordinate with one another and with the verbal code to achieve outcomes, nonverbal communication should be studied as a dynamic system that is highly integrated with verbal communication. Using this system depends on an array of skills and capabilities, but some people have particular conditions that make doing so challenging. To make all of these claims (and as we do throughout the book), we reviewed some of the many ways in which the study is multi-disciplinary, coming from different traditions and using several research methods to attain evidence to make claims about the rich and varied system that is nonverbal communication. All of this will be illustrated further as we take you through the chapters of this book.

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