Nonverbal communication is inseparable from talk in normal interaction and carries messages over and above the words you speak. For example, a smile makes your words seem friendly, but a sneer makes the same words seem sarcastic. Nonverbal communication most often goes along with and supports talk, although not always. You might say, “I’m not angry” but look as if you are really angry, or you might say, “I love you” and only have to exchange a glance with your partner for him or her to see that you really mean it. Not only does nonverbal communication frame talk, but it can also frame other people’s assessments and judgments of you before you even speak, and it can indicate how you feel about other people. The way you move, look, and sound and the speed and pitch of your voice convey relational messages to others—whether with friends as you’re chatting in a lounge or with an interviewer considering you for a job or with patients as you’re about to tell them bad news. All nonverbal communication conveys something about your sense of relaxation and comfort with the person(s) with whom you’re speaking. Nonverbal communication also indicates your evaluation or assessment of that person. In short, nonverbal communication is an essential relational element of all interaction, and you cannot have interactions without nonverbal communication; nor can you have interactions without the relational messages that nonverbal communication sends.

Nonverbal communication, or NVC, has been tied up with your communication all of your life, which can make it difficult for you to appreciate its importance because it is too obvious. But is NVC something worth understanding and learning about? You bet!
What Is Nonverbal Communication?

Nonverbal communication is everything that communicates a message but does not include words. This definition covers a very wide range of topics: facial expression, hand movements, dress, tattoos, jewelry, physical attractiveness, timing of what happens, position in the interaction (for example, the professor always stands at the front of the class), tone of voice, eye movements, the positioning of furniture to create atmosphere, touch, and smell—and that is not an exhaustive list.

The Two Sides of Nonverbal Communication: Decoding Versus Encoding

It is important to distinguish between decoding and encoding of NVC. Decoding a nonverbal message is exactly like decoding anything else—you draw meaning from something you observe. For example, if somebody blushes unexpectedly, you might decode that as meaning he or she is embarrassed. On the other hand, when you encode a nonverbal message, you put your feelings into behavior through NVC; for example, if you are feeling happy, you look truly happy. A good decoder can work out sensitively what is going on inside another person, but if you’re a good encoder, you put your feelings “out there” well and help other people “get” what is going on.
inside you. Skillful actors, teachers, and public speakers are good encoders; effective therapists, advisors, and interrogators are good decoders. Good encoding helps your listeners understand what you feel about your subject; good decoding helps you figure out what the speaker is trying to tell you.

Encoding is important when you go on a job interview, give speeches, or go on a first date because you need to display confidence rather than anxiety, and the more confident you are, the more people will attend to what you say. Decoding is important when you’re chatting with a friend: You need to be able to notice if your friend is anxious or having a hard time but not telling you directly, for example, or even lying.

The Two Modes of Nonverbal Communication: Static Versus Dynamic

Communication scholars traditionally divide the many kinds of NVC into two aspects (Manusov & Patterson, 2006): static (fixed) and dynamic (changeable). The color of someone’s eyes is static NVC; a change in the size of his or her pupils is dynamic NVC.

Static NVC refers to those elements of an interaction that do not change during its course. For example, the arrangement of furniture in a particular room can send nonverbal messages about status and power or about comfort and informality, and it is unlikely that the furniture itself will be moved around during the course of the interaction. A judge’s power in the courtroom is symbolized by the fact that the judge sits higher up than all the other people in the court. A shop assistant going behind the cash register to complete your purchase is using a static aspect of the design of the shop that separates out “customer areas” from “shop assistant areas.” Customers can go into one part of the shop but not into the other part without permission. If you followed the assistant behind the cash register, you might be suspected of intending a robbery.

The room in which you interact also counts as a static nonverbal cue (Duck, 2007). An interaction in a friend’s bedroom is conducted in a different static environment from one in a public lounge and frames the interaction with a different context. How you interact at home may be influenced by the lighting and décor (static nonverbal cues) that make the environment relaxing, as opposed to those cues present when you’re speaking in the static environment of a large lecture hall.

Other examples of static nonverbal cues are body piercings, military uniforms, the clothes you wear into an interaction, the color of your hair, your sex, your age, your tattoos, your height and build, your ethnicity, or whether you are wearing sunglasses, pajamas, a sexy outfit, or jewelry. Although some of these things may change during the
course of an interaction, most often they don’t; they can, however, send signals about your relationship to another person or to society at large. For example, Seiter and Sandry (2003) showed people photographs of job applicants with different numbers of body piercings. They found that reviewers did not give different physical attractiveness ratings according to the type of jewelry the applicants wore, but the applicants’ credibility was rated much lower when they were wearing jewelry. In particular, applicants’ likelihood of being hired significantly decreased when they were wearing a nose ring.

Dynamic NVC involves movement and change during the course of the interaction—behaviors closely watched by poker players. Most dynamic NVC relates to bodily activity or position. Facial expressions, gestures, postures, the pitch and tone of the speaker’s voice as she relates a story, the way someone’s eyes move, and the amount of touching that takes place during the course of conversation are all dynamic aspects of NVC and can be broken down into several different parts. Don’t forget as you go through all these parts that each of them can convey emotional and relational messages separately and together. As you will see later in the chapter, NVC also serves a second, extremely important relational function: It regulates (e.g., starts and stops) interaction. It also helps maintain emotional flow.

How Nonverbal Communication Works

Having discussed the two sides and the two modes of NVC, we can now discuss the operation of nonverbal symbols to give you a better understanding of how they are used in your everyday experiences. Verbal and nonverbal communication are both symbolic and share many of the same characteristics, such as being personal, ambiguous, guided by rules, and linked to culture. As we discuss the nature of NVC, we address the characteristics it shares with verbal communication as well as how they materialize. We will also discuss characteristics unique to NVC, such as its continuous nature and that it is
often beyond your full control. This comparison will help you develop insight into the nature of NVC and, while you’re at it, give you an even clearer understanding of verbal communication (Knapp & Hall, 2002; Remland, 2004).

**Symbolic**

Nonverbal and verbal communication are both symbolic. The key difference between them is that verbal communication involves the use of language and NVC involves the use of all other symbolic activity.

Like verbal symbols, nonverbal symbols can be described as polysemic; that is, a single nonverbal symbol can have multiple meanings. The highly ambiguous nature of nonverbal symbols often makes it quite difficult to ascertain their intended meanings. For example, what does a stare mean: affection, anger, hostility, interest, longing, or “Be quiet!”? Like that of verbal symbols, the meaning of nonverbal symbols depends on the context of the interaction and the relationship of the interactants. Is your arriving 20 minutes late to class impolite? What if your instructor does it?

**Guided by Rules**

Nonverbal communication is guided by rules. As in verbal communication, rules guide the choice of nonverbal symbols that should be used in specific situations and with certain people. You would probably shake your instructor’s hand rather than give him or her a high five. The appropriateness of greeting someone with a kiss changes depending on whether he or she is your romantic partner, an attendant behind the counter at a gas station, or someone from a culture where a kiss on the cheek is an accepted greeting even between persons of the same sex (Russia or Italy, for example).

Rules also guide your understanding of how to evaluate nonverbal behavior. For instance, you know that nonverbal expressions of gratitude include shaking a person’s hand, smiling, and talking in an appreciative tone of voice as opposed to avoiding eye contact, pouting, and talking in a surly tone of voice. You also measure the extent to which a person is thankful through his or her nonverbal behaviors. A brisk handshake is evaluated differently than a hearty handshake; a slight smile is evaluated differently than a broad smile. You can even gauge the extent of a person’s degree of appreciation through slight alterations in his or her tone of voice.

As opposed to those guiding verbal communication, the rules guiding NVC have been learned more indirectly and primarily through your interactions with others (Remland, 2004). This course may be the first time you have ever formally studied NVC, but you have been studying verbal language in school for years. In your English classes, for example, you learned the difference between nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs and about proper sentence structure. In grade school, you learned vocabulary skills and the meanings of certain words. With NVC, you have learned nearly everything, from the meaning of particular nonverbal symbols to the structure of their use, informally throughout your lifetime as you have interacted with other people.
There is actually a diagnosable disability called NLD (nonverbal learning disorder; http://www.nlda.org/) where people fail to understand NVC. They may stand too close to you, get in your way when you try to get past them, or fail to read your tone of voice correctly or to differentiate anger from nonanger. Sometimes, this disability will cause misunderstanding of others’ intentions; for example, a person with NLD may wrongly assume that someone looking at him is intentionally threatening. A child with NLD who is told with a glare “I wouldn’t do that if I were you” will not correctly interpret the glare but will take the words literally—not as a command to stop—thinking the speaker means, “In your position, my choice would, as a matter of fact, be not to do what you have chosen to do.” Adults often consider such children insolent or inattentive, but in fact, their understanding of NVC rules is impaired. A particularly frustrating disability for everyone, NLD doesn’t count as bad enough to require medical treatment, yet it is socially disruptive to have people stand too close to you or fail to recognize your boundaries. If you suspect somebody has this problem, it is of course important to recognize that his or her behavior is caused not by rudeness but by an inability to understand the rules. Several otherwise high-functioning intelligent people (including Albert Einstein, some believe) suffered from this particular disorder, showing that it is possible to be both extremely intelligent and nonverbally disabled.

Cultural

Nonverbal communication is highly linked to culture. The appropriateness of certain nonverbal behaviors changes according to culture (Knapp & Hall, 2002). In the United States, eye contact is often viewed as a display of courtesy, honesty, and respect. In other countries, making eye contact, especially with a superior, is considered improper and highly disrespectful. Meanings of nonverbal messages depend on culture, including address, use of space, touch, and time. Dialect and accent can also indicate that a person comes from a particular country or region, and particular cues may be associated with stereotypes—for example, sexiness (French accent), slowness (Southern drawl), or cheeky friendliness (Irish accent). Also, many gestures are acceptable in some cultures but impolite or offensive in others (although in our culture the forefinger-to-thumb “O” means “perfect,” in other cultures it is an...
offensive sexual suggestion). While many nonverbal behaviors and symbols are perhaps universally recognized (the smile, for example), they do not necessarily have universal meaning and understanding in the same contexts (Remland, 2004).

**Personal**

Nonverbal communication can be very personal in nature (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). Similar to verbal communication, you develop your own personal meanings and use of nonverbal symbols. A person’s use of some nonverbal symbols may even become idiosyncratic over time. You also respond positively or negatively to certain nonverbal symbols. Some people may not like to hug or be hugged, for example. One person may view the peace sign (shown in Figure 3.1) as cliché and may look at celebrities flashing the peace sign at cameras with disdain. Another person may view this sign as still having great meaning and value and may regard its use with admiration. Others still may cover themselves with tattoos (see http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art37314.asp for the Leopard Man).

**Ambiguous**

The meaning of NVC is highly ambiguous, even more than the meaning of verbal communication. You are often uncertain what another person’s NVC actually means, unless you have clear signals from context. You often use the physical or situational context, along with your relationship with that person, to assign meaning and understanding, but you may never know for certain whether it is accurate.

The ambiguous nature of NVC is largely why it is so valuable when flirting with someone. Nonverbal behaviors associated with flirting can mean so many different things. You could use eye contact, a quick or sustained glance, a smile, or even a wink either to flirt with someone or just to be friendly. Here, ambiguity is useful because it releases the pressure of not receiving the desired response. If the other person is interested, the response transacts your ambiguous message (for example, a long and perhaps longing stare) as a come-on; if the other person is not interested, the response transacts your ambiguous behavior as “just friendly.” Always remember the ambiguous nature of NVC and heed this piece of advice: Another person may receive your friendly glance as a sexual provocation.

**Less Controlled**

Nonverbal communication is less subject to your control than is verbal communication. In the presence of someone you dislike, you might be able to keep from calling that person a jerk, but nonverbally you may be expressing your displeasure unknowingly through dirty looks or changes in pupil size. Nonverbal behaviors often occur without your full awareness and very often reveal how you really feel. This betrayal of your internal feelings, known as leakage, refers to the fact that NVC allows you to “leak” your true feelings. Because your spontaneous NVC is more difficult to control than your verbal
communication, people are more likely to believe your nonverbal over your verbal messages—especially when they are contradictory. Audiences rely more on what you do than on what you say.

**Continuous**

Nonverbal communication is continuous and ongoing. You will always be communicating nonverbally through your physical appearance; furthermore, in face-to-face speaking situations, you begin communicating nonverbally before you start talking and will continue communicating after you stop. For example, if you do not want to give a speech, you may convey this message nonverbally by having a look of dread on your face before you begin speaking. Afterward, this look of dread may be replaced by a look of relief as you say your final words.

**The Functions of Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication, whether static or dynamic, has several different functions in everyday life, some of which reinforce verbal behavior, some of which regulate interactions, and some of which serve to identify people. Nonverbal communication also registers people’s emotional states or displays their attitudes about themselves, the other person in the interaction, or their comfort level. One of the clearest indicators of liking and disliking, for example, is registered by NVC: Pupil size, an uncontrollable activity, indicates the degree to which someone likes the person or idea that he or she is considering. If you look at a person you like very much, your pupil size will increase, whereas if you look at someone you dislike, your pupil size will decrease.

**Interconnects With Verbal Communication**

One function of NVC involves its interconnection with verbal communication. Your interpretation of a verbal message’s meaning is often framed by accompanying nonverbal elements, such as tone of voice, facial expression, and gestures.

Quite often your NVC will repeat your verbal communication. When you send a verbal message, you often send a corresponding nonverbal message. For example, when you say hello to someone from across the room, you might wave at the same time.

Alternatively, nonverbal messages can substitute, or be used in place of, verbal messages. For example, you might just wave to acknowledge someone and not say anything.
Nonverbal communication is often used to *emphasize* or highlight the verbal message. If you have ever gone fishing and described “the one that got away” to your friends, you have no doubt used NVC to emphasize just how big that fish really was by holding your arms out wide to indicate its gargantuan length. A verbal message can also be emphasized through your tone of voice. When you tell someone a secret, for example, you may use a hushed voice to emphasize its clandestine nature.

When NVC is used to *moderate* verbal communication, it essentially tempers the certainty of a verbal message. For instance, a doubtful tone of voice and the slight scrunching of your face and shoulders could indicate uncertainty. If your supervisor did this while saying, “I may be able to give you a raise this year,” you would probably not anticipate an increase in pay. By moderating the verbal message nonverbally, your boss is letting you know there is uncertainty in that statement.

Your NVC can also *contradict* your verbal communication—sometimes intentionally, such as when you are being sarcastic. Contradiction may occur unintentionally as well—for instance, when someone charges into a room, slams the door, sits down on the couch in a huff, and, when you ask what is wrong, says, “Oh, nothing.” Contradiction is not always this obvious, but even when it is more subtle, you are generally skilled at detecting it—especially when you share a close, personal relationship with the speaker. In situations of contradiction, you will be more likely to believe the person’s nonverbal over verbal communication, because, as we discussed earlier, spontaneous NVC is less subject to your control than is verbal communication.

**Regulates Interactions**

Another function of NVC is to help regulate your interactions. Nonverbal communication informs you how you should behave and conveys how you want others to behave especially in starting or ending interactions. Used to determine whether you should actually engage in interactions with another person, NVC helps you know when to send and when to receive verbal messages.

*Regulators* are nonverbal actions that indicate to others how you want them to behave or what you want them to do. A classic regulator occurs at the end of most college classes: Students begin closing their books and gathering their belongings to signal to the instructor that it is time to end class. Other regulators include shivering when you want someone to close the window or turn up the heat, a look of frustration or confusion when you need help with a problem, and a closed-off posture (arms folded, legs crossed) when you want to be left alone.

Nonverbal communication is often used to determine whether you will actually engage in conversation. If one of your friends walks past you at a rapid pace with an intense look on his or her face, it may be an indication that he or she is in a hurry or not in the mood to talk. In this case, you might avoid interacting with your friend at this time. If someone looks frustrated or confused, however, you may decide to interact with him or her because the nonverbal behavior signals a need for help.

Nonverbal communication also serves to *punctuate* how you talk to other people; it starts and ends interactions and keeps them flowing. Specifically, NVC creates a framework within which interaction happens in proper sequence. Most of the time it is perfectly effortless and unconscious, but you must *act* to get in and out of conversations: For example, you must “catch the server’s eye” to start ordering in a restaurant.
You follow elaborate nonverbal rules to begin and to break off interactions. Consider what happens when you see someone walking toward you in the distance and wish to engage in conversation. Kendon and Ferber (1973) identified five basic stages in such a greeting ritual, as shown in Table 3.1.

Nonverbal communication is also used to signal the end to an interaction. You may, for example, stop talking, start to edge away, or show other signs of departure, such as looking away from the other person more often or checking your watch. You might also step a little farther back or turn to the side. Most people will pick up on the fact that the interaction is coming to an end and will join in rituals of ending, such as stepping back, offering a handshake, or stating directly that it’s time to go.

**Identifies Others**

Nonverbal communication also functions to identify specific individuals. Just as dogs know each other individually by smell, humans use basic olfactory recognition but can also recognize one another specifically from facial appearance. You also use such additional physical cues as muscles, beards, skin color, breasts, and the whiteness of a person’s hair to identify him or her as a particular sex, age, race, or athletic ability.

Clothing, also an identifying signal, can be used to identify someone’s sex (men rarely wear dresses), personality (whether they wear loud colors, sedate business attire,
Table 3.1 Kendon and Ferber’s (1973) Five Basic Stages of a Greeting Ritual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sighting and recognition</td>
<td>Occurs when you and another person first see each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Distant salutation</td>
<td>Used to say hello with a wave, a flash of recognition, a smile, or a nod of acknowledgement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lowering your head and averting your gaze (to avoid staring)</td>
<td>Done as you approach the other person, which breaks off your visual connection while you get close enough to talk and be heard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Close salutation</td>
<td>Most likely involves some type of physical contact, such as a handshake, a kiss, or a hug, which brings you too close for a comfortable conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Backing off</td>
<td>For example, taking a step back or turning to the side to create a slightly larger space, the actual size of which is dictated by the type of relationship you share with the other person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

or punk clothing), favorite sports team, and job (police, military, security). Clothing can also identify changes in people, such as whether they have a special role today (prom outfits, wedding wear, gardening clothes), or indicate specific differences about their lives (casual Friday).

People can also distinguish others’ scents: What perfume or cologne do they wear? Do they smoke? Are they drinkers? You may not comment on these kinds of clues because they are very often noticed with lower levels of awareness. If your physician smells of alcohol, however, you may well identify him or her as professionally incompetent to deal with your health concerns.

**Transmits Emotional Information**

An additional function of NVC is to convey emotional information. When you are angry, you scowl; when you are in love, you look gooey; when you feel happy, you smile. Nonverbal communication actually allows you to convey three different kinds of emotional information as follows.

**Attitudes Toward the Other**

First, NVC conveys your attitudes toward the other person in an interaction. If your facial expression conveys anxiety, viewers assume you are frightened. If your face looks relaxed and warm, viewers assume you are comfortable. If you care about what your professor has to say, you fall silent when a lecture begins; talking in class (professors’ biggest complaint about students) makes it difficult for people to hear and shows lack of respect.
Attitudes Toward the Situation
Second, NVC conveys your attitudes toward the situation. For example, rapidly moving about while talking conveys a message of anxiety. Police officers often see fidgeting and an inability to maintain eye contact as indicators of a person’s guilt.

Attitude Toward Yourself
Third, NVC conveys information about your attitude toward yourself. If a person is arrogant, confident, or low in self-esteem, it is expressed through nonverbal behaviors. An arrogant man may not express verbally how highly he thinks of himself, but you can tell he holds himself in high regard through his nonverbal actions, such as facial expression, tone of voice, eye contact, and body posture. If someone stands up to her full height and faces you directly, you might assume that she is confident. Conversely, if she slouches and stares at the ground, you might assume that she is shy, diffident, and insecure.

Establishes Relational Meaning and Understanding
Your relationships with others guide and inform your everyday communication, and your everyday communication develops these relationships. Nonverbal communication not only regulates social interaction, but it also acts as a silent relational regulator. Regulation of interactions serves to regulate engagement, politeness, coordination of action, and sense of pleasure in the interaction—all of which are ultimately relational in effect. The appearance of others enables you to distinguish and make judgments about them, as well as forms the basis of relational attraction. In fact, you often are attracted to people with facial and bodily features very similar to your own.

Relational meaning and understanding can be gained from all of the aforementioned functions of NVC, especially the expression of emotional information, and you will see more examples as we next work through the types of NVC. When we write about the function of NVC in the establishment of relational meaning and understanding, think specifically about how it establishes rapport, connection, engagement, responsiveness, liking, and power.

The Elements of Nonverbal Communication
So far we have discussed NVC as if it is a single thing, but it is actually made up of many different elements used collectively in the construction and interpretation of meaning, the development of identity, and the enactment of relationships. We discuss them individually to provide a more detailed explanation, but keep in mind that NVC works as a system comprising all these elements. Accordingly, we put them back together again at the end of this section.
Proxemics: Space and Distance

Proxemics is the study of space and distance in communication. Using space in different ways conveys different meanings: You lay it out as living rooms, bedrooms, offices, or bus shelters, and you decorate, rearrange, and occupy it. You often mark and establish it as your own even when you do not have exclusive control over it: sitting in your favorite chair at school or laying your books on a table to indicate its occupation. Countries possess space and usually mark it with a flag to indicate ownership and control. Both countries and people get quite upset if space regarded as theirs is invaded in some way. If somebody sits in your favorite chair or moves the books you placed on a table, you will probably be irritated. If a person you have just met stands mere inches away and stares at your face, you may feel uncomfortable. Of course, a romantic partner standing that close to you may be more than welcome. The occupation of space and the distance you maintain from others conveys messages about control, acceptance, and relationships.

Territoriality is the establishment and maintenance of space that you claim for your personal use. Knapp and Hall (2002) point out three types of territory that you may establish: primary, secondary, and public. Primary territory is space that you own or have principal control over and that is central to your life, such as your house, room, apartment, office, or car. How you maintain and control this space conveys a great deal to those around you. Decorating your home in a particular fashion not only provides you with a sense of comfort but also informs others about the type of person you may be or the types of interests you may have. Even in dorm rooms, though they are generally less than spacious, roommates find a decorative way to assert ownership of “their” areas.

You establish secondary territory, or space that is not central to your life or exclusive to you, as your own through repeated use. A good example of secondary territory is the room where your class is held. Chances are pretty good that you and your fellow students always sit in the exact same location that you sat in on the first day of class. Even though this space does not belong to you, others associate it with you because of repeated use. Accordingly, if you came to class one day and someone was sitting in “your” seat, you would probably get a little upset or at minimum be uncomfortable during class if you were forced to sit elsewhere.

Public territory is space open to everyone but available for your sole temporary occupancy, such as park benches or
seats in a movie theater. Secondary and public territory can involve the same type of physical space, such as a table at a restaurant, so consider this: If you go to the same restaurant every day for lunch and always sit at the same table, eventually it will become your secondary territory. Although it is open to everyone, once you claim that space for your temporary use, you assume exclusive control over it for the time being and would not expect anyone to violate that. Of course, there are cultural variations in the use of public territory. In the United States, for example, if you and your date went to a restaurant and were seated at a table for four, the two additional seats would remain empty regardless of whether other people were waiting to be seated. In many European countries, however, it would not be surprising if another couple you do not know were eventually seated at your table.

Markers, used to establish and announce your territory, are usually quite effective. People generally mark space by putting their “stuff” on it. Markers are especially common when using public territory because of its seemingly open and unrestricted nature. For example, when you lay a jacket over the back of a chair, you have claimed that chair. Should someone want to move the chair, he or she would probably ask your permission rather than simply removing the jacket and taking the chair. Markers are often used to indicate privacy and control, and you feel uncomfortable if someone else enters the space without permission. People meet this “invasion” with varying degrees of disapproval, but blood pressure frequently goes up (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006).

**Personal Space and Distance**

In addition to establishing territory as your own, you carry around with you an idea of how much actual space you should have during an interaction, and it will be affected by your status, your sex, and your liking for the person with whom you are talking. It also will be affected by the situations in which you find yourself.

**Personal space** refers to that space legitimately claimed or occupied by a person for the time being. Close friends are literally closer in the sense that you permit them to be in closer proximity than you do other people. You generally tend to stand closer to the people you like. In fact, if you look around, you can tell whether people are friends or strangers according to the amount of space between them.

All of us have a **body buffer zone**, a kind of imaginary aura around us that we regard as part of ourselves. People differ in the size of their body buffer zone, and if you step into the body buffer zone that someone feels is “their space,” even if it is beyond what you would normally expect, you may be in for trouble. Your friends and family can enter your body buffer zone more freely than other people. You react to space and its use depending on the kind of situation in which you find yourself. An early pioneer of personal space research, E. T. Hall (1966) distinguished among intimate distance (contact to 18 inches), personal distance (18–48 inches), social distance (48–144 inches), and public distance (12–25 feet) (see Figure 3.2). Although valuable, this early research does not account
for cultural differences, and it has become accepted that people from Latino and Arab cultures require less space for each of these types of encounters than do Northern Europeans and North Americans.

**Figure 3.2** Hall's (1966) Four Types of Personal Space

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**Proxemics and Everyday Life**

The actual meaning of space and distance is framed by your relationships with others. What it means for someone to stand mere inches away from you could vary a great deal depending on whether he or she is a friend, an adversary, or a complete stranger. A friend moving the backpack you placed on a table in order to sit near you would mean something entirely different than if a complete stranger did it.

Your use of space and distance actually signifies or enacts these particular relationships. Individuals in subordinate roles tend to give more space to individuals in leadership positions. An employee, for example, would stand at a greater distance when talking with an employer than he or she would with a coworker, indicating the superior-subordinate nature of that relationship and enabling both interactants to perform their respective roles. Actual physical space is often laid out to indicate and perform leadership or power roles. For example, a formal chairperson of a meeting sits at one end of the table, usually in a special seat, and everyone else lines up along the length of the table at right angles to the chairperson; in contrast, a more secure or less formal leader might sit anywhere at the table. From seemingly minor physical facts about the distribution and use of space, then, you can determine relational information about the people in a setting—who is in charge and who is not—as well as the leader’s preferred style of interaction, formal or informal.

Your use of space and distance is also where relational negotiation takes place. For instance, a friend who desires a more intimate relationship with you may begin standing a bit closer to gauge your reaction. Similarly, a subordinate decreasing the amount of space given to a superior may be indicating a desire for an advanced role or a more cultural conditions.
equal relationship. Either attempt could be accepted or rejected depending on the other person’s view of the relationship. Such relational negotiation frequently takes place in families, with adolescent sons or daughters wanting their parents to stay out of their bedrooms.

The use of space and distance will also guide your actual interactions with others and how you might approach them. If your friend has books, papers, and other material spread out over a large space, it could indicate that he or she prefers to be alone. In this case, you might ask your friend before you move these items to the side, or you might avoid going over altogether. Your instructor working in his or her office with the door wide open could be indicating that he or she is available to see students. Still, you would probably attempt to knock or at least announce yourself before entering the office, because you are essentially invading the instructor’s primary space. The reactions of your friend sitting at a table or your instructor working in the office—looking up and smiling or with a harried expression—will probably dictate what you do next, which brings us to the next element of NVC.

Kinesics: Movement

**Kinesics** refers to the movement that takes place during the course of an interaction. While interacting, you may move around quite a bit, shift position and walk around as you talk, cross and uncross your legs, or lean forward on a table or sit back in a chair. Kinesics can be broken down into posture, gesture, and eye contact/gaze. In every case, whether separately or in combination, these cues once again convey messages about your relationship to the speaker or your audience, to the subject you are discussing, or to the situation as a whole. Often, movement is seen as either very intimate or very aggressive, especially if you move into somebody’s space as we discussed with proxemics.

**Posture**

Posture refers to the position of your body during the course of an interaction; it may be relaxed and welcoming or tense and off-putting. For example, someone draping him- or herself over a chair will look very relaxed, and someone sitting up straight or standing to attention will not. You can probably look around the room now and see people with different postures. Even during class, you likely draw conclusions about whether people are interested just from the posture they adopt.

In an open posture, the front of the body is observable, and in closed posture, the front of the body is essentially shut off, usually because the arms are folded across the chest or the person is hunched over. Both types of posture convey the three attitudes we noted before: (1) attitudes about self (confidence, anxiety, shyness, a feeling of authority), (2) attitudes about others (liking, respect, attention), and (3) attitudes about the situation (comfort, ease). An open posture conveys positive messages, and a closed posture conveys negative messages. When someone feels “down,” he or she tends to look “down,” slumping over, slouching, and generally being depressed (depressed—pressed down). These postures send messages to others about a person’s relaxation, attention, confidence, comfort, and willingness to communicate.
**Gesture**

Gesture can be defined as a movement of the body or any of its parts in a way that conveys an idea or intention or displays a feeling or an assessment of the situation. Suppose you were in a foreign country, one of your friends suffered heatstroke, and no one knew the word for *dehydrated* in that country’s language. You would likely indicate your needs for water by making a “drinking” gesture.

When people think of gestures, hand or arm movements most often come to mind, but facial expressions also count as gestures for our purposes. Quite frequently, your face and the rest of your body work together to express meaning. For instance, when a person is expressing an emotion, his or her face will provide information about the exact emotion being expressed or experienced, and his or her body will provide information about its extent. You could, for example, be angry and scowling while your body is fairly loose and fluid, indicating low-intensity anger. However, you could be scowling, holding your body tight and rigid, and almost shaking, which would indicate great anger and tell others to use their knowledge of proxemics to give you plenty of space!

Gestures can be split broadly into two sorts: those that signal a feeling not expressed in words (emblems) and those that signal something said in words (illustrations). Emblematic gestures are not related to speech in the sense that they do not help illustrate what is being said, although they may clarify what a person means. Consider conductors directing bands and orchestras, police officers directing traffic, and coaches signaling plays. Emblems can nevertheless be translated into verbal expressions; for example, you recognize that bouncing the palm of your hand off your forehead means, “How stupid of me! Why didn’t I think of it before?”

**Illustrators**

Illustrators are directly related to speech as it is being spoken and are used to visualize or emphasize its content. For example, turning your palm down and then rotating it as you describe how to unscrew a bottle cap is an illustrator, and screwing up your face while saying “This tastes disgusting” is an illustrator using facial expression. Like other NVC, gestures can also regulate interaction, and some gestures that relate to speech regulate its pace or emphasis. While making a speech, you might raise a finger to draw attention to the fact that you wish to make a key point.

**Eye Contact Versus Gaze**

Eye contact refers to the extent to which you look directly into the eyes of another person and how that person looks back at you. Someone who “looks you in the eye” while talking is generally seen as reliable and honest; someone with shifty eyes is treated as suspicious and untrustworthy.

Gaze—distinguished from eye contact, where both interactants look at each other—describes one person looking at
another and, most of the time, is seen as rewarding. Most people generally like to be looked at when they are talking to someone else. In fact, if you gaze at a speaker and smile or nod approvingly, you will probably find that the speaker pays more attention to you, looks toward you more often, and engages in eye contact with you. Try this with your instructor the next time you are in class, and see if he or she responds to you personally in this way.

Starting with the broad generalization that gaze and eye contact convey mostly positive messages, note that eye contact indicates engagement in interactions, and eye contact and orientation can start conversations or establish the likelihood of interaction. A continued positive pattern of eye contact shows that you are paying attention to someone and are interested in what he or she is saying.

Although most eye contact is positive, it can also convey negative messages. A wide-eyed stare can mean a disbelieving “Excuse me?!” or be a threat. Years ago, Ellsworth and her colleagues (Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Henson, 1972) stood at the intersections of roads and stared at some drivers and not others. Those who were stared at tended to drive away more speedily, suggesting that a stare is a threatening stimulus to flight. Gaze can therefore be threatening and negative as much as it can be enticing and positive. Something for you to think about, then, is how this particular element of NVC helps you determine whether a positive or negative message is being sent (hint: NVC is a system of different parts that interrelate).

Eye contact or gaze is often used to gather information or acquire feedback from the speaker as you are listening and from the listener when you are talking. If you are looking at someone, you can see how he or she is doing and get a better idea of what is going on for him or her. If you are talking, this allows you to assess whether another person is paying attention, how he or she responds to what you are saying, and how he or she evaluates you.

Some people (shy people, for example), afraid that others will evaluate them negatively, tend to decrease eye contact (Bradshaw, 2006), which cuts out negative inputs from other people. For shy people, this is a distinct advantage, but it also reduces the amount of information they can gather about a listener’s reaction to what they say. Many outsiders assume that decreased eye contact is evidence of other social flaws, such as deception, so a shy person who avoids eye contact through fear of feedback may eventually create an impression of being shifty and unreliable. Burgoon and colleagues (Burgoon, Coker, & Coker, 1986) found that gaze aversion produces consistently negative evaluations of interviewees. Typically, unconfident behavior (as in shy people) involves not only low eye contact but also nervous speech, poor posture, tendency for long silences in conversation, and lack of initiative in discussion.

Eye contact is also used to regulate interactions. Some characteristic patterns of eye movements go along with talk in conversations to regulate its flow. The speaker, for example, tends to look at the listener at the start and end of sentences (or paragraphs, if the speaker is telling a longer tale) but may look away during the middle parts. A listener who wishes to speak next will tend to look hard at the present speaker, and a person asking a question will look right at the person to whom it is directed, maintaining his or her gaze while awaiting a reply. Listeners tend to look at speakers more consistently than speakers look at listeners in everyday speaking. When giving a speech to a group or large audience, however, it is important that you not only look at your audience (rather
than at your notes) most of the time but also distribute your gaze around the room or the group.

Interaction is further regulated through use of eye contact to manage the turn taking noted earlier, a kind of eye-based “over and out.” In cultures where simultaneous speech is taken as a sign of impoliteness, rather than of active and desirable involvement in the interaction, eye contact is used to end or yield a turn (a speaker looks longer toward the audience at the end of sentences), as well as to request a turn (a listener establishes longer eye contact with a speaker in order to signal willingness to enter conversation). You leave conversation by breaking off eye contact (typically 45 seconds before departure) and then, when the talking stops, turning toward an exit.

**Vocalics: Voice**

**Vocalics**, sometimes called paralanguage, refers to vocal characteristics that provide information about how verbal communication should be interpreted and how you are feeling. For example, the tone of your voice can be strained when you are angry or high-pitched when you are anxious, and your talking speed may be fast when you are excited. Vocalics indicate your degree of comfort in an interaction and whether you like the person to whom you are talking or feel upset by him or her. You can also signal to other people how you feel about what you are saying. You must manage your paralanguage when giving a speech, for example, to let people know you’re interested in your topic. In contrast to verbal communication, vocalics involves the voice rather than the content of speech, referring not to what you say but to how you say it.

A main element of vocalics involves the sound of your voice (voice quality) and how it can change during the course of an interaction or a speech. Sometimes you can tell who is calling on the phone just by the way a call begins; some people do not need to identify themselves directly to you since you just know how their voices sound. Even people who do not know you can tell something about you from your accent and tone of voice. For example, your accent can give people information about where you come from (the deep South as opposed to Minnesota, for instance). The sound of your voice alone can indicate your age.
and sex. Also, some people make decisions about your attractiveness on the basis of the sound of your voice, with some accents preferred over others.

You often use the tone or pitch of your voice to emphasize parts of the sentence that you think are the most important. A loud scream or a shout of “Fire!” or “Help!” conveys the situation as urgent in a way that a simple conversational tone would not. These aspects of vocalics are used to emphasize elements of an interaction to which an audience must pay more attention. You can make a speech more interesting, for example, by varying vocalic pitch and tone in a way that keeps the audience attentive and helps the audience identify the most important parts of the speech. Tone of voice also enables you to determine what someone really means by the words coming out of his or her mouth and is especially important when trying to determine whether or not a person is being sarcastic.

Another aspect of vocalics is speech rate, or the speed at which someone talks. When a teacher wants you to pay special attention to what is being said, he or she will sometimes slow down so you realize the importance of the point. Someone who speaks too fast is likely to be treated as nervous or stressed or possibly shy or uncomfortable in the situation. In everyday life, where people are relaxed among friends, their speech rate tends to be lively and fluent rather than stilted or halting. In stressful circumstances, however, their speech rate may be hesitant or uneven.

One surprising part of vocalics is silence. You have likely heard the seemingly contradictory phrases “Silence is golden” and “Silence is deadly.” Tending to differ on the extent to which they view silence as one or the other, people evaluate silence depending on contextual and relational factors surrounding its use. Most people in the United States—especially on a date or in an interview—meet silence or a prolonged break in conversation with discomfort. Actually able to convey many messages, however, when someone does not know what to say or cannot take a turn in a conversation, silence could indicate embarrassment, anxiety, or lack of preparation as well as shyness, confusion, or disrespect. Silence can also be used to show anger or frustration, such as when you are mad at someone and give him or her the “silent treatment,” or relational comfort, in that people do not feel pressured to keep the conversation going. “Shared inactivity” can be an indication of the absolute comfort in one another’s presences as when you and a partner just veg out in front of the TV.

Giles (2008) shows that people can indicate their membership in a particular group or their relationship to other people by the way they use vocalic nonverbal behavior. For instance, if you are from the South, you might use a heavier accent in your conversation with others from your state or region, but you might tone down your accent when talking to people from the Northeast. Where people wish to maintain a distance from the person they are talking to, they will diverge, or hang on to differences in accent, but when they want to become closer to the other person, they will tend to converge, or match their way of talking to the other person’s. You may notice yourself copying the speech styles of people you like.

**Vocalics and Regulation**

In addition to sending relational messages, people also use vocalics to regulate their interactions. A sharp intake of breath indicates shock, pain, or surprise; “uh-huh” or “um,” known as **backchannel communication** (vocalizations by a listener that give
feedback to the speaker to show interest, attention, and/or a willingness to keep listening) may be used either to encourage someone else to keep talking or to indicate that a speaker does not want to yield the floor, still has something to say, but has not yet decided what.

The most common use of vocalics in regulating your interaction is with **turn taking**, which is when you hand over speaking to another person. This hand-over happens much less obviously than does a radio form of communication, where an airline pilot or a trucker, for example, says “over” or “comeback” to indicate that he or she has finished speaking and wants another person to respond. In your normal interactions, you don’t need to say “over” because you can tell from the speaker’s tone of voice or eye movements (referring back to kinesics) that he or she wants you to begin speaking, but you still need to signal a hand-over. For example, when someone asks a question, raising the pitch of his or her voice afterward serves to prompt you that the questioner now expects an answer. You also know when people are coming to the end of what they want to say because they will generally slow down somewhat and drop the pitch of their voice. That is how students know when a lecture is coming to an end and that they can start closing their books!

### Chronemics: Time

**Chronemics** encompasses use and evaluation of time in your interactions, including the location of events in time. For example, the significance of a romantic encounter can often be determined by when it occurs. You might see a lunch date as more informal and less meaningful than a late-night candlelit dinner. Whether you are meeting for lunch or dinner, however, your meal will have a time structure and pattern. You probably have the salad before the ice cream.

Chronemics also involves the duration of events. You have probably noticed that boring lectures seem to last forever. You may also have had the experience that people often end their college romances after about 18 months or during the spring semester, when one partner might be graduating or going away for the summer. You are quite likely to comment if you run into someone whom you have not seen for “a-a-a-ges.” Also, you would probably feel the need to apologize if you left an e-mail unanswered for too long or were late for an appointment. Cultural differences in attitudes toward time also exist; some cultures especially value timely completion of tasks over attention to relationships, respect, or status, while others place the priorities exactly in reverse, feeling that it is discourteous to get down to the task before taking plenty of time to create a good relational atmosphere first.

### Chronemics and Regulation of Interaction

Chronemics can affect the structure of interactions. You all have an expectation about the number of milliseconds that are supposed to elapse between the time when one person finishes speaking and when the other joins in. When this timing gets disrupted,
interaction becomes uncomfortable for everybody—one reason why people who stam-
mer or are very shy create difficulty for other people in interaction by not picking up the
conversational baton when they are expected to (Bradshaw, 2006). You also recognize
that when someone is really paying attention to you and is interested in what you are
saying, he or she will tend to be engaged and maintain “synchrony.” He or she will not
allow too much time to elapse between utterances and try to synchronize his or her
interaction and behavior with yours. In addition, you can indicate interest in somebody
else by answering his or her questions promptly, a chronemic activity. You also convey
information about your knowledge and expertise by keeping your talk flowing freely
and not allowing yourself too many hesitations. Fluency and the absence of hesitation
both count as chronemic elements of nonverbal communication since they are about
the timing of speech.

Another important element of the timing of speech is whether or not your speech over-
laps someone else’s, which encompasses relational themes of the interaction. In the United
States, White culture assumes that it is rude to interrupt someone, without making an
apology, when he or she is talking, and interruption is often seen as a power/dominance
ploy. By contrast, in African American and other cultures, it is simply rude and uncaring
not to respond to someone else’s talk when it is offered, and backchannel communica-
tions, such as “Amen to that,” “Go on,” “Then what?” “Oh yeah!” and “Is that right?” are
expected. Of course, you also know that sometimes you interrupt somebody else without
intending to and that overlapping of speech is sometimes just a demonstration of excite-
ment and interest. Friends do it all the time, and it seems to be an index of the informal-
ity of their conversations. Some researchers distinguish between interruption, where you
stop the flow of the other person speaking, and overlap, where you talk at the same time
as the other person. In White United States culture, friends tend to overlap more often
than interrupt, but in other cultures, too, overlap is a sign of involvement in close relation-
ships. Unlike strangers, friends can in fact interrupt one another relatively freely without
anyone taking offense. Some kinds of interruption simply indicate the informality and
friendliness of the interaction.

Haptics: Touch

Haptics is the study of the specific nonverbal behaviors involving touch. When people
get into your personal space, they will likely make actual physical contact with your
most personal possession, your body. Touch is used not only as a greeting to start an
interaction (a handshake or a kiss) but also in ceremonies, whether baptism, the con-
firming laying on of hands, holding a partner’s hands while making wedding vows, or
as a means of congratulation from a simple handshake to a pat on the back to those piles
of players who form on top of the goal scorer in sports.

Psychologist Sidney Jourard (1971) observed and recorded how many times couples
in cafés casually touched each other in an hour. The highest rates were in Puerto Rico
(180 times per hour) and Paris (110 times per hour). Guess how many times per hour
couples touched each other in the mainland United States? Twice! (In London, it was
zero. They never touched.) Jourard also found that French parents and children touched
each other three times more frequently than did American parents and children.

Heslin (1974) noted that touch, of which there are many different types, has many
different functions, as shown in Table 3.2. These forms of touch show positive feelings,
but each could also produce negative feelings: Someone you feel close to shakes your
hand instead of hugging you, or someone you are not close to tries to hug you. Touch
can also indicate influence. Have you ever seen a politician who places one arm on
the back of a visiting foreign dignitary to indicate a place to which the person should
move? The two actions together serve to indicate politely to the other person where
the next stage of a discussion or proceedings will take place. Touch can also serve
as a physiological stimulus, for example in sexual touch or from a reassuring back rub.

As with all other NVC, touch can play a role in interaction management. For exam-
ple, you can touch someone on the arm to interrupt the flow of conversation. Also you
both begin and end encounters with handshakes on many occasions, indicating that
the beginning and ending of the interaction have essentially relational consequences
because you imply, through touch, continuance of the relationship beyond the specific
interaction.

Table 3.2 Heslin’s (1974) Functions of Touch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional/professional</th>
<th>Touch is permitted by the context—for example, during a medical exam, someone you hardly know may touch parts of your body that even your best friend has never seen.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social/polite</td>
<td>Touch is formal—for example, a handshake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship/warmth</td>
<td>Touch is an expression of regard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love/intimacy</td>
<td>Touch is special, permitted only with those with whom you are close.</td>
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</table>

The Interacting System of Nonverbal Communication

In the last few pages, we have split NVC into separate parts to give a better understanding
of the complicated system that makes it work, but we promised to reassemble them at the
end. It has probably struck you that elements of NVC carry double messages or, at least,
that they can be “read” in more than one way. A stare can be a threat or a sign of longing; a
touch can be an intimate caress or a sexual harassment violation; a move toward someone
can be loving or aggressive. Same behavior, different meaning! How do you know what to
make of the behavior and how it should be understood?

Essentially, you can discern the meaning of NVC in four ways that recognize that it
occurs as part of a system and is related to other parts of an interaction:

1. Nonverbal communication has a relationship to the words used with it. It
can affect how words are understood, and words can affect how NVC is
understood. Someone caressing your thigh and saying “I love you” is doing
something different from someone touching your thigh and saying “Is this
where it hurts?”
2. Any NVC has a relationship to other NVC that happens simultaneously. If someone is staring at you with a scowl and clenched fists, you can assume that the stare is intended as a threat; if the stare is accompanied by a smile and a soft expression, it is intended as friendly. Likewise, a smile accompanied by agitated gestures, sweating, or blushing probably means the person is nervous, but someone smiling and looking relaxed with an open posture is probably feeling friendly and confident.

3. The interpretation of NVC depends on its context. If someone stares at you in class, it feels different from a stare across a crowded singles bar; a scream at a sports match probably means your team just scored, but a scream in your apartment could indicate the discovery of a spider.

4. How NVC is interpreted is also affected by your relationship to another person. If the person caressing your thigh is a nurse, you’re probably right to assume that the touch is part of a treatment or medical exam, so stay there and get well. If the person is your instructor, it’s time to leave—and leave quickly.

We have referenced a few of the errors and violations that can occur in NVC (such as sitting in someone else’s special chair or touching someone when he or she does not want to be touched), but we have not given you direct guidance for how it can be improved. The preceding four guidelines should generally help you avoid serious errors, but we can go further and address specific ways to improve NVC overall.

**Improving Your Use of Nonverbal Communication**

Let’s start with what you already know. People can be poor at encoding their intentions or at decoding others’ meanings. The goal of improving NVC suggests immediately that you can identify errors that need to be improved or avoided.

Errors and NVC mistakes occur as part of life and cannot be avoided altogether, but violations can. A violation is a serious breach of a rule of NVC, such as invading someone’s territory or personal space in the ways discussed earlier. In general, a violation openly breaks a rule that ignores the four guidelines in the previous section that help interpret the interacting system of NVC. All the negative interpretations that follow violations of NVC rules derive from the fact that the violations are taken...
to indicate a negative attitude or relationship toward the other person, usually of dislike or disrespect. Although any NVC rule can be violated, the most fateful are often violations of touch since the body is the most personal and primary area of space, and invasion of someone’s body or personal space is a deeply disrespectful act.

Successful conversation and use of NVC depend in large part on how people tune in to one another and respond appropriately. Recall the earlier distinctions between encoding and decoding. Someone who is socially skilled is a good encoder and a good decoder, but you tend to notice more obviously when someone is bad at encoding and continually producing inappropriate NVC. For example, some very young children do not yet understand the rules and often need to be told directly, “Don’t stare; it’s rude” or “Look at me when I am talking to you.” It is harder to notice when someone is a poor decoder and just “doesn’t get it.”

One way to become a better decoder is to make sure that you attend to whether other people pay attention to NVC and seem to understand it. A good decoder also bonds with the speaker and watches out for the signals that the speaker sends about comfort in the situation. A good decoder will notice when the speaker is anxious and will smile more often or reward the speaker with head nods and encouraging NVC to put him or her at ease. A good listener also coordinates with the speaker and responds to his or her cues so the interaction runs smoothly with no awkward silences. Skilled listeners should also detect/decode the undercurrents of a speaker’s talk by attending carefully to eye movements and gestures that “leak” what the speaker truly feels. Finally, a good listener is encouraging and invites the speaker to continue, shows interest, looks at the speaker directly, is focused, and makes the speaker the center of attention in the conversation.

What about skilled encoding? A good speaker will affirm the listener by encoding approval and liking while talking—that is, as we have noted, by smiling or good eye contact. Good speakers also blend their NVC together with the talk to allow for consistency between what is said and what is delivered in the NVC channels. Directness is achieved by making sure that NVC is done clearly and unambiguously, and emotional clarity is presented by good signaling of what is felt. Good speakers and good actors are able to convey the emotions of their words by matching their nonverbal expression of emotion to the meaning of the words.

The skills listed in Table 3.3 can be broadly summarized by saying that two people in an interaction should not disrupt the usual patterns of normative interaction, and hence, they show the importance of NVC in regulating interaction while also sending positive messages about the other person and yourself—in short, about the relationship between the two people.

Table 3.3 Encoding and Decoding Skills

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Speaker/Encoder</th>
<th>Listener/Decoder</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Affirming</td>
<td>Attending</td>
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<td>Blending</td>
<td>Bonding</td>
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<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Coordinating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Directness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Clarity</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
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Chapter 3 Nonverbal Communication
Focus Questions Revisited

What is nonverbal communication?
Nonverbal communication is everything that communicates a message but does not include words. We looked, among other things, at space and distance, movement, vocal tone and pitch, time, gestures, touch, eye movements, and posture.

How does nonverbal communication work, and what work does it do in communication?
Nonverbal communication serves to convey attitudes about self, others, and interaction and to illustrate speech and regulate interaction.

How does nonverbal communication regulate (e.g., begin and end) interactions?
Nonverbal communication regulates interaction by initiating conversation, regulating the turns with which people speak, and defining when interactions have reached their end. It does this through eye movements, vocalics, and gestures, among other things.

What are the elements of nonverbal communication, and how do they interconnect?
Elements of NVC are proxemics, kinesics, vocalics, chronemics, and haptics. They work as an interacting system so a particular cue (for example, a stare) can be interpreted in the context of other cues (for example, a grim or friendly expression). The overall meaning of communication is determined by the combination within the system and by the frame of the relationship in which it happens.

How can you improve your use of nonverbal communication?
There are two sides of NVC that can be improved: encoding and decoding. Improvement of encoding involves better projection of your emotions and feelings; improvement of decoding involves paying more attention to the other person in an interaction and fully understanding what he or she means.

Key Concepts

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Questions to Ask Your Friends

- How good are your friends at telling when you are not speaking the truth?
- How good are your friends at telling when you're embarrassed, when you wish you did not have to tell them something, or when you feel uncomfortable?
- Ask your friends whether they think they could get away with telling you a lie.

Media Links

- Look for TV news stories involving police putting people into cars. What percentage of police touch the person’s head? In what other circumstances, if any, do people open the car door for someone else and then touch the head of the person getting in? What do you think is being conveyed?
- How many news stories can you find where a fight got started because someone felt another person was “looking at him in a funny way” or infringing upon his personal space?
- How do TV shows use the placement of furniture to add something to the story (look at The Office, The Cosby Show, or Friends)?

Ethical Issues

- Now that you know more thoroughly some of the behaviors involved in NVC, would it be ethical for you to use this information to deceive other people?
- Would it be unethical for you to use your knowledge to reveal when other people are being deceptive?
- If a member of another culture is breaking a nonverbal rule in your culture, should you tell him or her? Why or why not?

Answers to Photo Captions

**Photo 3.1**  There are static cues and dynamic cues: Static cues include the hairstyle, wrist band, chain, necklace, and tattoo, all identifying him as a “punk.” Although this is a still photo, he has taken a posture that in everyday conversation would be part of a dynamic system of movement. His posture is somewhat defiant, his expression somewhat condescending or possibly threatening or hinting at menace.

**Photo 3.2**  Bodily adornment can create images of power and intimidation in enemies. People sometimes adopt body modifications in order to raise their status or inspire fear.

**Photo 3.3**  Nonverbal communication regulates interaction first through recognition (we recognize someone as the individual he or she is by sight, by touch, or
in the case of animals and human beings by smell/fragrance), and then there are various rituals of behavior that begin interactions (catching someone’s eye, handshakes, bowing, or sniffing) and behaviors that are used to end interactions, such as a handshake, a bow, a wave, or a wag of the tail.

**Photo 3.4** You can tell they like each other from at least the following: physical closeness, touching together parts of the body not normally touched with strangers (thighs and calves), and smiling at an intimate distance. Their similar dress codes and open postures indicate comfort with each other; the woman’s body (her left shoulder) and head lean toward the man. There are also static cues: Where they are sitting is an intimate place.

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**Student Study Site**

Visit the study site at [www.sagepub.com/ciel](http://www.sagepub.com/ciel) for e-flashcards, practice quizzes, and other study resources.

**References**


