

Chapter 6

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR APPROACHES

Communication often involves more than a verbal message. We typically send and receive several messages simultaneously. Messages sent without using words are called “nonverbal” messages. For instance, a person’s verbal message concerning a new shirt you are wearing might be, “I really like your new shirt.” If the person accompanied the verbal message with nonverbal behavior such as erratic eye contact, a downward twist of the lower lip, words spoken in a slightly higher than average pitch, shoulders turning away from you, eyes blinking, and feet shuffling, you might decide that the verbal message was inconsistent with the nonverbal cues. Which would you tend to believe? Probably you would conclude the person really does not like your new shirt and is simply trying not to offend you.

Our example suggests that nonverbal communication is important because it is highly believable. Understanding what people mean is central to how effective we are socially; determining what people mean is not always easy. Verbal statements are affected by a number of factors, including the desire not to offend, social pressure to agree when others are present, the desire to make a commitment when time and resources may not be available, worries about other issues that divert attention, and deceptive comments just to avoid questions asked. For example, individuals believe one thing but say they believe something else, claim to pay attention but are actually thinking about their next vacation, and say they will behave one way while intending to do just the opposite. The better we can “read” people, the more we know what to expect and can plan accordingly. Understanding nonverbal communication is a very valuable social tool.

There is widespread interest in nonverbal communication by both the general public and those in the communication field. The book *Body Language* (Fast, 1970) continues to enjoy popularity even after 46 years, and several dubious conclusions it contains about nonverbal communication. In the communication discipline, nonverbal behavior is one of the major lines of research.

Nonverbal behavior is thought to be at least as important as verbal behavior in understanding communication. Some researchers have argued that nonverbal behaviors typically stimulate much more meaning than the meaning created by the words used in a communication situation (Mehrabian, 1981). The nonverbal code may be viewed as a language, one that we begin learning just as early in life as we do the verbal code.

The popularity of nonverbal communication makes it necessary to emphasize that it is not a “cure-all” for social problems; studying nonverbal communication does not guarantee social effectiveness. Popular books sometimes characterize nonverbal codes as “secret weapons,” requiring only that you learn the secrets to conquer any task. However, nonverbal communication is only one dimension of communication competence. Competence with the verbal code, constructing effective arguments, and good delivery are also very important.

AFFECTIVE-COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNICATION



The potency of verbal and nonverbal communication varies according to what is being communicated. Understanding the **affective** and **cognitive dimensions** of communication will clarify the variation. The affective dimension includes the communication of emotion (such as anger, love, fear, or happiness), attitude (how much something is liked or disliked, for example), and predispositions (such as anxiousness, confidence, or depression). These feelings can be communicated by the verbal code, but the task is difficult. For instance, when you try to tell a friend how much you love another person, you may feel that you have not really been understood. Some ideas are difficult to put into words but can be expressed very clearly nonverbally. Simply observing how a person looks at you communicates a good deal about the degree of affection, for instance. Nonverbal behavior is particularly effective in communicating affect.

The verbal code, on the other hand, is more effective when the goal is to communicate thoughts or cognitions. The cognitive component of communication refers to beliefs about what is and/or is not related to the object of communication. You can have beliefs about attributes, characteristics, and consequences of an object. For instance you might believe that a candidate for the presidency is honest, sincere, friendly, and an expert in domestic issues, but a novice in foreign affairs. Beliefs have to do with how things are related. This might also be

thought of as “an idea” or “thinking.” Typically, abstract processes such as spatial reasoning are necessary to comprehend a belief. These processes are very difficult to express nonverbally. The verbal code seems to have been designed especially for communicating the cognitive aspects of our internal processes. In our example, expressing beliefs about a candidate’s relationship to domestic issues and foreign affairs could be done verbally without much difficulty. However, to do this nonverbally would be a nearly hopeless task. Expressing affect for the candidate through the nonverbal code could be accomplished very easily. A negative opinion about the candidate could be expressed with a look of disapproval; positive feelings could be expressed with smiles, head nodding, or clapping.

THE CONTEXTUAL NATURE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

The idea that the meaning of a message depends on its context is important in understanding nonverbal communication. A context involves situations and variables in the situations that make it different from other contexts. These differences occur along the lines of who, what, how, why, where, and when. The characteristics of the context influence the meaning of a message. Take a symbol such as a handshake. In a situation where you are introduced to someone, the handshake might indicate “I’m very glad to meet you,” whereas the very same behavior in greeting an old friend could mean “I’m so glad to see you again.” A handshake with rivals before a contest can mean, “May the better person win”; after closing a business deal, “It was a pleasure to do business with you”; after a bitter quarrel, “Let’s put this fight behind us.” The behavior is essentially the same in all these examples. However, the meaning is considerably different. The reason is quite simple; we have learned that a given symbol (or set of symbols) means one thing in one situation but something different in another. Thus, the meaning of a message is influenced by context. We should note the context in which a message is presented when we decide on its meaning.

Despite the fact that the contextual nature of communication is discernible, some of the popular books on nonverbal communication overlook this concept. Instead, they suggest that certain nonverbal behaviors mean only one thing and ignore the other possible meanings that could be created by changes in the situation. For instance, a possible interpretation of a woman talking to a man with her arms folded in front of her is that she is signaling unavailability; he is “closed out.” What if this behavior occurs in a chilly room or even in a warm room by a woman who has just come in from the cold? In such cases, the nonverbal arm behavior might say nothing about the woman’s desire for a relationship. It is misleading to treat a set of nonverbal behaviors as a formula for social knowledge. In certain circumstances it might be true that “a woman is interested in you if she moves her shoulders back, is slightly flushed, and tilts her head to one side a bit.” These behaviors might indicate interest in an intimate setting. If you are walking across campus to your next class, they might

signal that she had a good workout at the gym, is stretching her deltoids, and is reacting to the muscle stimulation.

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR AND INTENTIONALITY

In Chapter 1 we explained that all human behavior is not communicative behavior. *Communication occurs when humans manipulate symbols to stimulate meaning in other humans.* Symbols are only one of several things that can stimulate meaning. Non-symbolic behavior can stimulate a response; however, intention is not involved. A woman may fold her arms for many reasons. If sending a message about unavailability is not one of her reasons, then communication about approachability does not occur when she folds her arms. Of course, others might “read meaning into” her behavior. She cannot stop people from thinking. Meaning can be stimulated by both symbolic and nonsymbolic elements. If a woman’s arm folding is nonsymbolic regarding accessibility, imagine her confusion if a man said, “Why did you just send me a message that said you are unavailable?” Her response, in the terminology of this book might be, “I cannot stop you from seeing meaning in nonmessage behavior. If you do, do not act as though I am communicating with you. Realize that you are creating meaning for yourself that may have no relation to my ideas and feelings.”

Perhaps one of the reasons the area of nonverbal communication has become so popular is that nonverbal behavior provides clues to detecting attitudes, traits, and deception. There are many examples. Pupil dilation shows interest. Frequent head nodding indicates a feeling of lower status. Deception is signified by less forward body lean. Nervousness is evidenced by fewer gestures. Such behaviors seem to reveal information that people themselves usually would not volunteer. As such, these nonverbal behaviors appear to be a valuable means for understanding people. Despite this appeal, the behaviors in question usually do not constitute communication because intentional manipulation of symbols to send messages is not apparent. Instead, the behaviors are more like symptoms as defined by Cronkhite (1986). For example, a drooping posture may be a symptom of sadness or depression.

Emotional leakage

A term used to describe when a person’s feelings “leak out” through one or more nonverbal channels

Similarly, **emotional leakage** is a consequence of the perception of symptoms. Emotional leakage is the term used to describe when a person’s true feelings “leak out” through one or more nonverbal channels. Unknowingly, or at a very low level of awareness, individuals reveal their true emotions because of their nonverbal behavior. If you are bored with a conversation but pretend you are interested, emotional leakage might occur if your laughter were less relaxed and you used fewer vocal expressions and head nods. The idea that a person’s boredom would leak out and foil the person’s attempt to create a particular impression is intriguing. However, the “leaky” behaviors are not symbolic; most likely they are symptoms. As our conception of communication makes

clear, all meaning does not result from communication. Although highly provocative, “emotional leakage” is not a communication behavior because it does not involve a deliberate message on the part of the sender. Instead, one-way meaning is formed in the mind of the observer based on naturally occurring symptoms or behaviors that cannot easily be controlled.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION ABILITIES

People vary widely in how well they encode and decode written and spoken messages. Because individuals range from very high to very low in verbal language abilities, we would expect to find differences in nonverbal communication as well. Research suggests that the ability to encode and decode nonverbal behavior may be an attribute of certain personality traits. People who are extroverted are more skilled at portraying emotions through vocal and facial codes. Introverts are less able to communicate emotions nonverbally, if for no other reason than they have not had as much practice due to their tendency to withdraw from people.

Self-monitoring of expressive behavior (see Chapter 4) is another trait that appears related to nonverbal encoding ability (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors are very aware of the impression they make on others. They are able to assess their behavior and reactions to it and make adjustments in their performance accordingly; high self-monitors are very adaptive. High self-monitors are also skilled at communicating emotions nonverbally when compared to low self-monitors. Having the motivation to monitor one’s behavior with respect to the reactions of others appears necessary for the development of the ability to encode nonverbal messages skillfully.

Greater encoding skill by high self-monitors has been investigated in terms of deceptive communication (Miller, de Turk, & Kalbfleisch, 1983). Research participants were asked to tell the truth or to lie about the feelings that they had while viewing pleasant or unpleasant slides. Both high and low self-monitors took part in the experiment. Participants either spoke immediately or were given twenty minutes to rehearse what they would say. Observers viewed videotapes of the participants’ messages and judged whether the individual was telling the truth or not. When rehearsal was permitted, high self-monitors were more effective in deceiving observers. The more time they had to practice their behavior, the more successful they were. Low self-monitors who had not rehearsed displayed more pauses and had a higher rate of nonfluencies such as “um.” This experiment confirmed the hypothesis that high self-monitors would be more effective in deceiving others.

There may be a sex difference in the ability to communicate emotions facially and vocally (Zaidel & Mehrabian, 1969). Females seem to be more skilled than males. One explanation for this is that culture has taught females to be more

Self-monitoring of expressive behavior

A trait that involves monitoring one’s nonverbal behavior and adapting it to situations in order to achieve communication goals

expressive and to reveal emotions. Males, on the other hand, have been conditioned to be more stoic and to inhibit expression of feelings. Because males engage less in emotionally expressive behavior, they are less skilled at encoding it. Nonverbal decoding ability is also related to sex. Psychologist Robert Rosenthal and his associates (1979) developed the PONS (Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity) test to measure ability to decode nonverbal messages. One of the most consistent results in research using this test is that females tend to score higher in comparison to males. The finding that females are higher in both nonverbal encoding and decoding abilities further illustrates the point that the two abilities are related. That is, if you are high on one, you tend to be high on the other; if you are unskilled regarding one, you tend to be unskilled regarding the other.

Although females generally score higher on the PONS test, there are some males who score equally well. These tend to be males who are in very communication-oriented professions that require sensitivity to the needs of others. Teachers, clinical psychologists, and actors are examples. This finding further supports the social-influence explanation given earlier for male-female differences in nonverbal behavior.

High scorers on the PONS test differ from low scorers in several ways in addition to gender. Low scorers tend to be younger. Just as with verbal language, nonverbal ability seems to improve with age. High scorers tend to function better socially, to have closer same-sex relationships, and to predict future events with greater accuracy.

In developing the PONS, Rosenthal experimented with the amount of time a scene was shown to people. He found when exposure was reduced from five seconds to 1/24 of a second, some people were still able to identify the emotion portrayed. These individuals who appeared to be especially sensitive to the nonverbal code reported that they had less satisfactory relationships with other people. Perhaps it is possible to see “too much” in the behavior of others, and this creates dissatisfaction with people. That is, extreme accuracy in decoding may make one more aware of the “common deceptions” that are a regular component of social interaction. Common deceptions refer to “white lies,” behaving one way but preferring something else, or concealing the truth because of a desire to protect someone’s feelings.

FUNCTIONS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Functional approaches have been used extensively to examine a number of areas in communication such as credibility, persuasion, and mass media. Viewing nonverbal communication in terms of the functions that it fulfills for the individual is similarly valuable. We will briefly examine six important functions.

SENDING UNCOMFORTABLE MESSAGES

Some messages are much easier to present nonverbally. Overt delivery of a verbal message could result in embarrassment, hurt feelings, discomfort, anxiety, and anger. One example of such a message involves initiating or preventing interaction. For instance, at a party Jamie might realize that Sean across the room wants to approach and talk. If Jamie does not want to meet Sean, a possible verbal message would be, “Don’t bother coming here to talk with me; I don’t want to get to know you.” Of course, that is a difficult message to present in a social situation. An “easy way” to deliver the idea would be preferable. Nonverbal codes such as eye and facial behavior and the directness of body orientation can send the message without as much embarrassment. In fact, even in a crowded room, probably only Sean would be aware of Jamie’s message of discouragement.

Once interaction has been initiated, another difficult message is to inform someone that you wish to terminate the interaction. Imagine that Sean in our previous example ignored the nonverbal message and approached Jamie anyway. The verbal message: “Why did you come across the room to talk with me? Couldn’t you see I’m not interested? Please leave” would be a very difficult message to deliver. Nonverbally, the task would be easier. Jamie could avoid eye contact, turn so as not to face Sean directly, and talk in short phrases with little expression (sound bored).

These examples illustrate that negative messages are communicated with efficiency by the nonverbal code. However, some types of positive messages also are easier to say nonverbally. One example is communicating love. Some people find it difficult to say “I love you” and instead rely on **eye behavior**, **touch**, and **close proximity**. Another example is communicating favorable internal states such as feeling very good about oneself. Nonverbally, this can be done by sounding confident (vocally), reflecting this feeling in facial behavior, and walking with a confident gait.

Eye behavior Nonverbal behavior that communicates attitude, interest, dominance, or submission

FORMING IMPRESSIONS

Nonverbal communication is especially useful in the process of forming first impressions. Initial interaction and the early stages of a relationship are influenced a good deal by the first impressions that people form of each other. Communication between people is viewed as ranging from impersonal to interpersonal (Miller, 1978). At the *impersonal* end of the continuum, people use sociological variables such as age, sex, and race to form an impression that guides what to say and how to say it. When communication is impersonal, you rely on assumptions about what people are like to guide your communicative behavior. We typically place a good deal of importance on first impressions because we do not want to say something that the other will view as foolish. We are strongly motivated to reduce uncertainty about the other so that we can predict with confidence how to and how not to communicate. (You will read more about this process in the discussion of uncertainty reduction theory in Chapter 8).

When communication is *interpersonal*, the impression of the other that guides interaction is based mainly on *psychological* data. In comparison to sociological data, psychological is more personal. The major types of psychological data are values (very strong, wide-ranging beliefs that guide behavior), attitudes (like or dislike for things), and personality (traits that define the person). Thus, when communication is interpersonal, it is less stereotypic and is individualized according to the psychological characteristics of the people involved.

The nonverbal messages we send contribute substantially to the first impression others form of us. This impression then guides how people talk with us in the early stage of interaction. Many of these messages pertain to physical appearance—fashion, grooming, body type, and attractiveness. For instance, the first impression that you make might be: a male, late teens, highly fashion conscious, very neat and clean looking, a “physical fitness” type who values being attractive. These cues would provide a basis for others to guess how to communicate with you. For instance, clothes or physical fitness would be “excellent bets” for successful topics of communication.

Nonverbal cues provide data relevant to your psychological characteristics. If the cues are clear, communication moves from the impersonal to interpersonal levels more readily. The cues just discussed, fashion consciousness and physical fitness, are a few examples. Other cues derive from nonverbal codes such as the way we use our voices. For instance, a person might sound very self-confident or move very confidently. Another individual’s movements might suggest nervousness or apprehension. If the nonverbal cues are not clear, then there is the tendency for communication to remain at the impersonal level. For instance, if the messages from your eyes, face, and body movements make it unclear whether you are a very cautious or a carefree person, a person talking with you will exercise discretion, selecting only “safe” topics such as the weather, one’s major, or hometown.

MAKING RELATIONSHIPS CLEAR

In addition to content, communication has a **relationship** dimension (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Content refers to the topic of the message. For instance, a parent might say, “Did you have a nice time at the party last night?” The content is clear. It has to do with how favorable your experience was with the party. The relationship dimension refers to the interpersonal relationship between the individuals, and this influences how the message will be handled. For instance, you might respond, “Oh, I had a great time!” If a friend had asked the same question, you might have said: “I was having a great time...until I reached the point where I had too much to drink!” The relationships we have with people exert a powerful force on our communicative behavior.

Nonverbal communication functions to establish and clarify the relationship dimension of communication. It does this very well because at times the relationship message would be offensive if spoken verbally. For example, “I am your boss even though you do not like it.” Communicating such a message without words serves to “soften” the message, making a destructive outcome

of the situation less likely. If the relationship is not clarified, the danger of a misunderstanding increases. For instance, in the early stages of a new job you might be uncertain as to whether you must comply with what a certain person tells you to do. This uncertainty could result in your responding to the person with indifference when the other person's expectation was for you to be compliant. This would be a costly mistake if the person was your superior and not a peer.

There are many types of relationships that are important in communication. Some of these are parent–child, superior–subordinate, spouse–spouse, partner–partner, friends, and siblings. Others are based on competition, cooperation, liking, love, or disdain. Nonverbally, we tell one another what we believe the nature of our relationship to be. If there is correspondence between the parties, the relationship dimension of communication can recede to the background. For instance, if you want to be dominant in a relationship, you might communicate that by steady eye contact, holding the floor most of the time, interrupting and touching the other person more. If the other person accepts this relationship definition, there is no problem. Nonverbally, this acceptance might be communicated by eyes cast downward while looking “up” to you, frequent head nods, and passive smiles. On the other hand, if the nonverbal messages that people send one another about the nature of their relationship are not congruent, then the definition of the relationship becomes an issue and usually predominates until resolved. When a relationship issue emerges, it becomes more likely that the attempt to define the relationship will shift from the nonverbal to the verbal code. That is, it is easier, less disruptive, and less offensive if we tell one another nonverbally of the nature of our relationship. If this fails to produce an agreeable outcome, then more overt communication is necessary; there is a need to talk about the relationship.

Regarding our earlier example, suppose you are new on a job and respond with indifference to someone who says you should stop what you are doing for a while and work at a different task. Suppose further that this person's eye contact was not steady and the tone of voice was unsure—two behaviors that do not indicate a superior relationship. Because the command is incongruent with the nonverbal cues, it probably would be necessary to clarify the relationship verbally. This could be done by having your supervisor explain to you whom else in the organization you must obey.

REGULATING INTERACTION

Regulating our interaction with others is a fourth major function of nonverbal communication. Imagine the following: two people recognize one another in a college library. They begin to talk in a pleasant tone with occasional laughter. They take turns talking with little silence between utterances. After about 15 minutes the conversation ends, and they return to separate places in the library. Imagine further that both individuals derived considerable satisfaction from the interaction. This is an example of successful communication.

Although such episodes are extremely common, we could also view them with amazement—an example of complex human activity made to look easy. A major reason why communication events such as this go smoothly is they are carefully and skillfully regulated. The central regulating mechanism appears to be nonverbal communication. As a regulator, nonverbal behavior operates in terms of *initiating interaction, clarifying relationships, directing turn-taking, guiding emotional expression, and leave-taking*.

Greeting behaviors that suggest a desire to interact are largely nonverbal. In our example, each person could send such messages by raising eyebrows while widening the eyes, raising the chin with a smile, and perhaps waving the hand in greeting. When the individuals approached one another and positioned themselves about three feet apart, the conversation could begin.

During the conversation, several nonverbal behaviors regulate the interaction. We discussed the function of clarifying relationships in the previous section. Directing turn-taking involves communicating when you want the floor and when you are or are not willing to relinquish the floor. When we want the floor (our turn to speak), a number of nonverbal messages may be used: throat clearing, vocal sounds such as “uh, uh,” opening the mouth as if beginning to speak, raising eyebrows, and opening eyes wide. Willingness to give up the floor is indicated by pausing, looking to the other as if searching for a response, nodding approval to begin, or gesturing toward the person to begin. Wanting to hold the floor when someone desires to talk is expressed by increasing volume somewhat, employing an aggressive tone in the voice, breaking eye contact, and adopting a determined facial expression.

Guiding emotional expression involves the tone of the conversation. Nonverbally we say whether the tone should be happy, sad, angry, hurried, or serious. As we explained earlier, nonverbal communication is especially effective at expressing the affective or emotional dimension of communication.

Regulating leave-taking is accomplished nonverbally in many ways (Knapp, Hart, Friedrich, & Shulman, 1973). Messages that indicate a desire to end the conversation include breaking eye contact and glancing around the area, looking at a watch, shuffling feet, and leaning in the direction of the exit. The actual leave-taking will either be positive or negative, depending on the desire for future communication. Some positive nonverbal messages are a handshake, a smile, and a wave. Negative messages include an abrupt ending, turning and leaving with no goodbye, an angry goodbye, and a gesture of disgust on exiting.

INFLUENCING PEOPLE

Nonverbal communication appears to be very important in the process of persuasion. Certainly the verbal message matters. However, there is increased awareness that people are influenced by nonverbal messages as well. Whether the verbal message is accepted seems to depend on how well the persuader communicates nonverbally. The adage, “It’s not what you say but how you say it,” is an overstatement, but “What you say cannot overrule how you say it” is accurate.

There are several types of nonverbal messages that can enhance a source's persuasiveness. Some involve physical appearance that appeals to the receiver, such as dress and grooming. Others include body movement or eye and facial behavior—creating a dynamic image, a sincere look, or appearing sociable. Vocal behavior, meaning the way the voice is used, is also important. This entails sounding dynamic and interesting. These nonverbal messages all contribute to the individual's *image* or total impression. In political communication especially, there is increased use of terms such as image building, image management, and image rebuilding or repairing. The use of these terms acknowledges the principle that one's nonverbal messages are not independent of the verbal message. Perhaps this causes you to think that the influence process, whether it occurs in the political, business, or personal arena, is extremely superficial because appearances matter so much. However, there is a very good reason for this. People pay close attention to persuaders' nonverbal behavior as a basis for deciding whether to *trust* the person. Trust is a necessary condition for persuasion in almost all cases.

A person's nonverbal behavior provides a major source of data in deciding on a person's character. Eye behavior is usually emphasized as a criterion for deciding whether to trust someone. Voice is also a focus. What qualities do we look for when deciding trust? The answer is rather well established in terms of research. We are more attracted to people and trust them when they are similar to us (Infante, 1978). Similarity tends to breed attraction, and the more our nonverbal behavior says to a person, "As you can see, I am a lot like you," the more the person probably will trust you. This is true mainly because they know what to expect from a similar other. They assume the person is guided by similar values.

This analysis has identified an approach to nonverbal communication in persuasion that has been termed **nonverbal response matching** (Infante, 1988) and may be considered an aspect of communication accommodation theory, which was discussed in Chapter 5. The idea is for the persuader to match the receiver's nonverbal behavior so that a bond of trust develops because the receiver perceives similarity between self and the persuader. For instance, if the receiver talks fast with short, quick gestures, the persuader would adopt this style to identify with the receiver. This is not mimicry, which is a form of insult. Instead, it is a message that says, "I understand how you are, and I like being that way myself." This behavior confirms the saying, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." Studies that compared successful salespersons to mediocre ones revealed that the successful sellers used response matching, whereas the unsuccessful ones did not (Moine, 1982). Clearly, our nonverbal behavior provides important input in our decision about whether to trust others.

Nonverbal response matching Matching another's nonverbal behavior in order to create perceived similarity, which leads to trust

REINFORCING AND MODIFYING VERBAL MESSAGES

Finally, one of the most basic functions of nonverbal communication is to affect the verbal message. The verbal and nonverbal messages are often produced together. As such, there is not one message but several, comprising a set of messages. The idea of a set emphasizes that things go together, influence one another, and the whole is more than simply a sum of the parts. Thus, a given configuration of nonverbal messages along with certain words will

communicate one thing, whereas the very same words with a different set of nonverbal messages will communicate something else. Nonverbal communication may reinforce or modify the verbal message.

Nonverbal communication reinforces verbal messages in a variety of ways. Imagine gestures that would accompany the phrases in parentheses in the following sentence. Gestures are used to illustrate size (“the fish was this big”), position (“I was here; the fish jumped there”), effort (“I struggled to keep the rod tip high while he pulled really hard”), movement (“I reached into the water quickly and picked up the fish by the lower jaw”). Facial, eye, and vocal behavior are especially effective in emphasizing the emotional content of a message. For instance, if you are talking about hunger in America, your nonverbal messages should reflect concern and reinforce the seriousness of this social problem. While you discuss the issue, your face, eyes, and voice could express sympathy and gravity. If proposing a solution such as a guaranteed job program, your face, eyes, and voice could communicate hope, enthusiasm, and confidence.

At times, nonverbal messages are used to modify verbal messages. This is especially likely when we do not want our words to be taken literally. There are at least four ways this happens. One is when it is socially desirable to say one thing, but we want to express our displeasure with the contents of the verbal message. For example, imagine working for a company that invested much of its resources in a new but very unsuccessful product. In talking with coworkers your verbal message might be, “Oh, yes, our...is a wonderful innovation.” Nonverbally, with eyes, face, and tone of voice, you might say that the product is not so wonderful and actually not much of an innovation either. Mock verbal aggression is a second means of altering literal meaning; it includes playfulness commonly termed “kidding” or “teasing.” However, one must be careful to avoid miscalculation. Receiving a birthday present wrapped in paper that reads, “Happy birthday to a sweet old buzzard” may or may not be taken as a joke! Third, nonverbal messages are used to modify the verbal message in requests. Terry asks Dale for something, and Dale really would like to say “no” but uses a nonverbal message that says, “OK, I will if you *really* want me to.” The verbal “yes” is expressed with little enthusiasm, looking away, and breathing out while drooping the shoulders (as if burdened by a great load).

NONVERBAL EXPECTANCY VIOLATIONS THEORY

Nonverbal expectancy violations theory Theory that explains a wide range of communication outcomes associated with violations of expectations about nonverbal communication behavior

Judee Burgoon (1978, 1983, 1985) and Steven Jones (Burgoon & Jones, 1976) originally designed **nonverbal expectancy violations theory** (NEVT) to explain the consequences of changes in distance and personal space during interpersonal communication interactions. NEVT was one of the first theories of nonverbal communication developed by communication scholars. NEVT has been continually revised and expanded; today the theory is used to explain

a wide range of communication outcomes associated with violations of expectations about nonverbal communication behavior.

According to NEVT, several factors interact to influence how we react to a violation of the type of nonverbal behavior we expect to encounter in a particular situation (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). NEVT first considers our **expectancies**. Through social norms we form “expectations” about how others should behave nonverbally (and verbally) when we are interacting with them. If another person’s behavior deviates from what we typically expect, then an expectancy violation has occurred. Anything “out of the ordinary” causes us to take special notice of that behavior. For example, we would notice (and probably be very uncomfortable) if a stranger asking for directions stood very close to us. Similarly, we would notice if our significant other stood very far away from us at a party. A violation of our nonverbal expectations is unsettling; it can cause emotional *arousal*.

We learn expectations from a number of sources (Floyd, Ramirez, & Burgoon, 1999). First, the culture in which we live shapes our expectations about different types of communication behavior, including nonverbal communication. As we will describe in our discussion of nonverbal immediacy behaviors, contact cultures have more eye contact, more frequent touch, and much smaller zones of personal distance than noncontact cultures. The context in which the interaction takes place also affects expectations of others’ behavior. A great deal of eye contact from an attractive other may be seen as inviting if the context of the interaction is in a social club, whereas the same nonverbal behavior may be seen as threatening if that behavior is exhibited in a sparsely populated subway car late at night. Depending on the context, “a caress may convey sympathy, comfort, dominance, affection, attraction, or lust” (Burgoon, Coker, & Coker, 1986, p. 497). The meaning depends on the situation and the relationship between the individuals. Our personal experiences also affect expectancies. Repeated interactions condition us to expect certain behaviors. If our usually cheerful roommate suddenly stops smiling when we enter the room, we encounter a distinctly different situation than we expected. NEVT suggests that expectancies “include judgments of what behaviors are possible, feasible, appropriate, and typical for a particular setting, purpose, and set of participants” (Burgoon & Hale, 1988, p. 60).

Our *interpretation and evaluation* of behavior is another important element of the theory. NEVT assumes that nonverbal behaviors are meaningful and that we have attitudes about expected nonverbal behaviors. We approve of some and dislike others. **Valence** is the term used to describe the evaluation of the behavior. Certain behaviors are clearly negatively valenced, such as being subjected to a rude or insulting gesture (e.g., someone “flips you the bird” or rolls their eyes at you). Other behaviors are positively valenced (e.g., someone signals “v” for victory after a touchdown or “thumbs up” for your new sweater). Some behaviors are ambiguous. For example, imagine that you are at a party and a stranger to whom you are introduced unexpectedly touches your arm. Because you just met that person, that behavior could be confusing.

You might interpret the behavior as affection, an invitation to become friends, or as a signal of dominance. NEVT argues that if the given behavior is more positive than what was expected, a positive violation of expectations results. Conversely, if the given behavior is more negative than what was expected, a negative violation of expectations results. In ambiguous situations, the following element tips the balance.

Communicator reward valence is the third element that influences our reactions. The nature of the relationship between the communicators influences how they (especially the receiver) feel about the violation of expectations. If we “like” the source of the violation (or if the violator is a person of high status, high in credibility, or physically attractive), we may appreciate the unique treatment, and the violation behavior may be seen positively. However, if we “dislike” the source, or if the person engaging in the violation behavior is seen as low in credibility, gives you negative feedback, is seen as unattractive, we are less willing to tolerate nonverbal behavior that does not conform to social norms; we view the violation negatively.

NEVT posits that it is not just a matter of the nonverbal behavior violations and the reactions to them. Instead, NEVT argues that who is doing the violations matters greatly and must be accounted for to determine whether a violation will be seen as positive or negative. Unlike other nonverbal interaction models such as discrepancy arousal theory (see LePoire & Burgoon, 1994), NEVT predicts that even an “extreme violation of an expectancy” might be viewed positively if it was committed by a highly rewarding communicator (Burgoon & Hale, 1988, p. 63). That is, if a person you have just met at a club puts their arm around you, and you view this person as highly attractive (both socially and physically), high in credibility, and high in status, you may value this violation behavior positively. Thus, NEVT suggests that it is not just a matter of the nonverbal behavior violations and the reactions to them. Instead, who is doing the violation matters greatly, and must be accounted for in order to determine whether the violation will be seen as positive or negative.

Nonverbal expectancy violations theory has generated much interest and research. We will mention a few studies based on this theory. Burgoon and Jerold Hale (1988) conducted an experiment in which individuals participated in discussions with friends and with strangers who either increased, reduced, or acted normally regarding immediacy behaviors (especially **proxemics**, body orientation, forward lean, eye contact, and open posture). They found that low-immediacy behaviors (i.e., negative violations of expectations such as less eye contact than normal or indirect body/shoulder lean) resulted in lower credibility ratings than high or normal levels of immediacy in both the friends and the stranger conditions. Being less immediate than expected was perceived as communicating detachment, lower intimacy, dissimilarity, and higher dominance. However, being more immediate than normal (e.g., standing closer, leaning forward) was viewed as expressing more intimacy, similarity, and involvement.

Proxemics How people use space to communicate

Burgoon and Joseph Walther (1990) examined a variety of touch behaviors, proxemics, and postures to determine which are expected or unexpected in interpersonal communication and how expectations are influenced by the source's status, attractiveness, and gender. Some findings were that a hand-shake is most expected, whereas an arm around the shoulder is least expected. Erect posture is most expected, and tense posture is least expected.

Several studies have examined the role of expectancy violations in different kinds of interpersonal relationships. For example, NEVT was used to study sexual expectations and sexual involvement in initial dating encounters. Previous research suggested that males enter female-initiated first dates with heightened sexual expectations (Mongeau, Hale, Johnson, & Hillis, 1993), and that less sexual intimacy is reported in female-initiated as compared to male-initiated first dates (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995).

Using an experimental design, Paul Mongeau and Colleen Carey (1996) varied the directness in initiating a date. Male and female participants read a scenario in which a female asks a male out on a date to a movie (*female asks*), a female indicates interest in seeing a movie followed immediately by the male asking her on the date (*female hints*), or the male asks the female on the date without the preceding hint (*male asks*). The gender of the target varied; half the participants evaluated the male target and the other half the female target. The extent to which the target took an active role in making the date, measures of dating and sexual expectations, and the target's general level of sexual activity were measured. Mongeau and Carey report that the results of this study were consistent as predicted by expectancy violations theory: "males enter female-initiated first dates with inflated sexual expectations. As a consequence, that less sex occurs on female-initiated first dates is certainly consistent with a negative violation of the males' expectancies" (p. 206).

Kory Floyd and Michael Voloudakis (1999) used NEVT to explore the communication of affection in adult platonic friendships. Their study involved 40 mixed-sex dyads. The first encounter consisted of conversation between the participants. For the second encounter, the researchers asked some participants (confederates) to increase or to decrease their "affectionate involvement" with the naive subject. The researchers hypothesized that unexpected increases in affection would be considered positive expectancy violations, whereas unexpected decreases would be considered negative expectancy violations. The research supported their hypotheses. In addition, naive participants in the low-affection condition saw the confederates as less immediate, less similar to themselves, less composed, and less equal to themselves. Again, these findings support NEVT's prediction that negative expectancy violations can produce negative outcomes.

One study manipulated the reward value of the communicator and the valence and extremity of the violation behavior to explore their effects on student-professor interactions (Lannutti, Laliker, & Hale, 2001). A scenario was created involving a student-professor conversation. An experimental study manipulated the location of a professor's touch (no touch, touch on arm, or

touch on thigh), reward value for the professor (e.g., low—“one you dislike and disdain,” or high—“one you like and admire”), and sex of the participant (male or female). The sex of the professor was also adjusted so that it was always the opposite sex of the participant. Evaluation of the professor, desire to interact with the professor, and perceptions of sexual harassment were measured.

Nonverbal expectancy violations theory was “partially supported” in this study in that female participants’ evaluations of the professor became more negative as the intimacy of touch increased, regardless of the reward value of the professor. The more unexpected the touch, the less favorable the professor and the interaction were evaluated by the female participants (Lannutti, Laliker, & Hale, 2001).

Nonverbal expectancy violations theory continues to generate research; modifications and revisions of the theory are still emerging. NEVT makes us more aware of the influence of our nonverbal behavior (i.e., distance, touch, eye contact, smiling). It suggests that if we engage in nonverbal communication behavior that violates expectations, it might be wise to contemplate our “reward value.” Unless our “reward value” is sufficiently high to offset a violation of expectations, it might be wise to rethink our behavior.

INTERACTION ADAPTATION THEORY

Interaction adaptation theory A theory of how we alter our behavior in response to the behavior of another person

Interaction adaptation theory (IAT) was conceptualized to explain behavior that is “mindful, intentional, and symbolic” (Burgoon, LaPoire, & Rosenthal, 1995, p. 11). IAT assumes that adaptation is a systematic pattern of behavior that is in direct response to the interactive pattern of another communicator (Burgoon et al., 1995). Therefore, there are no random adaptations when people interact with each other. This suggests that all adaptation is considered intentional. IAT also assumes that our relationships with each other are based on both verbal and nonverbal messages that are adapted to the behavior of the interaction partner. Adaptation reflects the degree to which we alter our behavior in response to the behavior of another person. Further, adaptation during interaction serves as a signal to the interactants and observers of the interaction as to the nature or basis of the relationship between the two communicators (White, 2008). That is, the way people engage in adaptive behavior during an interaction relays important relational information that can include the type of relationship, degree of positive/negative affect between the interactants, as well as power and status differences.

The two adaptation patterns that people utilize when in an interaction reflect patterns that either **reciprocate** or **compensate**. Adaptation that “reciprocates” reflects matching behavior or reciprocating the behavior of the other person. This is similar to the communication accommodation theory concept of converging our speech patterns to the other person to show liking and affiliation (see Chapter 5). Convergence means we adapt our interaction patterns to match

those of the other person. Matching, within the IAT framework, refers to both verbal and nonverbal behavior and is not restricted to just verbal or paraverbal behavior as it is in communication accommodation theory. To illustrate how IAT accommodations function, consider a scenario where a close friend is very upset and discloses to you that their mother is gravely ill. When communicating with this friend, you will probably use matching adaptation reflecting behavior that is somber, empathetic, and caring.

Adaptation that “compensates” reflects the “balancing out” of the other’s behavior and seeks to represent the “whole spectrum” of the interaction. An example of this would be a friend who is very excited and calls us to say that they are putting their entire life savings into the buying and selling of real estate based on an investment product that they had purchased from an infomercial they just viewed on television. In this case, our interaction pattern may be one of a cautious, reserved, and skeptical tone, thus not matching the euphoric, excited, and determined patterns of our friend. This concept of compensation is also reflective of the yin and yang concept found in Chinese philosophy. The yin and yang concept reflects the intertwining of opposing forces. In the current example, your behavior is cautious, reserved, and skeptical and is exhibited to compensate for your friend’s overly euphoric, excited, and determined behavior.

Although adaptation is considered nonrandom (i.e., intentional), IAT treats interaction adaptation as a primal survival need. That is, we choose our adaptation in a way that satisfies survival needs and seeks to establish important links to other people, thus ensuring or significantly increasing our survival (i.e., strength in numbers). There is more to adaptation than the simple idea that we engage in reciprocating or compensating patterns or we do not. The theory also speaks to the amount to which we engage in adaptation. The degree of adaptation is influenced by both the role we play in society (i.e., societal norms) and idiosyncratic personal preferences. For example, a person who is a mortician will probably have a much more restricted degree of adaptation than a professional athlete due to the fact that societal norms for a mortician’s behavior are far more conservative than they are for the professional athlete.

IAT assumes that several main factors (both socially and personally derived) influence a person’s needs, wants, and expectations of other people when engaged in interaction. More specifically, when we first encounter someone in conversation, we bring with us a host of **requirements**, **expectations**, and **desires** with regard to the person and the specific interaction conversation. These three components of the theory were originally conceptualized as being hierarchically organized so that “requirements” influence “expectations,” which in turn influence “desires.” The theory maintains conversational requirements are a person’s basic psychological/physiological needs related to approach-avoidance behavior (a.k.a. the fight-or-flight biological activation of the brain). These requirements are believed to be primarily unconscious and are said to influence our conversational expectations. The expectations are formed by societal norms of appropriateness as well as the degree of knowledge that we have developed from past interactions with that specific person.

These expectations, in turn, influence our desires, which are “highly personalized and reflect things such as one’s personality and other individual differences” (White, 2008, p. 193). This hierarchical approach was later refuted by the research findings of Floyd and Burgoon (1999). However, the three components, although not hierarchically organized, are believed to be highly interdependent and the requirements, expectations, and desires can be weighted differently based on the specific interaction. In other words, in one interaction, expectations may play more of a role than desires or conversational requirements, whereas in another interaction, another factor may be weighted more heavily. For example, a person may have a great need to avoid a particular person (i.e., conversational requirement) that is so strong that this need for avoidance supersedes our expectations (i.e., what is socially appropriate behavior in that situation) and our desires (i.e., individual interests).

The three components—requirements, expectations, desires—combine to form a unique collection of individualized communication information known as a person’s **interaction position**. According to Burgoon et al. (1995), an interaction position represents “a net assessment of what is needed, anticipated, and preferred as the dyadic interaction pattern in a situation” (p. 266). By understanding a person’s interaction position, people have better predictability about how one interprets a communication situation and the likely communicative behaviors that they will enact.

Interpersonal adaptation theory offers two basic predictions about a person’s response to behavior and is based on the dynamic relationship between the interaction position and the actual behavior that is enacted (Burgoon & Ebesu Hubbard, 2005).

- **P1:** When the interaction position is more positively valenced than the actual behavior, the interpersonal pattern is divergence, compensation, or maintenance.
- **P2:** When the actual behavior is more positively valenced than the interaction position, the anticipated interpersonal pattern is convergence, matching, or reciprocity.

In terms of how this would work in explaining communication, consider the example of a supervisor who is about to conduct a meeting with a subordinate concerning the quarterly performance review of the subordinate. The supervisor has, throughout their career, engaged in many conversations with subordinates concerning both positive and negative aspects of their performance. According to IAT, any given conversation is influenced by the supervisor’s psychological and/or physiological needs at any given time. These may take the form of the need to mentor, need for affiliation, or need to control. This would constitute the supervisor’s conversational “requirements.” Second, the supervisor has an “expectation” about how employees generally respond to negative evaluations and even more specific expectations about how a particular employee will respond to such information (e.g., anger, sorrow, remorse, embarrassment). Finally, the supervisor has a “desire” for employees to be open, involved, and eager to make needed changes to

improve performance. These three components constitute the supervisor's "interaction position."

Imagine that a subordinate who has had a history of poor performance and a generally negative attitude is about to come into the supervisor's office for the performance evaluation meeting. Based on the supervisor's interaction position described earlier, the supervisor would expect a hostile and generally emotionally charged interaction. Therefore, the supervisor would prepare herself to console the subordinate and try to give some comforting words. However, imagine further that when the subordinate arrives for the review, he is proactive in strategies to improve his performance and optimistic about his future contribution to the department and the organization as a whole. Interaction adaptation theory predicts that the supervisor will have an interaction style of convergence, matching, and reciprocity due to the fact that the subordinate was more positively valenced than the supervisor's interaction position. Thus, P2 is what would be predicted for such a communication situation.

According to White (2008), important research directions in the application of interaction adaptation theory include romantic and intimate relationships and the particular communicative exchanges that occur within these relationships (e.g., problematic interactions). For example, when studying deception in interpersonal interactions, White and Burgoon (2001) found support for IAT in that the interaction position of both deceivers and truth-tellers influenced their initial behavior. That is, both deceivers and truth-tellers were affected by the behavior of the interaction partner.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF IAT

One of the many strengths of IAT is that it conceptualizes expectancies as being formed by personal and biological factors as well as the degree to which these factors are further influenced by actual communicative behavior. IAT can be considered a cousin of expectancy violations theory discussed earlier in this chapter as it accounts not only for the expectations of the communicators but also integrates actual communicative behavior in the prediction of interaction behavior. The primary weakness of IAT lies in the fact that it is a relatively new theory with modest empirical support. However, the evidence that does exist lends support for the assumptions of IAT and holds exciting implications for interpersonal scholars.

NONVERBAL IMMEDIACY

Imagine the following scenario. You have been waiting at the doctor's office for about half an hour and have finally been called into the examination room. Your level of anxiety is already high, as you wonder if your lower abdominal pain and discomfort is serious. After waiting another ten minutes in the examination room, you hear a knock on the door and the doctor enters. The doctor looks at you very briefly and then turns away. He takes a seat at the other end

of the examination room. He appears somewhat tense as he asks you to identify the nature of your medical concern. During his questioning, he speaks with a dull and monotonous voice, does not smile very much if at all, uses very few gestures, and avoids eye contact throughout the interview. He asks you to sit on the examination table but fails to mention what will happen next. As the medical interview progresses, you become more worried and concerned than you were before the doctor came in.

Perhaps you can relate to the scenario outlined. Many patients describe such experiences during initial interaction with their physician. Patients often describe such interactions as being uncomfortable at best and frightening at worst, even if their medical condition was easily diagnosed and treated. Quite often patients delay return visits to the doctor or seek alternative health-care options rather than subject themselves to a repeat of this scenario. The anxiety and frustration can happen in communication encounters in other contexts as well, from close interpersonal interactions (such as a first date) to relatively impersonal communication interactions (such as communication with a salesperson in an automobile dealership).

The degree of closeness between individuals is an important factor influencing the ease of communication. Researchers have identified and labeled a set of nonverbal behaviors that influence the degree of perceived closeness. **Immediacy behaviors** is the term used to describe a set of messages (both verbal and nonverbal) that signal feelings of warmth, closeness, and involvement with another person (Andersen, 1999, p. 187). Immediacy behaviors can result in positive or negative interpersonal communication outcomes, depending on how they are manifested (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000b).

Immediacy behaviors
Messages that signal feelings of warmth, closeness, and involvement with another person

Although originally conceived by the psychologist Albert Mehrabian (1971), research and theory-building efforts in identifying and understanding the impact of nonverbal immediacy has come largely from communication scholars such as Peter Andersen, Janis Andersen, Virginia Richmond, and James McCroskey among others. Peter Andersen (1985, 1999) suggested the following four functions of immediacy behaviors:

- Immediacy behaviors signal to others that we are *available* for communication and make others feel included in the interaction.
- Immediacy behaviors signal *involvement*—that we are interested in those with whom we are communicating. It makes receiver(s) feel that we are closer to them. Immediacy behaviors that signal involvement can be something as benign as a wave or as intimate as a kiss or prolonged eye contact.
- Immediacy behaviors *stimulate our senses* both psychologically and physiologically. Andersen argued that blood pressure, heart rate, and brain activity are increased when we receive immediacy cues from another person.
- Immediacy behaviors communicate *closeness and warmth*. In positive relationships immediacy behaviors (such as looking another person in the eye or smiling) bring people closer. Lack of nonverbal immediacy can do just the opposite.

What are nonverbal immediacy behaviors? A cluster of several nonverbal behaviors constitute what we now call “nonverbal immediacy behaviors.” These include tactile (touch) behaviors, proxemic (personal space), oculosic displays including eye contact, kinesic (body motion and movement) behaviors including facial expressions, smiling behavior, head nods, and body position, and paralinguistics or vocalics (i.e., how a person says something, not what they say).

One especially powerful set of immediacy cues is associated with eye behavior, specifically *eye contact* and *gaze*. When someone locks eyes with you, they offer an invitation to engage in communication and to interact. Gaze functions as a primary immediacy cue in a number of contexts including relational and instructional communication.

Proxemics, the use of **personal space**, is the most frequently studied nonverbal immediacy cue; closer proxemic distances convey greater feelings of immediacy. Recall in our earlier example that the physician sat at the far end of the room, conveying a sense of avoidance rather than immediacy. Other proximically oriented immediacy behaviors include interacting on the same physical plane (the same level) as your receiver and leaning forward when communicating with another.

Personal space Zones of space that surround us: intimate, casual-personal, socioconsultative, public

Touch has also been identified as a powerful nonverbal immediacy cue, especially in intimate relationships. Perceptions of touch, however, are modified by the nature of the interpersonal relationship (the level of intimacy), the culture a person comes from (some cultures use more touch than others), personal norms concerning touch, and the context in which the individuals are communicating (on the job or in a romantic setting, for example).

Kinesics, body motion and movements, comprise a fourth set of immediacy behaviors. Kinesic behaviors that communicate immediacy include facial expressions such as smiling, head nods (signaling agreement), gestures that show approval, open body positions (e.g., arms open, head up, legs not crossed), and speaking with someone while facing them directly (as opposed to turning away from them).

Paralinguistics (vocalics—not what we say, but *how* we use our voice to express feelings) is a fifth set of immediacy cues. Vocal synchrony (adjusting your paralinguistic style to fit or match the person with whom you are communicating) is another type of vocalic immediacy cue. Perhaps you can recall an instance when you spoke more softly to match the tones of the person with whom you were talking. One of the authors recalls that his father occasionally took on the accent of the person he was talking to in an effort to promote immediacy and to achieve vocal convergence (see our discussion of communication accommodation theory in Chapter 5). When discussing this cluster of nonverbal immediacy behaviors, it is important to point out that individuals do not receive these behaviors in a fragmented fashion.

What causes a person to communicate using this cluster of immediacy behaviors? Peter Andersen (1999, 1998, 1985) suggested several antecedents that either promote or dampen the exhibition of immediacy behaviors. A powerful

antecedent (cause) of exhibiting nonverbal immediacy (or not) is a person's *culture*. Certain cultures have been called "contact cultures," and people from these cultures tend to use more nonverbal immediacy behaviors when they communicate. That is, they may use more gestures, touch each other more, and stand closer together. A second cause of immediacy behavior is the *valence of the interpersonal relationship*, which refers to whether the relationship is seen as positive or negative. We tend to exhibit a lot of immediacy behaviors (e.g., closer distance, greater use of gestures, greater eye contact) with someone whom we like. A third cause of immediacy behavior is the *perception of the stage of the relationship*; as relationships develop, more immediacy cues are exhibited. *Individual differences and traits* constitute another cause of immediacy behaviors. Factors such as biological sex, orientation to touch, and communication and personality traits can influence the exhibition of nonverbal immediacy behaviors. *The nature of the situation* or environment can influence expressions of immediacy. Touching someone in public may be perceived as situationally inappropriate; however, the same type of touch might be seen as appropriate if you were in more private surroundings. Finally, the *temporary state* of the individual can influence the exhibition of immediacy behaviors. Feeling physically ill, in a "bad mood," or "stressed out" can dampen one's exhibition of nonverbal immediacy cues.

What are the consequences of engaging in nonverbal immediacy cues? A great deal of communication research during the last several decades supports the potency of employing nonverbal immediacy in a variety of contexts. One of the contexts in which the exhibition of nonverbal immediacy has a significant impact is instructional communication. In one of the first studies to introduce the immediacy construct in the communication discipline, Janis Andersen (1979) found that teacher immediacy favorably influenced students' attitudes toward the teacher and the course. Highly immediate teachers increased student liking for both high school and college courses (Flax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986). Teachers highly skilled in immediacy behaviors were perceived as higher in competence, trustworthiness, and caring (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998). The influence of teacher immediacy does not appear to be bound by culture. Increases in teacher immediacy resulted in increased learning across four cultures including mainland American (U.S.), Australian, Finnish, and Puerto Rican (McCroskey, Sallinen, Fayer, Richmond, & Barraclough, 1996). Thus, when students perceive that their instructor employs nonverbal immediacy they have more positive feelings for the instructor, more positive feelings for the course, and report more cognitive learning (Witt, Wheelless, & Allen, 2004).

Research in the health-care context has also pointed to the advantages of nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Patients' perceptions of their physicians' nonverbal immediacy behaviors influence their reported satisfaction with those physicians (Conlee, Olvera, & Vagim, 1993). In addition, physicians who were perceived as immediate had patients who reported lower levels of fear (Richmond, Smith, Heisel, & McCroskey, 2001). Doctor-patient relationships might yield very different outcomes if the physician used more nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Parents' perceptions of their pediatrician's nonverbal immediacy, in relationship to their communication satisfaction with the

physician, feelings, emotions, and acceptance of their doctor's advice and recommendations was studied (LaBelle, Odenweller, & Myers, 2015). The results revealed that parents who saw their pediatrician as nonverbally immediate, as well as clear and receptive to them, reported greater communication satisfaction (i.e., greater positivity toward the doctor in fulfilling their needs) and affective learning with that doctor. These results suggest the importance of a physician employing nonverbal immediacy behaviors, appearing relaxed and approachable, and recognizing parents' input during an office visit. In such situations, parents will leave the visit to the doctor more satisfied and more likely to follow the doctor's recommendations (LaBelle, et al., 2015, p. 66).

Nonverbal immediacy also operates in the organizational context, especially in superior-subordinate communication. Immediacy stimulates a reciprocity of immediacy; subordinates report more satisfaction with supervisors who exhibit nonverbal immediacy and engage in more immediacy behaviors themselves (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000a). Supervisors who use immediacy cues make subordinates feel more valued, respected, and relationally attractive (Koermer, Goldstein, & Fortson, 1993).

Marital relationships also appear to be influenced by immediacy cues. Research has found that "individuals who engage in nonverbal immediacy behaviors tend to be more inclined to be liked by their marital partners than are those who are not nonverbally immediate" (Hinkle, 1999, p. 87). In addition, use of immediacy behaviors and liking for your spouse appear to persist throughout the duration of a marriage (Hinkle, 1999).

COGNITIVE VALENCE THEORY: AN EXTENSION OF NONVERBAL IMMEDIACY

Working from an interactionist approach to studying communication and relationships, Peter Andersen (1999) considered the question, "When one person increases intimacy or immediacy, how can you explain the response of their partner?" (p. 454). **Cognitive valence theory** (CVT) maintains that when a person in an interaction perceives an increase in immediacy behaviors "cognitive schemata" are activated. Cognitive schemata are expectations about the consequences of behaving in a certain way that allow people to interpret, explain, and act upon information (Andersen, 1998, p. 47).

Cognitive valence theory A perceived increase in immediacy behaviors from one person in a relationship activates expectations

An important component in CVT is *arousal*. Arousal is "the degree to which a person is stimulated or activated" (Andersen, 1999, p. 161). When arousal is increased, there is a tendency to engage in more nonverbal immediacy behaviors, which builds even greater levels of arousal. Levels of arousal that are too low produce virtually no change in the relationship. However, too much arousal can lead to negative relational outcomes. CVT suggests that moderate levels of arousal (found in most interactions) are most likely to activate cognitive schemata.

CVT suggests that relationships usually develop when individuals communicate using immediacy; that is, one person sends messages using immediacy cues, and the other person reciprocates. Interactions such as these are called

“positively valenced.” Sometimes, however, immediacy behaviors exhibited by one person are not seen favorably by another; they are instead “negatively valenced.” CVT also addresses the question, “What happens when efforts to increase relational closeness by using nonverbal immediacy are rejected?” If the cognitive schemata are positively valenced, the theory states positive relationship outcomes will result; if cognitive schemata are negatively valenced, negative relationship outcomes are more likely.

According to CVT, six cognitive schemata (similar to the factors that influence immediacy discussed earlier) form the basis of whether the relationship will become positively or negatively changed as a result of an increase in immediacy and intimacy (Andersen, 1999).

1. **Cultural Appropriateness.** Cultures vary in the degree to which they use immediacy behaviors. As we have mentioned, some cultures use touch more than others. Noncontact cultures (Japan, for instance) prefer little touch; contact cultures (such as Greece) prefer greater amounts of touch. When communicating with a person from Japan, using a great deal of touch would be culturally inappropriate and thus negatively valenced.
2. **Personal Predispositions.** Personality and communication traits (such as dogmatism, self-esteem, communication apprehension, and interaction involvement), as well as personal predispositions such as touch-avoidance, influence reactions to increases in immediacy behaviors. For example, an increase in eye contact might be seen as positive for an extrovert, while the same behavior may be negatively valenced for the person high in communication apprehension.
3. **Interpersonal Valence.** According to Andersen (1999), “interpersonal valence is the evaluation of another person’s qualities, not one’s relationship with that person” (p. 232). CVT suggests that an increase in immediacy by someone who has qualities we admire (for example, credibility or physical attractiveness) will be positively valenced, whereas the same behavior will be negatively valenced if it comes from someone whose qualities we evaluate less positively.
4. **Relational Appropriateness.** These schemata deal with expectancies about where one individual thinks a relationship should be heading, the “relational trajectory.” According to CVT, nonverbal immediacy behaviors that correspond to the anticipation of greater relationship intimacy should be seen positively. According to Andersen (1999), “the key to relational success is to anticipate your partner’s desired relational trajectory and to behave accordingly” (pp. 232–233). If your relational partner has expressed a desire for the relationship to become more intimate, then engaging in immediacy behaviors should result in positive outcomes. If you engage in more touch, greater eye gaze, and less proxemic distance, your partner will likely judge those immediacy behaviors positively because they fall along his or her perceived relational trajectory (i.e., the desire for increased intimacy). On the other hand, immediacy behaviors that do not correspond to another person’s anticipated relational trajectory will likely be seen negatively.

5. **Situational Appropriateness.** Immediacy behaviors that are inappropriate to the situation or context are likely to be negatively valenced. For example, behavior that would be acceptable in a romantic restaurant could be considered inappropriate in a college classroom.
6. **Psychological or Physical State.** These schemata “represent intrapersonal, internal dispositions (Andersen, 1999, p. 235) and refer to our moods, our temporal physical conditions (e.g., having a bad cold or flu), and temporal emotional and psychological states such as feeling happy or sad, tired, or excited. Getting a costly traffic ticket, receiving an unexpected grade of “A” on a course paper, receiving a compliment on your appearance from a valued other, or having a fight with your roommate can influence how you will react to immediacy and intimacy behaviors. CVT suggests that, in general, positive psychological or physical states are related to positive reactions to immediacy and intimacy behaviors, whereas negative psychological or physical states are related to negative reactions to immediacy and intimacy behaviors.

If the immediacy behaviors exhibited by person A match person B’s six cognitive schemata, those immediacy behaviors will be positively valenced and positive relationship outcomes will ensue. Relationships develop based on a number of factors, including the degree of preferred closeness. CVT suggests that for relationships to become closer and more satisfying, one must match the relationship partner’s cultural, personal, interpersonal, situational, state, and relational schemata (Andersen, 1998, 1999).

SUMMARY

Nonverbal behavior functions best in communicating affect; it is highly believable. The meaning of nonverbal behaviors depends on the communication context. Similarly, our expectations of appropriate nonverbal behaviors depend on the situation and the relationship between individuals. The authors believe symbolic activity is a necessary condition for nonverbal behavior to be considered communicative. Without an intention to convey a message, the behavior is usually a symptom. We use nonverbal communication to perform a number of important functions: to express messages that are uncomfortable to present verbally, to form impressions, to clarify and establish the nature of the relationship between the people who are communicating, to regulate the interaction between people, to persuade people by conveying a basis for trust, and to reinforce and modify verbal messages. Research on nonverbal immediacy and expectancy violations helps us understand the effects of various nonverbal behaviors. Our responses to violations of expectations are determined by our expectancies, our interpretation and evaluation of the behavior, the valence of the violation (positive or negative), and the reward level of the person with whom we are communicating. These ideas were explored in the theories covered: expectancy violations theory, interaction adaptation theory, nonverbal immediacy, and cognitive valence theory.



KEY TERMS

Cognitive valence theory
Emotional leakage
Eye behavior
Immediacy behaviors

Interaction adaptation theory
Nonverbal expectancy
violations theory
Nonverbal response matching

Personal space
Proxemics
Self-monitoring of expressive
behavior