

Take four different English proper nouns (other than someone's name) and use online translation dictionaries to translate each noun into five different languages. Do some of the translated nouns have a resemblance to the English nouns? If so, can you think of a possible reason?

Try to find someone who is from a culture that uses an indirect communication style and who uses English as a second language. Ask that person how his or her native tongue is different from English when using language in an indirect manner.

Talk with two or three people over sixty years of age and ask them for some examples of the slang they used in their younger days (e.g., "groovy,"

man"). Try to compare it with slang that is popular now.

4. Working with someone from another culture whose second language is English, compile a list of animals, then are common to both of you then compare the sounds that each of you hears from those animals.

5. Meet with one or two non-native English speakers to identify the kinship terms they use in their family (e.g., mother, brother, etc.). Do they use the same terms when referring directly to a family member and in a third person situation? Do they have kinship terms that vary with age differences? What cultural values do you think their terms reflect?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. In a small group, discuss what images come to mind when you hear different types of accents. Try to decide why you form those images.

Some scholars think the world is moving toward an "oligarchy" of languages from the major economic powers. Do you think this would be a good or bad occurrence? Why? What will happen to minority languages, and what will be the result?

3. Discuss different ways that language differences could influence an intercultural marriage.

4. Some countries have an official language (or languages), but others do not. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a country having an official language? Should the United States have an official language? Why?

Nonverbal Communication: The Messages of Action, Space, Time, and Silence

CHAPTER 7

There are times when silence has the loudest voice.

LEROY BROWN

To know what people think, pay regard to what they do, rather than what they say.

RENE DESCARTES

When American troops drove through the streets of Iraq, they thought they were being greeted by throngs of happy children. They observed hundreds of children lining the streets of Baghdad giving them the "thumbs-up" sign. However, as Woodward points out, the Americans "did not realize that in Iraq the thumbs-up sign traditionally was the equivalent of the American middle-finger salute." Misinterpreting the nonverbal actions of people from different cultures is rather commonplace. For example, in Mexico it is not unusual to see both men and women hugging each other in public. Yet in cultures such as China and Japan, these open displays of physical contact are normally excluded from interpersonal exchanges. Moving one's head from side to side in the United States is usually a sign of "no" and means disagreement, yet in India the same sign often represents agreement. In Western cultures, people normally greet by shaking hands. Arab men often greet by kissing on both cheeks. In Japan, men greet by exchanging bows. In Thailand, to signal another person to come near, one moves the fingers back and forth with the palm down. In the United States, you beckon someone to come by holding the palm up and moving the fingers toward your body. In Vietnam, that same motion is reserved for someone attempting to summon his or her dog. Crossing one's legs in the United States is often a sign of being relaxed; in Korea, it is a social taboo. In Japan, gifts are usually exchanged using both hands. Muslims consider the left hand unclean and do not eat or pass objects with it.

The above examples were offered for two reasons. First, we hoped to arouse your interest in the subject of nonverbal communication. Second, we wanted to demonstrate that although much of nonverbal communication is universal, many of your nonverbal actions are shaped by culture. Those actions are at the core of this chapter.

To appreciate the importance of nonverbal communication to human interaction, you should reflect for a moment on the countless times in a day that you send and receive nonverbal messages. Barnlund highlights some of those times:

Many, and sometimes most, of the critical meanings generated in human encounters are elicited by touch, glance, vocal intonation, gestures, or facial expression with or without the aid of words. From the moment of recognition until the moment of separation, people observe each other with all their senses, hearing pause and intonation, attending to dress and carriage, observing glance and facial tension, as well as noting word choice and syntax. Every harmony or disharmony of signals guides the interpretation of passing mood or enduring attribute. Out of the evaluation of kinetic, vocal, and verbal cues, decisions are made to argue or agree, to laugh or blush, to relax or resist, or to continue or cut off conversation.¹

THE IMPORTANCE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

With just a handful of examples, Barnlund makes it clear why nonverbal communication is an indispensable and all-pervasive element of human behavior. Perhaps its most obvious application is seen in infants. Babies start comprehending words at around six months of age, yet understand nonverbal communication well before that time. Hence, from the moment of birth to the end of life, nonverbal behavior is an important symbol system. This importance is made clear by Knapp and Hall, who conclude that any "list of all the situations where nonverbal communication plays an important role would be interminable."² It is essential that, here at the outset of our analysis, you realize that nonverbal communication is a basic means of expressing what a person is thinking and feeling.

While nonverbal communication is omnipresent and an essential ingredient in human interaction, we also maintain that there are some specific uses of nonverbal behavior that are worth mentioning. Let us look at a few of those so that you will see why any study of intercultural interaction must include information about nonverbal communication.

Judging Internal States

Nonverbal communication is important because people use this message system to express attitudes, feelings, and emotions. Consciously and unconsciously, intentionally and unintentionally, people make important judgments and decisions concerning the internal states

REMEMBER THIS
Nonverbal communication expresses emotion as well as specific information.

of others—states they often express without words. If you see someone with a clenched fist and a grim expression, you do not need words to tell you that this person is not happy. If you hear someone's voice quaver and see his or her hands tremble, you may infer that the person is fearful or anxious, despite what he or she might say.

Your emotions—be they fear, joy, anger, or sadness—are reflected in your posture, face, and eyes, so you can express them without ever uttering a word. For this reason, most people rely heavily on what they learn through their eyes. In fact, research indicates that you will usually believe nonverbal messages instead of verbal messages when the two contradict each other.⁴

You can even evaluate the quality of your relationships according to the interpretations assigned to nonverbal messages. From tone of voice to the distance between you and your partners to the amount of touching in which you engage, you can gather clues to the closeness of your relationships. The first time you move from holding hands with your partner to touching his or her face, you are sending a message, and that message takes on added significance if your touch is returned. In short, we agree with Morreale, Spitzberg, and Barge when they write, "people use nonverbal cues to define the social and emotional nature of their relationships and interactions."⁵

Creating Impressions

Nonverbal communication is important in human interaction because it is partially responsible for creating impressions. Think for a moment of the nonverbal preparation you make for an employment interview or an important date. This preparation shows your awareness that people will draw a mental picture of you based on your appearance. Your personal experiences will also show you how often you make judgments about other people based on such things as the color of their skin, age, gender, facial expression, manner of dress, accent, and even the type of handshake they manage to administer. How you select friends and sexual partners is likewise grounded in nonverbal impressions. You often approach certain people because of how attractive you find them and avoid others because of a decision you have made concerning their appearance.

Managing Interaction

Your nonverbal actions, whether intentional or unintentional, offer you and your partner clues about your conversation. You might lean forward, point a finger, pause, and even look away from your partner as a way of directing the conversation. These and other actions communicate to your partner "when to begin a conversation, whose turn it is to speak, how to get a chance to speak, how to signal others to talk more, and how to end a conversation."⁶

To help you understand nonverbal communication and its role in intercultural communication, we will (1) define nonverbal communication, (2) list its functions, (3) offer some guidelines for studying nonverbal communication, (4) link nonverbal communication to culture, and (5) discuss the major classifications of nonverbal messages. We will begin our discussion of each category of nonverbal communication by noting some of the basic behaviors found in the dominant culture of the United States, and then relate the categories to other cultures.

DEFINING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Because the central concern of this chapter is to examine how and why people communicate nonverbally, we begin with a definition of nonverbal communication. As you discovered in earlier chapters, there is no shortage of definitions for culture and

communication. The same proliferation is characteristic of the term *nonverbal behavior*. We shall, therefore, select a definition that is consistent with current thinking in the field and reflects the cultural orientation of this book. We propose that *nonverbal communication* involves all those *nonverbal stimuli* in a *communication setting* that are generated by both the *source* and his or her use of the *environment* and that have potential *message value* for the *source* or *receiver*. It is not by chance that our definition is somewhat lengthy. We wanted to offer a definition that would not only establish the boundaries of nonverbal communication but would also reflect how the process actually functions. Part of that functioning involves (1) intentional and unintentional messages, and (2) the tandem relationship between verbal and nonverbal messages.

Intentional and Unintentional Messages

Our definition permits us to include unintentional as well as intentional behavior. This approach is realistic because you send the preponderance of nonverbal messages without ever being aware that they have meaning for other people. In verbal communication, you consciously dip into your vocabulary and decide what words to use. Although you often consciously decide to smile or select a certain piece of jewelry, you also send countless messages that you never intend to be part of the transaction. For example, frowning because the sun is in your eyes may make someone mistakenly believe you are angry; leaving some shampoo in your hair could make someone think you look silly; and touching someone's hand for an extended time could cause that person to think you are flirting when that was not your intent. These are all examples of how your actions, without your blessing, can send a message to someone else. The sociologist Goffman describes this fusing of intentional and unintentional behavior:

The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he gives and the impression that he gives off. The first involves verbal symbols or their substitutes, which he uses admittedly and solely to convey the information that he and the other are known to attach to these symbols. This is communication in the traditional and narrow sense. The second involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor (communicator), the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way.⁷

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is multidimensional activity. This multidimensional aspect is revealed in the fact that nonverbal communication does not operate in isolation, but usually interacts with verbal messages. Knapp and Hall emphasize this idea when they write, "We need to understand that separating verbal and nonverbal behavior into two separate and distinct categories is virtually impossible."⁸ The interacting of the verbal with the nonverbal is reflected in a number of ways. For example, you often use nonverbal messages to repeat a point you are trying to make verbally. If you were telling someone that what they were proposing was a bad idea, you might move your head from side to side while uttering the word "no." To use another example, you might point in a

certain direction after you have just said, "The new library is south of that building." The gestures and words have a similar meaning and reinforce one another. You can also observe the reciprocal relationship between words and actions if you tell someone that you are pleased with his or her performance at the same time as you pat the person on the shoulder.

STUDYING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Because the study of nonverbal communication has become part of "popular culture" in recent years, this complex and multifaceted subject is often trivialized and misunderstood. Therefore, we need to pause before pursuing the topic any further and mention some potential problems and misconceptions associated with this important area of study.

Nonverbal Communication Can Be Ambiguous

We alluded to the first problem earlier when we discussed the intentional and unintentional natures of nonverbal communication. Simply stated, nonverbal communication can be ambiguous. For example, you may engage in a random gesture (such as swiping a fly off your arm) and someone may see that action and assume you are waving at them. Wood clearly underscores the idea of ambiguity when she writes, "We can never be sure that others understand the meanings we intended to express with our nonverbal behavior."⁹ Part of the ambiguity we have been talking about exists because nonverbal communication can be contextual. The ambiguity of context is clearly seen if someone brushes against you in an elevator: was it merely an accident or was it an opportunistic sexual act? Our point should be obvious: when you use or interpret nonverbal communication, you need to be aware of the ambiguous nature of this form of interaction. As Osborn and Morley tell us, "Meanings and interpretations of nonverbal behaviors often are on very shaky ground."¹⁰ We saw that "shaky ground" when some people, both in and out of the media, interpreted a fist bump exchanged by Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama and his wife Michelle as a "terrorist greeting" instead of a simple sign of affection between a husband and wife.

Multiple Factors Can Influence Nonverbal Communication

The next problem relates to individual differences—a subject we treated in great detail in Chapter 1 when we discussed the idea that your behavior is often produced by dynamics other than your culture. With regard to nonverbal interaction, Berman and Varner note the following: "Nonverbal communication is influenced

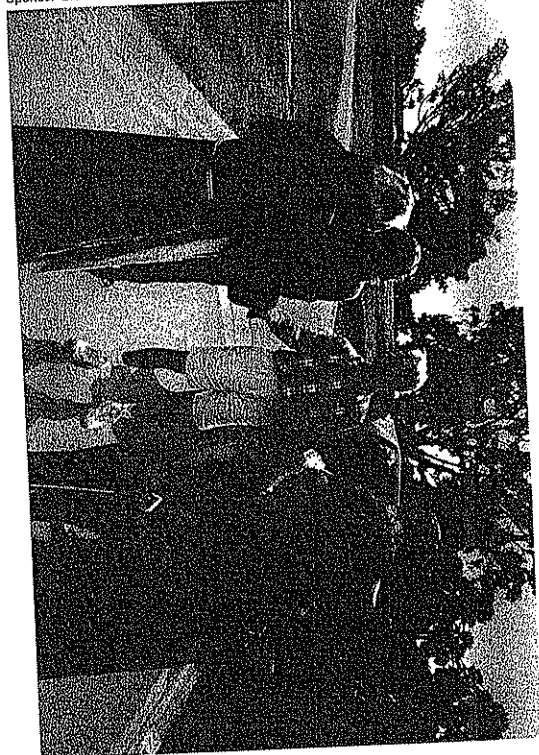
Nonverbal communication is multidimensional activity that can be influenced by a host of factors.

REMEMBER THIS



Nonverbal messages can be used to express attitudes, feelings, and emotions.

Spencer Grant/PhotoEdit



by a number of factors, including cultural background, socioeconomic background, education, gender, age, personal preferences and idiosyncrasies.¹¹ Simply stated, not all people in a particular culture engage in the same nonverbal actions, so interpretations of nonverbal communication must be carefully evaluated before generalizations can be made.

Nonverbal Communication is Contextual

The issue of the contextual nature of nonverbal communication might simply be an adjunct to our last point, in that it is once again calling your attention to the idea that "different situations or environments produce different nonverbal messages."¹² Personal observations will tell you that you behave differently at a club than you do in the lobby of a bank. It is the setting (context) that offers norms and guidelines for your interpersonal actions. When engaged in an intercultural interaction, keep this notion of context in mind as you try to decide the meaning behind the nonverbal cues you are receiving.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

The reason we have included an entire chapter on the subject of nonverbal communication is succinctly stated and illustrated by Ferraro in the following paragraph:

Certain messages can be sent in a number of different ways by different cultures. For example, whereas in the United States we signify affirmation by nodding, the very same message is sent by throwing the head back in Ethiopia, by sharply thrusting the head forward among the Semang of Malaya, and by raising the eyebrows among the Dyaks of Borneo.¹³

Rosenblatt expressed this same idea by noting, "What emotions are felt, how they are expressed, and how they are understood are matters of culture."¹⁴ What is key in Rosenblatt's sentence is that your culture has taught you what nonverbal actions to display (crying or laughing), the meaning of those actions (sadness or happiness), and the contextual backdrop of those actions (funeral or wedding). Our main thesis should be clear: nonverbal communication "plays a crucial and necessary part in communicative interactions between people from different cultures."¹⁵

As students of intercultural communication, learning about the alliance between culture and nonverbal behavior will help you improve the manner in which you engage in intercultural interactions. Hall underscores the need to learn about nonverbal communication in the following manner:

I remain convinced that much of our difficulty with people in other countries stems from the fact that so little is known about cross-cultural communication. . . . Formal training in the language, history, government, and customs is only a first step. Of equal importance is an introduction to the nonverbal language of the country. Most Americans are only dimly aware of this silent language, even though they use it every day.¹⁶

By understanding cultural differences in nonverbal behavior, you will not only be able to understand some of the messages being generated during the interaction, but you will also be able to gather clues about underlying attitudes and values. You have already seen that nonverbal communication often reveals basic cultural traits. Smiling and shaking hands tells us that a culture values amiability. How far people stand from each other during normal conversation can offer clues to their views on privacy. Bowing tells you that a culture values formality, rank, and status. It is not by chance that Hindus greet each other by placing their palms together in front of themselves while tilting their heads slightly downward; this salutation reflects their belief that the deity exists in everyone.

The connection between nonverbal communication and culture is made even more apparent if you recall from Chapter 1 that culture is invisible, omnipresent, and learned. Nonverbal communication has these same qualities. Hall alerts us to the invisible aspect of culture and nonverbal communication by employing phrases such as "silent language" and "hidden dimension." Andersen makes much the same point by stating, "Individuals are aware of little of their own nonverbal behavior, which is enacted mindlessly, spontaneously, and unconsciously."¹⁷ Both of these scholars are saying that much of your nonverbal behavior, like culture, tends to be elusive, spontaneous, and frequently beyond your awareness. We also remind you that culture is all pervasive, multidimensional, and boundless; it is everywhere and in everything. The same is true of nonverbal behavior.¹⁸

Another parallel between culture and nonverbal behavior is that both are instinctive and learned. Although much of outward behavior is innate (such as smiling, moving, touching, and eye contact), you are not born with a knowledge of the communication dimensions associated with nonverbal messages.

Let us offer a few words about some exceptions to this notion before we develop this relationship between learning and nonverbal communication. Research supports the view that because people are all one species, a general and common genetic inheritance produces universal facial expressions for most basic emotions (for example, fear, happiness, anger, surprise, disgust, and sadness).¹⁹ Most scholars would agree, however,

CONSIDER THIS

Below are some nonverbal dimensions. Take each of these dimensions and think of an example of how the dimension communicates a meaning in the dominant culture of the United States. Then go through the same list and think of an example from a culture different from your own.

Appearance/Posture/Gestures/Facial Expressions/Eye Contact/Touch/Paralanguage/Space and Distance/Time/Silence

CLASSIFICATIONS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Before we begin to break down nonverbal communication into a series of categories, we must once again remind you of the unified nature of the categories. As Richmond, McCracken, and Payne point out, "Messages generated by each category do not exist in isolation but rather exist in the company of messages from other categories, verbal messages, contexts, and people functioning as message receivers."⁷² Most classifications divide nonverbal messages into two comprehensive categories: those that are primarily produced by the body (appearance, movement, facial expressions, eye contact, touch, and paralanguage), and those that the individual combines with the setting (space, time, and silence).

Body Behavior

THE INFLUENCE OF APPEARANCE

From hair sprays to hairpieces, from reducing diets to twenty-four-hour fitness centers, from false eyelashes to blue contact lenses, and from plastic surgery on all parts of the body to tanning salons that might contribute to skin cancer, people show their concern for how they appear to others. So intense is our desire to influence the "messages" we send with our bodies that in the United States nearly fourteen million people spent almost \$10 billion on cosmetic surgery and BotoxTM injections.⁷³ In addition, the Academy of Dermatology estimates "that twenty-four percent of Americans between the ages of eighteen and fifty have at least one tattoo."⁷⁴ Keating clearly underscores the sway your outer shell has on others when she writes, "The power of communication to draw others near or to drive them away derives as much from how we appear as from the language we deploy."⁷⁵

As you would suspect, concern with personal appearance is not unique to the United States. As Peoples and Bailey point out, "People around the world are highly creative in altering their physical appearance."⁷⁶ And we should add that they have been doing

that "cultures formulate display rules that dictate when, how, and with what consequences nonverbal expressions will be exhibited."⁷⁸ Macraonis summarized this important principle in the following manner: "People the world over experience the same basic emotions. But what sparks a particular emotion, how and where a person expresses it, and how people define emotions in general vary as matters of culture. In global perspective, therefore, everyday life differs not only in terms of how people think and act, but how they infuse their lives with feelings."⁷⁹

Shehzad Noorani/MajorityWorld/Image Works



An important component of appearance is the perception of attractiveness and beauty.

so for a long time. As far back as the Upper Paleolithic period (about forty thousand years ago), your ancestors were using bones for necklaces and other bodily ornaments. From that period to the present, historical and archaeological evidence has shown that people are fixated on their bodies. They have painted them, fastened objects to them, dressed them, undressed them, and even deformed and mutilated them in the name of beauty. As the anthropologist Keesing has written, "The use of the body for decoration appears to be a cultural universal."⁷⁷ Face painting is still common in parts of Africa, in South America, and among some Native American tribes. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, many women still utilize facial tattoos as "beauty marks."⁷⁸ In India, many women place red dots on their foreheads to show they are married. And, of course, many women in the United States use various forms of facial makeup to enhance their appearance. For men, the wearing of beards has a long cultural tradition. In many cultures (such as Hasidic Jews, Sikhs, Mennonites, Amish, and some Muslim sects), it is an expression of a religious belief.

JUDGMENTS OF BEAUTY

An important component of appearance is the perception of attractiveness and beauty. Studies show that in the United States, being overweight reduces one's income, lowers one's chances of getting married, and helps decrease the amount of education one

receives.²⁹ One study pointed out that people make decisions about the future success of blind dates based completely on physical appearance.³⁰ Ruben noted that people use a person's attractiveness to make inferences (often faulty) about that individual's "intelligence, gender, age, approachability, financial well-being, class, tastes, values, and cultural background."³¹ In intercultural communication, appearance is important because, as Gardiner and Kosmitzki observe, "One's body image and the satisfaction with it result from comparisons with an implicit cultural ideal and standard."³² As you would suspect, the ideal varies from culture to culture. In the United States, people tend to value the appearance of tall, slender women and men with muscular bodies.³³ As Ferraro states, in the United States "people spend millions of dollars each year on running shoes, diet plans, appetite suppressants, and health spa memberships to help them take off 'ugly pounds.'"³⁴ This notion of leanness and trimness as a sign of attractiveness is not the rule in all cultures. For example, in large parts of Africa, plumpness is considered a sign of beauty, health, and wealth, and slimness is evidence of unhappiness, disease, or mistreatment at the hands of one's husband.³⁵ Among the Chinese, you can see yet another cultural standard for female attractiveness. As Wenhong and Grove note, "Many women keep their hairstyles simple (often one or two braids) and make little attempt to draw attention to themselves through self-decoration such as colorful scarves, jewelry, or makeup."³⁶

The judgment of beauty across cultures is a perception that is ripe for ethnocentrism. What happens, according to the anthropologist Ferraro, is that "people intolerant of different cultural practices often fail to realize that had they been raised in one of those other cultures, they would be practicing those allegedly disgusting or irrational customs."³⁷ As we have just noted, one of those "customs" is what constitutes "beauty." Remland offers an excellent example of the link between ethnocentrism and beauty when he reminds us, "what is seen as beautiful in one culture may look hideous to people from another culture."³⁸ Remland adds:

The many exotic rituals we often see in PBS documentaries or in the pages of National Geographic, such as neck stretching, lip enlargements, catoble plugs, teeth filing, and so on, represent the beautifying practices common in many parts of the world. Of course, liposuction, hair implants, facelifts, laser surgery, and the like, while not the least bit extraordinary to many Westerners, may seem abhorrent to people from other parts of the world.³⁹

Because cultures are dynamic and always in a state of flux, it will be interesting to observe if perceptions of attractiveness begin to change in Japan, Africa, Russia, India, China, and even Iraq as those cultures come into greater contact with Western media. Or perhaps the opposite might happen. Westerners might well alter their perceptions of what is attractive.

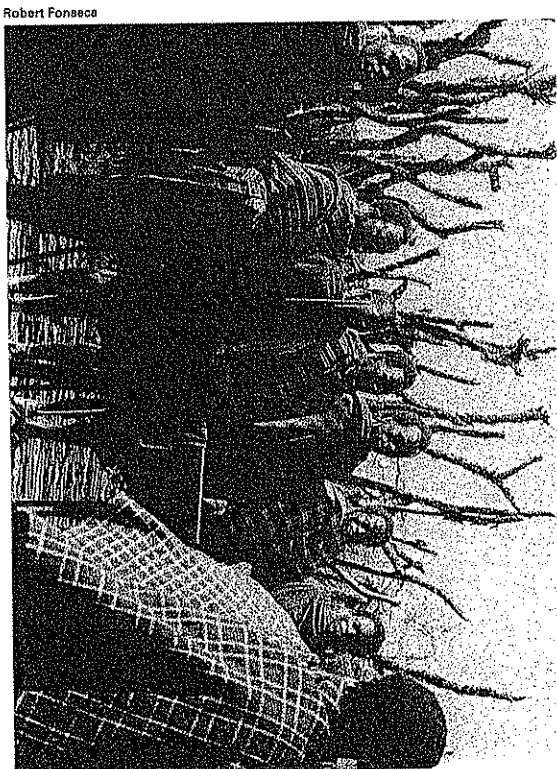
THE MESSAGES OF SKIN COLOR

Skin color is perhaps the most obvious example of how general appearance is linked to perception and communication. As Vazquez points out, "skin color is the first racial marker children recognize and can be considered the most salient of phenotypic attributes."⁴⁰ This indicator is important to intercultural communication in that skin color draws attention to the idea of differences.⁴¹ Knapp and Hall note, "In many respects, permanent skin colors have been the most potent body stimulus for determining interpersonal responses in our culture."⁴² Skin color "may also be the basis of the allocation

of economic and psychological privileges to individuals relative to the degree those privileges are awarded to valued members of the dominant culture."⁴³

THE MESSAGES OF ATTIRE

The use of clothing goes well beyond protection from the elements; it is often a form of communication. In the United States, as Adler and Rodman state, "Clothing can be used to convey economic status, education, social status, moral standards, athletic ability and/or interests, belief system (political, philosophical, religious), and level of sophistication."⁴⁴ In the United States, you can also observe how clothing can be a sign of group identification. Whether it is a uniform, the sweatshirt of a favorite football team, the specific tilt of a baseball cap, or the attire of the hip-hop co-culture, clothing attempts to tell other people something about your identity. Among gang members in East Los Angeles, even something as simple as the color of a bandana is a statement of group affiliation—blue for Crips and red for Bloods.⁴⁵ We can observe the subtlety of color in how the men of Iraq "tell others" about their status and affiliations by the colors on their *kaffiyas* (headpieces). An all-white *kaffiya* means the person wearing the headpiece has not yet made the pilgrimage to Mecca (as discussed in Chapter 3). What we have shown thus far is that attire, whether used as military dress, signs of status, or costumes, offers clues into a culture's view of the world.⁴⁶ For example, in Malaysia women often wear something called a *bayu kurang*. This garment is loose fitting and somewhat formless, and does not reveal the contours of the body. An even more extreme expression of feminine modesty through attire is seen among women in many Middle Eastern countries. In some instances, "Muslim girls are not allowed to participate in swimming classes because of the prohibitions against exposing their bodies."⁴⁷



Robert Fonseca

In much of the world, people still dress in their traditional attire.

Al-Kaysi develops this point in more detail when he speaks of the links between modesty and dress among Muslim women: "The main garment must be a 'flowing' one, that is, a woman must avoid tight or clinging clothes which exaggerate her figure, or any part of it, such as breasts, legs or arms."⁵⁸ Many Arab women also cover their hair with a scarf (called *hijab*) and in some very orthodox areas may even cover their entire face. These head coverings have been a point of contention in some non-Muslim countries. For example, in many European nations, there have been government attempts to ban the veils from being worn in public places.⁵⁹

The link between cultural values and clothing is also seen among Filipinos. Goche-nour tells us, "Values relating to status and authority are the root of the Filipino's need to dress correctly."⁶⁰ Of the German culture, Hall and Hall write:

Correct behavior is symbolized by appropriate and very conservative dress. The male business uniform is a freshly pressed dark suit and tie with a plain shirt and dark shoes and socks. It is important to emulate this conservative approach to both manners and dress. Personal appearance, like the exterior appearance of their homes, is very important to Germans.⁶¹

Much of the same concern for appearance in dress can be found in Argentina, where "elegant clothes are very important."⁶² Morrison, Conway, and Douress note that Argentines "pride themselves on dressing as fashionably as refined Parisians and Milanese."⁶³

The Spanish link appearance to one's rank, as Ruch asserts: "Historically, dress has denoted social status."⁶⁴ In Spain, it is not uncommon to see people of high status wearing a suit and tie in very hot weather. Perhaps nowhere in the world is the merger between attire and a culture's value system more evident than in Japan. McDaniel makes the connection when he writes, "The general proclivity for conservative dress styles and colors emphasizes the nation's collectivism and, concomitantly, lessens the potential for social disharmony arising from nonconformist attire."⁶⁵

In much of the world, people still dress in their traditional garments. Clothing styles, according to Peoples and Bailey "have historically served as the most overt single indicator of ethnic identity."⁶⁶ Whether it be the women of Guatemala wearing their colorful blouses (*huipils*) or African men in white *dashikis*, traditional garments are still common in many cultures. The dress of Arab men is a perfect example of cultural identity and dress. For many Arabs, correct attire would "include a long loose robe called a *thobe* or *ghutra* and a headpiece, a white cloth *kumma* bandied by a black *agal* to secure it."⁶⁷

As we have noted, for Muslims clothing is much more than apparel to cover the body. As Torrawa points out, garments often reflect important values of the Arab culture.⁶⁸ As is the case with so many aspects of culture, there is often a "below the surface" reason for cultural behaviors. This deep structure and its tie to attire in the Arab world are eloquently explained by Torrawa:

In all its guises, clothing inscribes ideologies of truth and deception, echoing the words of scripture, and revealing—and unveiling—that honor can only be attained when every robe donned is a robe of honor and every garment a garment of piety.⁶⁹

Whether they are Sikhs in white turbans, women in Iran wearing their *hijab*, the Japanese in kimonos, Hasidic Jews in black yarmulkes, or the black attire of the Amish in the United States, you need to learn to be tolerant of others' external differences and not let them impede communication.

BODY MOVEMENT (KINESICS)

It is an obvious understatement to say that "actions communicate." Imai clearly underscores the pervasive use of actions as a form of communication when he writes:

The world is a giddy montage of vivid gestures—traffic police, street vendors, expressway drivers, teachers, children on playgrounds, athletes with their exuberant hugging, clenched fists and high fives.⁷⁰ People all over the world use their hands, heads, and bodies to communicate expressively.⁷¹

The basic assumption of this important message system is expressed by Morreale, Spitzberg, and Barge: "How people hold themselves, stand, sit, and walk communicates strong nonverbal messages. Whether you intend to send a message or not, every move you make potentially communicates something about you to others."⁷² The study of how movement communicates is called *kinesics*. Kinesic cues are those visible body shifts and movements that can send messages about your attitude toward the other person (leaning forward to indicate you are comfortable with him or her), your emotional state (tapping on a table if you are nervous), and your desire to control your environment (waving your hand to ward off a mosquito).

In attempting to understand the power and influence of body movement, a few practical principles need to be mentioned.⁷³ First, it should be remembered that in most instances, the messages the body generates operate only in combination with other messages. People usually smile and say hello to a friend at the same time. In Mexico, when asking someone to wait for "just a minute" (*un momento, por favor*), the speaker also makes a fist and then extends the thumb and index finger so that they form a sideways "U." Second, while body language is universal, you need to consider what we said earlier in the chapter when we pointed out the many nonverbal messages, and the meanings they evoke, that are culture bound. Finally, because much of it is not learned, kinesic behavior is less controllable than verbal communication. That is to say, in most instances you have at least a fraction of a second to think about what you are going to say, while a great deal of your body action is spontaneous.

Scholars have suggested that people can make as many as seven hundred thousand distinct physical signs. Hence, any attempt at cataloging them would be both frustrating and fruitless. Our purpose is simply to call your attention to the idea that while all people use movements to communicate, culture teaches you how to use and interpret these movements. In the upcoming sections, we look at a few cultural differences in posture, sitting behavior, and movements of the body that convey specific meanings (gestures).

POSTURE

Posture can signal whether or not people are paying attention, the degree of status in the encounter, and even how much they like or dislike each other.⁷⁴ Posture can also reveal religious practices (sitting, kneeling, bowing, etc.), feelings of submission, and even sexual intentions.⁷⁵ A recent study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* revealed "that body posture may be as important as the face in communicating emotions such as fear."⁷⁶ Think for a moment of all the meanings associated with slouching, being stiff, slumping over, crouching, kneeling, pulling back one's shoulders, twitching one's legs, and the like.

On an intercultural level, posture can offer insight into a culture's value system and deep structure. You can observe this bond between culture and movement by looking at the Japanese, Thai, and Indian cultures. In Japan and other Asian cultures, the bow is much more than a greeting. It signifies that culture's concern with status and rank. In Japan, for example, a low bow is an indicator of respect.⁶⁶ Although it appears simple to the outsider, the bowing ritual is actually rather complicated. The person who occupies the lower station begins the bow, and his or her bow must be deeper than the other person's. The superior, on the other hand, determines when the bowing is to end. When the participants are of equal rank, they begin the bow in the same manner and end at the same time. The Thai people use a similar movement called the *wai*—made by pressing both hands close together in front of one's body, with the fingertips reaching to about neck level—to show respect. The nearer the head comes to the hands, the more respect is shown.⁶⁷ You can see yet another greeting pattern in India. Here the posture used when greeting someone is directly linked with the idea that Hindus see God in everything—including other people. The *namaste* (Indian greeting) is carried out by making a slight bow with the palms of both hands together and the fingertips at the chin.⁶⁸

Posture is also associated with how you sit. Here, again, you can find cultural differences. As eccentric as it sounds, the way people sit is often a reflection of important cultural characteristics. In the United States, where being casual and friendly is valued, people, consciously or unconsciously, act out this value by the way they sit. As Novinger illustrates, the position for males "includes a slump and leaning back and a type of sprawl that occupies a lot of space."⁶⁹ In many countries, such as Germany and Sweden, where lifestyles tend to be more formal, slouching is considered a sign of rudeness and poor manners. In fact, according to Nees, "German children are still taught to sit and stand up straight, which is a sign of good character. Slouching is seen as a sign of a poor upbringing."⁷⁰ For the Samoan culture, the idea of respect is acted out by how one sits. For example, people show respect by positioning themselves at a lower position than the person to whom they are junior.⁷¹ Even the manner in which you position your legs while sitting has cultural overtones. Remland offers an excellent example of this idea when he notes, "An innocent act of ankle-to-knee leg crossing, typical of most American males, could be mistaken for an insult (a showing of the sole of the foot gesture) in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Singapore, or Thailand."⁷² And according to Ruch, the same seemingly simple act is considered extremely offensive in Ghana and in Turkey.⁷³ People in Thailand also believe there is something special about the bottoms of the feet. For them, the feet are the lowest part of the body, and they should never be pointed in the direction of another person.⁷⁴ For the Thai, the feet take on so much significance that people avoid stomping them.

Within the United States, you can also find co-cultural difference in how people move, stand, and sit during interaction. Women often hold their arms closer to their bodies than men do. They usually keep their legs closer together and less relaxed than the men in mixed company. Their posture is more restricted and less relaxed than the posture of males. They also tend to tip their head to one side.⁷⁵ Most of the research in the area of gender communication concludes that these differences are related to issues such as status, power, and affiliation.⁷⁶ Posture and stance also play an important role in the African-American co-culture. This is evident in the walk employed by many young African-American males. According to Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau, "The general form of the walk is slow and casual with the head elevated and tipped to one side, one arm swinging and the other held limply."⁷⁷ The walk is often used to "show

the dominant culture that you are strong and proud, despite your status in American society."⁷⁸

GESTURES

Consider for a moment all of the messages people send each other by what appear to be the simplest of all movements—waving, placing hands on hips, folding arms, pointing, clenching a fist, shaking a finger, etc. The message value of gestures as a form of communication is also reflected in the fact that the deaf co-culture in the United States has a rich and extensive vocabulary composed of gestures.

Another example of the power of gestures can be found in the hand signals used by various urban gangs.

The slightest variation in performing a certain gesture can be the catalyst for a violent confrontation. You can see the importance of gestures in intercultural communication because some gestures that are positive, humorous, or harmless in some cultures can have the opposite meaning in other cultures. You can observe the potential for confusion and awkwardness in three quick examples. In Latin America, making the hand gesture used in the United States for "come here" (holding the hand palm up with the index finger extending in and out three or four times) can signal that you are romantically interested in the recipient of this gesture. You can also see confusion over the simple gesture of pointing. In the United States, pointing at someone usually does not carry negative connotations, but in China, it can be taken as a sign of rudeness. The "thumbs-up" gesture, which is very common in the United States, can also be misleading. In the United States, this gesture has positive connotations because it "says" "everything is okay" or "you are doing very well." However, "in most of Europe, in Australia and West Africa it is seen as a rude gesture."⁷⁹

Because there are thousands of gestures inherent in every culture, we do not intend to offer an all-inclusive taxonomy. Such an undertaking could fill the remaining pages of this book. Therefore, instead of presenting a random catalog of gestures, we will look at (1) pointing, (2) idiosyncratic gestures, (3) beckoning, (4) acceptance and understanding, and variations related to the (5) frequency and intensity of the gestures.

Pointing. As we have already noted, pointing is a very common gesture in the United States. Americans point to objects and at people with the index finger. Directions are even given by pointing in one direction or another with the index finger. Germans point with the little finger, and the Japanese point with the entire hand, palm up. In much of the Arab world, pointing is thought to be an offensive gesture. The Navajo use their chin, and in much of Asia, pointing the index finger at a person is considered rude.⁸⁰

CONSIDER THIS

What do you think the following gestures mean in the U.S. culture?

- Fingers crossed
- Thumbs up
- Thumbs down
- Making a round ring (O) with the hand
- The vertical horn sign, made with fingers
- Pointing at a person

Do you know of some cultures that give different meaning to these acts?



REMEMBER THIS

Idiosyncratic gestures are those movements whose meaning is directly linked to a particular culture.

Idiosyncratic Gestures. As we have already indicated, there are a limitless number of *idiosyncratic* gestures found in each culture. These are the gestures whose meanings are the feature and property of a particular culture. In China, if you place your right hand over your heart, it means you are making a sincere promise. In Iraq, the same gesture can mean "thank you." For the French, pulling the skin down below the right eye can mean "I don't believe you." In Argentina, one twists an imaginary mustache to signify that everything is okay. In the United States, "making a circle with one's thumb and index finger while extending the others is emblematic of the word 'okay'; in Japan (and Korea) it traditionally signifies 'money' (*okane*); and among Arabs this gesture is usually accompanied by a baring of teeth, signifying extreme hostility."⁹¹ To a Tunisian, this same gesture means, "I'll kill you."

Many gestures with sexual connotations are also tied to a certain culture. In the United States, someone might use the middle finger to send an insulting, obscene gesture. This sexual insult gesture is not universal. On the other hand, the gesture we discussed in the last paragraph (forming an "O" with the thumb and index finger) is, according to Lynch and Hanson, "an obscene gesture among some Latino cultures."⁹² In the Italian culture, the gesture that refers to someone as a homosexual is made by moving the middle finger behind your ear.⁹³ Ferraro suggests that nonverbal ways of communicating admiration can be one of the most idiosyncratic categories of gestures. For example, "the Frenchman kisses his fingertips, the Italian twists an imaginary mustache, and the Brazilian curls one hand in front of another as if he is looking through an imaginary telescope."⁹⁴

Beckoning. The sign we make for *beckoning*, another gesture that we take for granted, is also culturally based. In the United States, when a person wants to signal a friend to come, he or she usually makes the gesture with one hand, palm up, fingers more or less together, and moving toward the body. Koreans express this same idea by cupping "the hand with the palm down and drawing the fingers toward the palm."⁹⁵ When they see this gesture, many Americans think the other person is waving good-bye. Filipinos often summon someone with a quick downward nod of the head. In Germany and much of Scandinavia, tossing the head back comprises a beckoning motion. For many Arabs, holding the right hand out, palm upward, and opening and closing the hand is nonverbally asking someone to "come here."⁹⁶ And in Spain, to beckon someone, you stretch your arm out, palm downward, and make a scratching motion toward your body with your fingers.

Acceptance and Understanding. Head movements and gestures denoting acceptance and understanding represent another example of how some gestures are rooted in culture. In the United States, moving your head up and down is seen as a sign of understanding and agreement. This same movement can have different meanings in different cultures. As Lynch and Hanson point out, "This same gesture is interpreted quite differently in many other cultures. Among Native American, Middle Eastern, and Pacific Island groups, it often means, 'I hear you speaking.' It does not signal that the listener understands the message nor does it suggest that he or she agrees."⁹⁷ Greeks express "yes" with a nod similar to the one used in the United States, but when communicating "no," they jerk their head back and raise their faces. Lifting one or both hands up

to the shoulders strongly emphasizes the "no." And in Iraq, a quick upward head snap with a tongue click means "no." In India, gestures for "yes" and "no" also differ from those found in the United States. Indians demonstrate they agree with you by tossing the head from side to side. To show disagreement they nod up and down.⁹⁸ Both of these gestures are virtually reversed in the United States.

Frequency and Intensity. There are also cultural differences that regulate the frequency and intensity of gestures that cultures use. It is generally accepted that Italians, South Americans, most Latinos, Africans, and people from the Middle East are more nonverbally demonstrative and employ gestures with greater frequency and intensity than do cultures such as the Japanese, Chinese, Finns, and Scandinavians.⁹⁹ A few specific examples will help illustrate this point. As Falassi and Flower note, "Speaking with their hands—or all their bodies in fact—is in tune with the Italian love of theatrics, and their native *gusto* for social interaction."¹⁰⁰ Barry and his colleagues make much the same point with regard to the "exciting impression" Italians make "because of their lively movement patterns."¹⁰¹ Novinger describes the animated style of gesturing in Brazil when she writes, "Brazilians say that if you tie their hands they cannot speak. They use hand gestures and broad arm gestures, according to Winter, gestures are used to help add meaning to conversations and to emphasize key points."¹⁰² The use of gestures to promote meaning is also common among Arab men. Here you can see gesturing and "the waving of arms used to accompany almost every spoken word."¹⁰³ Members of many Asian cultures perceive such outward activity quite differently, often equating vigorous action with a lack of manners and restraint.¹⁰⁴ According to Lewis, "Arms are used very little by Nordics during conversation."¹⁰⁵ Germans are also made uncomfortable by bold hand gestures. These types of gestures, by their standards, are too flashy and flamboyant.¹⁰⁶ Ruch offers the following advice to American executives who work with German corporations: "Hands should be used with calculated dignity. They should never serve as lively instruments to emphasize points in conversation. The entire game plan is to appear calm under pressure."¹⁰⁸

You can also see the significance of gestures by looking at various co-cultures. For example, as compared to males, women tend to use fewer gestures and do so with less intensity.¹⁰⁹ African Americans value a lively and expressive form of communication and hence display a greater variety of movements than whites when interacting.¹⁰⁹

Facial Expressions

The early Greek playwrights and the Noh actors of Japan were keenly aware of the shifts in mood and meaning that facial expressions conveyed. Both forms of drama use masks and extensive makeup to demonstrate differences in each actor's character and attitude. Whether it is the Mexican adage that "One's face is the mirror of one's soul," or the Yiddish proverb that states, "The face tells the secret," people everywhere have been captivated by the face. What is fascinating about the study of the face is that you are talking about three faces. First, there is your "assigned" face, the one you are born with. While it is altered by age, health, and even cosmetics and surgery, this is your face at rest. Second is the face you are able to manipulate at will. You can decide to smile, wink, frown, and so on. Finally, you have the face that is changed by your surroundings and the messages you receive.

Among scholars, the importance of facial expressions is well established. From the very moment newborn infants arrive, they begin the process (which is unconscious at this stage) of "reading" the expressions on the faces that stare down at them. Calero makes this point when he writes, "Infants learn to distinguish different expressions and sense the changes in a parent's facial expressions."¹⁰¹ Ferraro further accentuates the importance of facial expressions by noting that the face is so central to the process of communication that people often speak of "face-to-face" communication in the West and "losing face" in places like Japan.¹⁰²

The reason facial cues are important is that they can reflect a course of action,¹⁰³ convey messages of "social submissiveness and dominance,"¹⁰⁴ tell others how interested you are, signal your degree of involvement, indicate your level of comprehension about the moment, and divulge whether or not your reactions are spontaneous or managed.¹⁰⁵

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND CULTURE

Although facial expressions play an important role in any study of intercultural communication, the specific implications of these expressions are often difficult to assess. At the core of a lingering academic debate lies this question: Is there a nearly universal language of facial expressions? One position holds that anatomically similar expressions may occur in everyone, but the meanings people attach to them differ from culture to culture.¹⁰⁶ The majority opinion, which we introduced earlier in the chapter, is that there are universal facial expressions for which people have similar meanings. Ekman is the driving force behind this position. He advances the following point of view: "The subtle creases of a grimace tell the same story around the world, to preliterate New Guinea tribesmen, to Japanese and American college students alike. Darwin knew it all along, but now here's hard evidence that culture does not control the face."¹⁰⁷ Ekman and others present the theory that there is "a basic set of at least six facial expressions that are innate, universal, and carry the same basic meaning throughout the world,"¹⁰⁸ that are innate, universal, and carry the same basic meaning throughout the world.¹⁰⁸ These six pan-cultural and universal facial expressions are happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and surprise.

Despite the biologically based nature of facial expressions, there seem to be clear cultural expectations and norms that often dictate when, where, how, and to whom facial expressions are displayed.¹⁰⁹ This means that different cultures construct their own rules for what are appropriate facial expressions, as well as what aspects of that behavior should be attended to.¹¹⁰ A few specific instances will illustrate the role of culture in the production and interpretation of facial expressions.

REMEMBER THIS

While there is a biological component to facial expressions, culture plays a major role in what produces the facial expression, how the expression is displayed, and the meaning attached to the facial expression.

SOME CULTURAL EXAMPLES

In many Mediterranean cultures, people exaggerate signs of grief or sadness. It is not uncommon in this region of the world to see men crying in public. Yet among Japanese and Chinese men, you often see a desire to hide public expressions of anger, sorrow, confusion, or disgust. As Sue and Sue point

out, "the Japanese and Chinese restraint of strong feelings (anger, irritation, sadness, and love or happiness) is considered to be a sign of maturity and wisdom."¹¹¹ Min-Sun Kim says that Koreans also withhold emotion and do not engage in animated facial expressions.¹¹²

The smile is yet another emotional display that is linked to one's culture. Everyone is born knowing how to smile. Yet the amount of smiling, the stimulus that produces the smile, and even what the smile is communicating often shift from culture to culture. As Kraut and Johnson note, culture can "influence smiling both by determining the interpretation of events, which affects the cause of happiness, and by shaping display roles, which determine when it is socially appropriate to smile."¹¹³ In America, a smile can be a sign of happiness or friendly affirmation and is usually used with great regularity. In the German culture, according to Nees, a smile "is used with far more discretion, generally only with those persons one knows and really likes."¹¹⁴ In the Japanese culture, the smile can also mask an emotion or be used to avoid answering a question.¹¹⁵ In addition, according to Nishiyama, "the Japanese may also smile when they feel embarrassed and laugh when they want to hide their anger."¹¹⁶ In Japan, people of lower status often use the smile "to denote acceptance of a command or order by a person of higher status when in fact they feel anger or contempt for the order or the person giving the order."¹¹⁷ In the Korean culture, too much smiling is often perceived as a sign of a shallow person. Dresser notes that this "lack of smiling by Koreans has often been misinterpreted as a sign of hostility."¹¹⁸ Thais, on the other hand, smile much of the time. In fact, Thailand has been called the "Land of Smiles."¹¹⁹

Even within a culture, there are groups that use facial expressions differently from the dominant culture. Summarizing the research on gender differences, Pearson, West, and Turner report that, when compared to men, women use more facial expressions, are more expressive, smile more, are more apt to return smiles, and are more attracted to others who smile.¹²⁰

Eye Contact and Gaze

The eyes, and their power and influence, have always been a fascinating topic. You can see the power of eye contact when professional poker players try to hide behind their dark glasses during an important tournament. In the United States, so important are the eyes as a communication tool that a lack of eye contact between patient and health care

CONSIDER THIS

After teaching for over five years at a university in California, Adie had learned to read students' nonverbal behaviors in the classroom. For instance, she could determine from facial expressions and body posture if a student did not understand the lesson, was bored, tired, or daydreaming, or was paying close attention to what was being said. With this knowledge, Adie could continuously adjust the way she lectured in order to maintain student attention. However, when she moved to a new position at a Japanese university, she discovered that students exhibited few, if any, facial expressions, and sat quietly at their desks with very good posture. What could Adie have done in this situation in order to measure student interest during her lecture?

professional is one of the most common complaints logged against doctors. The impact of eye contact on communication is also seen in the countless number of literary and musical allusions to eyes that have been made over hundreds of years. Emerson wrote, "The eyes indicate the antiquity of the soul." Shakespeare also knew the communicative potency of the eyes when he wrote, "Thou tell'st me there is murder in mine eye." And Bob Dylan underscored the same potency in his lyrics: "Your eyes said more to me than night than your lips would ever say." Even "the evil eye" is more than just an expression. In one study, Roberts examined 186 cultures throughout the world and found that 67 of them had some belief in the evil eye.¹² Zuniga highlights the power of the evil eye (*mal ojo*) in Mexico and Puerto Rico with the following observation: "Mal ojo is believed to be the result of excessive admiration and desire on the part of another. Mothers may isolate their children for fear of having one become a victim of *mal ojo*."¹² The Korean culture also has a distinctive approach to eye contact that underscores its significance to human communication. They have the term *nunchi*, which means communicating with the eyes. This style of eye contact is so important that Robinson maintains it causes "miscommunication between Westerners and all Asians."¹³

Another reason the eyes are so important to the communication process is that the number of messages you can send with your eyes is nearly limitless. We have all heard some of the following words used to describe a person's eyes: *direct, sensual, sardonic, expressive, intelligent, penetrating, sad, cheerful, worldly, hard, trusting, and suspicious*.

EYE CONTACT AND THE DOMINANT CULTURE

Before offering some cultural comparisons that demonstrate how culture can affect eye contact, we shall briefly discuss how eye contact is used by the dominant culture in the United States, where eyes serve a number of communication functions. Eyes express emotions, monitor feedback,¹⁴ indicate degrees of attentiveness, influence changes in attitude, define power and status relationships, and take on a central role in impression management.¹⁵ The manner in which these "functions" are carried out is also altered by culture. For example, in the United States, as Triandis notes, looking another person directly in the eye is very common.¹⁶ Not only is it the rule, but for most members of the dominant culture, eye contact is highly valued.¹⁷ There is even a tendency in North America to be suspicious of someone who does not follow the culturally prescribed rules for direct eye contact. In fact, gaze avoidance is usually associated with "a lack of interest, dishonesty, shyness, and negative attitudes."¹⁸ So important is this interpersonal skill that one popular communication textbook offered the following advice to its readers: "You can improve your eye contact by becoming conscious of looking at people when you are talking to them. If you find your eyes straying away from that person, work to regain direct contact."¹⁹ The key word in the previous sentence is *direct*. For, as you shall learn in the following few paragraphs, eye contact and all its variations represent important variables in the study of culture and communication.¹⁹

SOME CULTURAL EXAMPLES

In many cultures, direct eye contact is a taboo or an insult. In Japan, for example, prolonged eye contact is considered rude, threatening, disrespectful,²⁰ and even a sign of belligerence.²¹ It is not uncommon for the Japanese to look down or away or even close their eyes, while engaging in conversation. You can probably appreciate the problems that might arise if Americans are not aware of the Japanese use of eye contact. As

Richmond and her associates point out, many Americans often interpret Japanese eye contact, or lack of it, "as signs of disagreement, disinterest, or rejection."²²

Among people from Mediterranean cultures, we find yet another attitude toward eye contact. Some of these features are highlighted by Lewis:

Mediterranean people use their eyes in many different ways for effect. These include glaring (to show anger), glistening eyes (to show sincerity), winking (very common in Spain and France to imply conspiracy) and the eyelash flutter (used by women to reinforce persuasion).²⁴

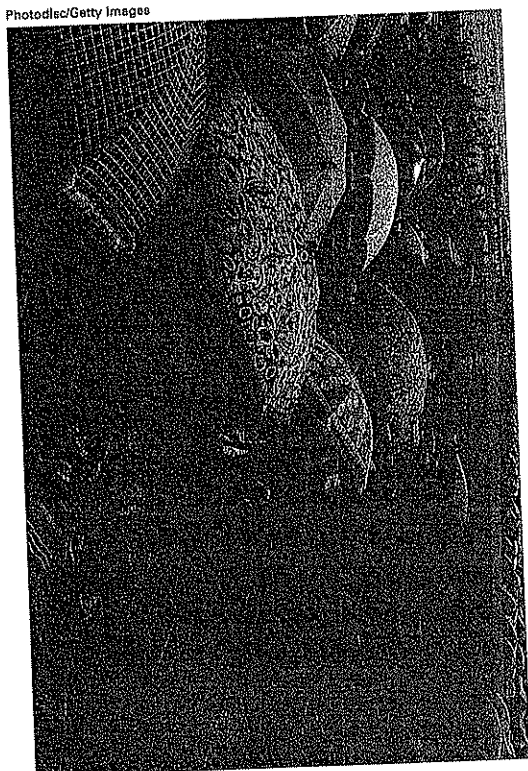
Dresser notes that "people from Latin American and Caribbean cultures also avoid eye contact as a sign of respect."²⁵ This same orientation toward eye contact is found in Africa. Richmond and Gestrin tell us, "Making eye contact when communicating with a person who is older or of higher status is considered a sign of disrespect or even aggression in many parts of Africa, where respect is shown by lowering the eyes."²⁶ There is even a Zulu saying that states, "The eye is an organ of aggression." India and Egypt provide two good examples of eye contact mirroring a cultural value. According to Luckmann, "In India, the amount of eye contact that is appropriate depends on one's social position (people of different socioeconomic classes avoid eye contact with each other)."²⁷ In Egypt, the issue is not social status but gender. "Women and men who are strangers may avoid eye contact out of modesty and respect for religious rules."²⁸ We should point out, at least as it applies to gender, that we agree with Tulaia when she notes that the use of eye contact involving women is "changing as more women throughout the world enter the job market and rise to higher levels."²⁹

Potential problems can arise when Asians and Westerners interact with cultures whose members practice prolonged eye contact with their communication counterpart. For example, Lomner and Malpass note, "In the Middle East, relatively extended gaze exchanges are considered appropriate during exchanges between men."³⁰ Members of these cultures believe such contact shows their interest in the other person and helps them assess the truthfulness of the other person's words.³¹ Germans also engage in very direct eye contact. This point, and some of the problems that can arise from this behavior, are noted by Nees: "Germans will look you directly in the eye while talking, which some Americans find vaguely annoying or disconcerting. From the German point of view, this is a sign of honesty and true interest in the conversation. For Americans it can seem too intense and direct."³²

In North America, the prolonged stare is often a part of the nonverbal code used by the gay male co-culture. When directed toward a member of the same sex, an extended stare, like certain other nonverbal messages, is often perceived as a signal of interest and sexual suggestion.³³ A few other differences in the use of eye contact in the United States are worth noting. Sue and Sue indicate that eye contact, or a lack of it, can create misunderstandings between African Americans and members of the dominant culture. The reason is simple: African Americans often do not find it necessary to engage in direct eye contact at all times during a conversation.³⁴ The Hopi interpret direct eye contact as offensive and usually will avoid any type of staring. The Navajos dislike sustained eye contact so strongly that they have incorporated it into their creation myth. The myth, which tells the story of a "terrible monster called He-Who-Kills-With-His-Eyes," teaches the Navajo child that "a stare is literally an evil eye and implies a sexual and aggressive assault."³⁵ This same uncomfortable feeling toward direct and prolonged eye contact can be found among Mexican Americans. As Purnell and Paulanka note, "Mexican Americans consider sustained eye contact when speaking directly to someone

u respond
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Photodisc/Getty Images



nude. Direct eye contact with superiors may be interpreted as insolence. Avoiding direct eye contact with superiors is a sign of respect."¹¹⁶

Among members of the dominant culture, there also are gender variations in how people use their eyes to communicate. For example, "Both sexes signal interest and involvement with others by making eye contact, but men also use it to challenge others or to assert their status and power."¹¹⁷ In addition, research on the subject indicates that in most instances, women maintain more eye contact than men do; women look at other women more and hold eye contact longer with one another than do men.¹¹⁸ We should add that gender characteristics regarding eye contact vary from culture to culture. As we noted earlier, in cultures where gender segregation is the norm (such as Saudi Arabia) direct eye contact between men and women is avoided.¹¹⁹

REMEMBER THIS	
Cultures that employ very direct eye contact	Cultures that employ nominal eye contact
• Middle Eastern • French • German • Dominant U.S. culture • Deaf co-cultures	• Korean • Japanese • African • Native Americans • East Indians

As you might imagine, eye contact is a very important consideration when communicating with a member of the deaf community who is employing American Sign Language. Among deaf people who are "signing," there is a belief that "eye contact is the most important part of communication."¹²⁰ Turning your back to people who are signing is essentially the same as ignoring them. So delicate is the use of eye contact that you seldom realize the modifications you make. For example, the next time you are talking with a disabled person, perhaps someone in a

wheelchair, notice how little eye contact you make with that person as compared with someone who is not disabled. This practice is not a good idea, because it reflects a lack of interest and concern.

Touch

Being touched and touching are compelling communication devices. "Touch is the oldest, most primitive and pervasive sense. It's the first sense we experience in the womb and the last one we lose before death."¹²¹ Whether your touch behavior is conscious or unconscious, the act of touching is a reflection of what you are feeling and experiencing at the moment. Hence, the meanings you assign to being touched, and your reasons for touching others, offer insights into the communication encounter. This is vividly illustrated by the character Holden Caulfield in the American classic *The Catcher in the Rye*:

I held hands with her all the time. This doesn't sound like much, but she was terrific to hold hands with. Most girls, if you hold hands with them, their goddam hand dies on you, or else they think they have to keep moving their hand all the time, as if they were afraid they'd bore you or something.¹²²

So important is touch to human communication that researchers know that infants who are denied a caregiver's touch can develop serious biological and emotional problems.¹²³ In short, touch, or lack of it, can influence a baby's physical, emotional, and cognitive development.¹²⁴ As you move from infancy into childhood, you learn the rules of touching. You are taught whom to touch and where they may be touched. By the time you reach adolescence, your culture has taught you the "rules" of touch behavior and how to communicate with touch. You have learned about shaking hands by employing various types of handshakes—firm, gentle, etc. You even have become skilled at knowing who to hug and the intensity and location associated with each person you are hugging (parent, friend, lover). Culture has also "taught you" what occasions (greeting, expression of affection, etc.) call for a hug. The "rules" of touching are so specific that in the United States you have learned a hierarchy associated with touching. As Chaney and Martin note, "People of higher rank (the president of the company) may touch those of lower rank (office employees), but secretaries may not touch the president."¹²⁵

In the dominant culture of the United States, there are five basic categories of touch behavior. (1) *Professional touches* is carried out by individuals such as doctors, nurses, and hairdressers. (2) *Social politeness touching* is usually associated with greeting and showing appreciation. (3) *Friendship touches* demonstrate concern and caring between family members and close friends. (4) The name *love-intimacy touches* is given to those types of touches (caressing, hugging, embracing, kissing, and the like) that usually occur in romantic relationships. (5) Finally, *sexual touching* is touch on the most intimate level, used for sexual arousal.¹²⁶

SOME CULTURAL EXAMPLES

We have just mentioned some of the rules of touch as it applies to the dominant culture, but in addition, each culture has subtle directives concerning how to use this personal means of communication. As Ferraro points out, "Every culture has a well-defined set of

meanings connected with touching. That is, each culture defines who can touch whom, on what parts of the body, and under what circumstances.¹⁵⁷ For proof of Ferrari's observation, you need only watch the news on television or visit an international airport to confirm that there are major differences in how cultures use touch, even in the simple act of greeting or saying good-bye. Drawing from a study involving cultural differences in touch behavior among couples at an international airport, Andersen offers the following narrative of some of the findings:

A family leaving for Tonga formed a circle, wove their arms around each other's back, and prayed and chanted together. A tearful man returning to Bosnia repeatedly tried to leave his sobbing wife; each time he turned back to her, they would grip each other by the fingertips and exchange a passionate, tearful kiss and a powerful embrace. Two Korean couples departed without any touch, despite the prolonged separation that lay ahead of them.¹⁵⁸

Let us look at a few other cultural examples. Arabs employ a great deal of touching behavior as part of their communication style.¹⁵⁹ In fact, it is not uncommon to see men in such places as Saudi Arabia walking along holding hands. People in much of Eastern Europe, Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Israel, and the Arab world hug and kiss when they meet family and friends. However, as West and Turner note, "such overt touching would be frowned upon in Japan or Scandinavia."¹⁶⁰ And as we have said elsewhere, because of religious and social traditions, those Arabs who are Muslims eat and do other things with the right hand, but do not greet (touch) with the left hand because this is a social insult. The left hand is used to engage in basic biological functions.

In some cultures, touch can have a religious meaning. Dresser offers the following observation regarding touching the head: "Many Asian people believe the head houses the soul. Therefore, when another person touches their head, it places them in jeopardy. It is prudent for outsiders to avoid touching the heads and upper torsos of Asians."¹⁶¹

South America and Mexico are two places where touch is routine. Brazilians, for example, engage in "embraces and back-thumping between men."¹⁶² Brazilians also "kiss each other on alternating cheeks."¹⁶³ And in Mexico, a warm embrace called *abrazo* can be seen throughout the country.¹⁶⁴ Condon adds, "Hugs, pats on backs, and other physical contact are an important part of communication in Mexico."¹⁶⁵ This same employment of touch as a form of communication is also found in Costa Rica, where women greet each other with a kiss on one cheek and a hand on the shoulder.¹⁶⁶

Touching is not a form of greeting in much of Southeast Asia, and people in these cultures engage in very little physical contact during the course of a conversation. In China, men and women seldom "show physical affection in public."¹⁶⁷ When describing business practices in Japan, Rowland asserts, "Touching fellow workers and associates is not common in Japan. Parting someone on the back or putting a friendly arm around them is not done."¹⁶⁸ Even the simple act of kissing has cultural overtones. Although mouth-to-mouth kissing, as a sexual act, is common in most Western cultures, it is not widespread in many parts of Asia. In fact, the Japanese have for centuries thapsodized about the appeal of the nape of the neck as an erotic zone. The Japanese language has no word for "kiss," so the English word has been borrowed and *kissu* is now used.

You can also find gender differences in how touch is used as a form of communication. This is clearly demonstrated in gender discrepancies. Morrales, Spitzberg, and Barge summarize the research on these differences in the following manner: "Women are more likely to hug and use touch to express support and affiliation. Men use touch to assert power or

express sexual desires, and men tend to touch females more than females touch males."¹⁶⁹ In recent years gender differences as they apply to touch, particularly in the workplace, have become the source of many sexual-harassment cases. A male colleague who strokes a female co-worker on the arm, or even pats her on the back, might be perceived as engaging in sexual or condescending behavior. All we are suggesting is that touching often carries multiple meanings and that it might be inappropriate in the workplace.

Some cultural differences regarding gender become clear when you interact with other cultures. Regarding males, Novinger points out those differences when she writes, "An orthodox Jew or a fundamentalist Muslim will not shake hands with (touch) a woman as a greeting or when being introduced, because such touch of a non-family female is not culturally permitted."¹⁷⁰

Cultures within the United States often employ touch in ways that are unique to their members. A limited number of studies reveal that African Americans engage in more interpersonal touch than do whites.¹⁷¹ And, Leathers says, one study has shown that "black females touch each other almost twice as often as white females."¹⁷² We should note in closing that many African Americans become annoyed if a white person pats them on the top of the head. They believe it carries the same meaning as being told, in a condescending manner, that they are "a good little boy or girl."

Paralanguage

When the German poet Klopstock wrote, "The tones of human voices are mightier than strings or brass to move the soul," he knew that the sounds we generate often communicate more than just the meanings of our words. Most of you probably have viewed a foreign film with subtitles. During those intervals when the subtitles were not on the screen, you heard the actors speaking an unfamiliar language but could understand some of what was happening just from the sound of the voices. Perhaps you inferred that the performers were expressing anger, sorrow, or joy, or recognized who the hero was and who was cast in the role of the villain. The rise and fall of voices also may have told you when one person was asking a question and when another was making a statement or issuing a command. Whatever the case, certain vocal cues provided you with information with which to make judgments about the characters' personalities, emotional states, ethnic background, and rhetorical activity. To be sure, you could only guess at the exact meaning of the words being spoken, but voice inflections still told you a great deal about what was happening. When we leave the analogy of watching a foreign film and move to day-to-day interaction, we find that the same sort of non-linguistic messages have an impact. In fact, research reveals that how a person's voice sounds can influence

IMAGINE THIS

John, an American from California, has received a very high-paying teaching position in an all-male private school in Saudi Arabia. Because he wants to make a good impression and have his students like him, he goes from student to student, introduces himself, and shakes hands in the same manner he used when he taught in California. The next day the dean of students calls John into his office and asks him to leave the school.

What happened?

REMEMBER THIS

Paralanguage is concerned with the communicative characteristics of the voice and with how people use their voices. Paralanguage includes such things as giggles, laughter, accents, groans, sighs, pitch, tempo, volume, and resonance.

nance, tone); (2) *vocal characteristics* (laughing, crying, moaning, whining, yawning); and (3) *vocal segregates* ("uh-huh," "shh," "uh," "ooh," "mmh," "hummm"). Let now briefly examine each of these components and assess their influence on intercultural communication.

VOCAL QUALITIES

It is extraordinary how many inferences about content and character can be made just from the paralinguistic sounds people produce. For example, paralanguage cues assist you in drawing conclusions about an individual's emotional state, socioeconomic status, height, ethnicity, weight, age, intelligence, race, regional background, and educational level.¹⁷⁵ Let's pause for a moment and look at some of the paralanguage messages you send and receive that have message value for a particular culture.

While vocal qualities have numerous components, cultural differences are most apparent in the use of volume. A few examples will illustrate this point. Arabs speak with a great deal of volume because for them it connotes strength and sincerity. As Triandis notes, "Arabs believe that loud and clear is 'sincere' and soft is 'devious.'"¹⁷⁶ For Brazilians, speaking loudly signifies "interest and involvement."¹⁷⁷ Ruch says Germans conduct their business with a "commanding tone that projects authority and self-confidence."¹⁷⁸ On the other end of the continuum, there are cultures that have a very different view toward loud voices. For example, Chaney and Martin note, "People from the Philippines speak softly, as they believe that this is an indication of good breeding and education."¹⁷⁹ And Remland observes, "Britons generally prefer a quieter, less intrusive volume than persons from many other cultures."¹⁸⁰ A visitor from Thailand once asked one of the authors if the loud voices she was hearing in America meant Americans were upset or mad at something. Her question made a great deal of cultural sense. As Cooper and Cooper note, in Thailand "a loud voice is perceived as being impolite."¹⁸¹ In Japan, raising one's voice often implies a lack of self-control. For the Japanese, a gentle and soft voice reflects good manners and helps maintain social harmony—two important values in Japanese culture.

Co-cultures also use vocal qualifiers in subtle and unique ways. For example, many African Americans use more inflection, are more intense and more dynamic, and have a greater emotional range in their use of voice than most white Americans.¹⁸² Differences in paralanguage also mark the communication patterns of males and females. In several studies, females evidenced a faster rate of speech than men and used fewer silent pauses while speaking.¹⁸³ After reviewing numerous studies on gender differences in the use of voice, Pearson, West, and Turner concluded that females speak at a higher pitch than men, speak more softly, are more expressive, pronounce the

perceptions related to social class and credibility.¹⁷² It can also influence the comprehension and retention of the words being spoken.¹⁷⁴ What we have been talking about is a small part of what is called *paralanguage*. It denotes the features that accompany speech and contribute to the meaning people assign to the overall transaction.

Most classifications divide paralanguage into three categories: (1) *vocal qualifiers* (volume, pitch, tempo, resonance); (2) *vocal characteristics* (laughing, crying, moaning, whining, yawning); and (3) *vocal segregates* ("uh-huh," "shh," "uh," "ooh," "mmh," "hummm"). Let now briefly examine each of these components and assess their influence on intercultural communication.

VOCAL SEGREGATES

Much like vocal characteristics, vocal segregates—sounds that are audible but are not actual words—fall into this category of paralanguage. In some instances, these sounds have very little meaning and are used as substitutes for words. A case in point is the overused "uh" sound produced by many Americans when they can't locate a specific word. However, in many cultures these sounds take on a special meaning. For instance, the Maasai also use a number of sounds that have special significance, the most common one being the "sh" sound, which the Maasai draw out and which can mean "yes," "I understand," or "continue."¹⁸⁴ In Kenya, the "iya" sound tells the other person that everything is okay; in Jamaica, the "kissing" or "sucking" sound expresses anger, exasperation, or frustration. The Japanese also make ample use of vocal segregates in their conversations. To demonstrate reluctance or concern, a Japanese worker might "suck in his breath, look doubtful and say 'Sah . . .'"¹⁸⁵ The Japanese will also make small utterances to demonstrate their attentiveness, such as *hai* (yes, certainly, all right, very well), so which has the same sound as the English "so" (I hear that, or an indication of agreement), or *ero* (well . . . or let me see . . .).¹⁸⁶

Having previously examined how body movement communicates, we now move to a review of how space, time, and silence communicate. Although these variables are external to the communication, they are used and manipulated in ways that send messages. For example, imagine your reaction to someone who stands too close to you, arrives late for an important appointment, or remains silent after you reveal some personal information. In each of these instances, you would find yourself reading meaning into your communication partner's use of (1) *space and distance*, (2) *time*, and (3) *silence*.

Space and Distance

The flow and shift of distance between you and the people with whom you interact are as much a part of the communication experience as the words being sent back and forth. The study of this message system, called *proxemics*, is concerned with such things

complete "ing" ending to words, and come closer to standard speech norms.¹⁸⁴ Women also have greater variation in their voices when they speak than do men.¹⁸⁵

VOCAL CHARACTERISTICS

As noted, vocal characteristics are vocalizations that convey a learned meaning for members of a specific culture. For example, the seemingly natural act of sneezing "is considered in Islam a blessing from God."¹⁸⁶ The rationale for this sound's having religious overtones goes to the heart of Islam. Because all actions are God's will, sneezing is an action triggered by God. In fact, after the sneeze a Muslim would say *Allahu ilah* (praise and thanks to God). Laughing also sends different messages, depending on the culture. Lynch and Hanson do an excellent job of noting this difference when they write:

Laughing and giggling are interpreted as expressions of enjoyment among most Americans—signals that people are relaxed and having a good time . . . Among other cultural groups, such as Southeast Asians, the same behavior may be a sign of extreme embarrassment, discomfort, or what Americans might call "nervous laughter" taken to the extreme.¹⁸⁷

as (1) *personal space*, (2) *seating*, and (3) *furniture arrangement*. All three have an influence on intercultural communication.

PERSONAL SPACE

The significance of personal space as a form of communication is clearly articulated by Hall and Hall in the following paragraph:

Each person has around him an invisible bubble of space which expands and contracts depending on his relationship to those around him, his emotional state, his cultural background, and the activity he is performing. Few people are allowed to penetrate this bit of mobile territory, and then only for short periods of time.¹⁹¹

Your personal space, then, is that piece of the universe you occupy and call your own. As the owner of this area, you usually decide who may enter and who may not. When your space is invaded, you react in a variety of ways. You may retreat, stand your ground, even as your hands become moist from nervousness, or sometimes even react violently.

Your use of personal space, like so much of your communication behavior, is learned on both the conscious and unconscious level. The anthropologist Edward T. Hall attempted to classify how personal space was used in North America by proposing four categories that he labeled (1) *intimate*, (2) *casual-personal*, (3) *social*, and (4) *public*.¹⁹² Each of these categories demonstrates how space can communicate. Intimate distance (actual contact to eighteen inches) is normally reserved for very personal relationships. You can reach out and touch the person at this distance. In personal distance (eighteen inches to four feet), there is little chance of physical contact, and you can usually speak in your normal voice. Social distance (four to twelve feet) is the distance at which most members of the dominant culture conduct business. Public distance is usually used in public presentations and can vary from relatively close to very far.

As is the case with most forms of communication, space is associated with culture, and associated more specifically with cultural values. In the dominant culture of the United States, privacy is highly valued. This view often is translated into Americans wanting more space than is normally taken by people in Mexico.¹⁹³ For instance, even the values of individualism and collectivism, which were discussed in detail in Chapter 5, are manifested in how people use space. For example, cultures that stress individualism (England, the United States, Germany, and Australia) generally demand more space than do collective cultures. Their members "tend to take an active, aggressive stance when their space is violated."¹⁹⁴ The Swiss will even "back away" when their counterparts move too close.¹⁹⁵ According to Andersen, in collective cultures, where people are more interdependent, "the members work, play, live and sleep in close proximity to one another."¹⁹⁶ According to Thandis, Arabs, Latin Americans, and U.S. Hispanics would fall into this category.¹⁹⁷ As we pointed out earlier, in Mexico the "physical distance between people when engaged in conversation is closer than what is usual north of the border."¹⁹⁸

With regard to Arabs, Ruch writes, "Typical Arab conversations are at close range. Closeness cannot be avoided."¹⁹⁹ This closeness is even reflected when people stand in line. As Morrison, Conway, and Douess point out, when waiting, "Egyptians do not stand in neat lines . . . everyone pushes their way toward the front."²⁰⁰

As we have noted elsewhere, a person's use of space is directly linked to the value system of his or her culture. In some Asian cultures, for example, students do not sit close

to their teachers or stand near their bosses; the extended distance demonstrates deference and esteem. Extra interpersonal distance is also part of the cultural experience of the people of Scotland and Sweden, for whom it reflects privacy. In Germany, as Hall and Hall note, personal space is sacred.²⁰¹ For the Germans "this distancing is a protective barrier and psychological symbol that operates in a manner similar to that of the home."²⁰² You find the opposite view toward space in the Brazilian culture, where "closeness and human warmth is apparent," and hence, conversation takes place with less room between participants.²⁰³

SEATING

Seating arrangements can also be a form of nonverbal communication. Notice, for example, that Americans, when in groups, tend to talk with those opposite them rather than those seated or standing beside them. This pattern also controls how they select leaders when in groups: in most instances, the person sitting at the head of the table is chosen (or the leader will move directly to the head table position). In America, leaders usually are accustomed to being removed physically from the rest of the group and consequently choose chairs at the end of the table. In China, seating arrangements take on different meanings and often reflect strong cultural values. For example, because China is a culture that greatly values proper etiquette, ritual and its historical past, seating arrangements are often dictated by cultural norms, particularly at formal events such as diplomatic and business banquets. The order of seats usually places the honored person (often decided by seniority and age) facing east.²⁰⁴ In addition, the Chinese often experience alienation and uneasiness when they face someone directly or sit opposite them at a desk or table.²⁰⁵ If you view a news story about American diplomats meeting with government officials from China, you might observe that the meeting is taking place with people sitting side by side—frequently on couches. In Korea, seating arrangements reflect status and role distinctions. In a car, office, or home, the seat on the right is considered to be the place of honor.

For the Japanese, seating at any formal or semiformal event will be determined based on hierarchy. When conducting business or diplomatic negotiations, the Japanese will arrange themselves with the most senior person sitting in the middle and those next highest in rank sitting to the left and right of this senior position. Low-ranking members will sit away from the table, behind the other representatives.²⁰⁶ Seating arrangements are also a way of demonstrating social hierarchy in the Fijian culture.²⁰⁷ The seat near the center house post is the seat of honor. Status in this culture is also reflected in the custom that women sit "below" men in the home and elders sit "above" junior members of the household.

FURNITURE ARRANGEMENT

The way people and cultures arrange furniture (chairs, tables, desks, etc.) also communicates in both obvious and subtle ways. The importance of seating arrangement as a form of communication is seen in the Chinese traditional philosophy of *feng shui*. This

CONSIDER THIS

Have you ever felt uncomfortable when someone you had just met stood too close to you? Why do you think you experienced this discomfort?

approach to the arrangement of furniture and space is part of the Chinese philosophy that stresses the need for people and nature to live in harmony—a concept discussed in detail earlier in the book. The heart of this perspective, as it applies to space, is that people must live with, rather than against, their environment. In short, for the Chinese, and recently for many Westerners, *feng shui* “is the art of manipulating the physical environment to establish harmony with the natural environment and to achieve happiness, prosperity, and health.”²⁰⁸ You can observe the signs of this philosophy in the way some Chinese arrange themselves at a table. In signing business agreements, a Chinese person will often want to sit in a seat that they believe allows them to be in consonance with their surroundings.²⁰⁹

As is the case with all aspects of nonverbal communication, the arrangement of furniture is a reflection of cultural values. In the United States, furniture arrangement is used for privacy and “can be used to withdraw or avoid interactions.”²¹⁰ People who value conversation, such as the French, Italians, and Mexicans, are often surprised when they visit the United States and see that the furniture in the living room is pointed toward the television set so people can concentrate on the TV program and not the other people in the room. They believe such an arrangement stifles conversation.

In Japan, offices are usually shared with a great many colleagues, and furniture is, like the people themselves, placed in close proximity. The contrast between office arrangements in the United States and Japan can, of course create problems. As Nishiyama notes, “Because of its lack of privacy, Westerners, especially individualistic Americans, might find the Japanese office arrangement very uncomfortable and annoying.”²¹¹

As we have already noted, the arrangement of furniture in offices can give you a clue to the character of a people. According to Hall and Hall, “French space is a reflection of French culture and French institutions. Everything is centralized, and spatially the entire country is laid out around centers.”²¹² Hence, offices are organized around the manager, who is at the center. In Germany, where privacy is stressed, office seating is dispersed throughout the office.²¹³ By comparison, in Japan, where group effort and hierarchy are important, office seating is arranged according to seniority and desks often abut each other.

SOME CO-CULTURAL EXAMPLES

Some co-cultures have their own special use of space. Prostitutes, for example, are very possessive of their territory. When prostitutes mentally mark an area as their own, even though it may be a public street or hotel lobby, they behave as if it were their personal property and attempt to keep other prostitutes away.²¹⁴ In prisons, where space is limited, controlled, and at a premium, space and territory are crucial forms of communication. New inmates quickly learn the culture of prison by finding out about the use of space. They soon know when to enter another cell, what part of the exercise yard they can visit, that reduction of space is a form of punishment, and that they must form lines for nearly all activities.

Women also use space differently than do men. For example, women normally “establish closer proximity to others” than do men.²¹⁵ In summing up other gender differences in the use of space, Leathers has concluded:

Men use space as a means of asserting their dominance over women, as in the following: (a) they claim more personal space than women; (b) they more actively defend violations of their territories—which are usually much larger than the territories of women;

(c) under conditions of high density, they become more aggressive in their attempts to regain a desired measure of privacy; and (d) men more frequently walk in front of their female partner than vice versa.²¹⁶

Spatial distance is also a variable when interacting with members of the deaf culture. For example, when using American Sign Language, it is necessary for the person signing to be seen. It would not be uncommon for two signers to sit across from one another at a distance that hearing people might perceive as impersonal.²¹⁷

Time

Over three centuries ago, when the Dutch mathematician Christian Huygens built the first pendulum clock, which allowed people to keep track of hours and minutes, little did he know that his invention would have such an impact on people's lives. Most people realize that time is, in many ways, a

fabrication of the mind—yet we strap clocks to our wrists, hang them on our walls, set them on our computer screens, and give them the power to control everything from moods to relationships. Anthropologists Rapport and Overing underscore the importance of time to human behavior when they write, “To cut up life into moments of being, in sum, is for the individual to possess a means by which that life can be filled, shaped and reshaped in significant ways.”²¹⁸ Self-reflection will reveal what time communicates about your professional and private life. If you arrive thirty minutes late for an important appointment and offer no apology, you send a certain message about yourself. Telling someone how guilty you feel about your belated arrival also sends a message. Studies even point out that one of the gauges of a successful and intimate relationship is the amount of time people spend together.²¹⁹

Of course, there is much more to time than what it says about your relationships. Gonzales and Zimbardo accentuate the multidimensional aspect of time when they write, “Our temporal perspective influences a wide range of psychological processes, from motivation, emotion and spontaneity to risk-taking, creativity and problem-solving.”²²⁰

The connection of time to culture is profound, and like most aspects of culture, is part of the enculturation process early in life. Hickson, Stacks, and Moore highlight this link as follows:

Culture begins to educate each of us at an early age as to the value of and the means by which we distinguish time. Each culture has its own particular time norms, which are unconsciously followed until violated. When such violations occur, however, they are

TRY THIS

The next time you are at an airport, supermarket, or shopping mall where people from different cultural backgrounds might be interacting, try to observe the interactions by referencing the items listed below.

- What are the average distances between the people you observed? Were there differences related to culture?
- What differences did you observe in touching behavior? How did people greet each other? Did people hug, kiss, shake hands, etc.?
- What differences did you observe in facial expressions? Were people animated, reserved, etc.?
- Did you notice any differences in gestures? Did some people use more or fewer gestures?

perceived as intentional messages associated with that particular culture. In this regard, each culture reaches its people what is appropriate or inappropriate with regard to time.²²¹

Your own experience tells you that in North America, most members of the dominant culture adhere to Benjamin Franklin's advice that "Time is money." Think of what is being said about the use of time in the common expressions "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today," "He who hesitates is lost," and "Just give me the bottom line." An excellent summary of the perception of time held by many North Americans is offered by Crouch:

In the United States, where time is fixed and measurable, and where we feel seconds ticking away, we attach much significance to schedules. We measure our efficiency according to our ability to meet deadlines and cross off items on our checklist by the end of the day. Getting things done on schedule has a value in itself.²²²

Cannon further highlights the bond between time and culture in the United States when he writes:

Time is also limited in America because there are so many things to do in one's lifetime. The society develops technologically at horrendous speed, and it's difficult to keep up. One has to be continuously on the move. This is America: there is little time for contemplating or meditating.²²³

As is the case with all aspects of nonverbal communication, culture plays a substantial role in how you perceive and manipulate time in order to communicate different messages. Ballard and Seibold establish the connection between culture and time when they note, "The existence and proliferation of objective, independent time-measuring devices is itself a cultural by-product, and the uniform seconds, minutes, and hours that clocks appear to 'measure' also are culturally constructed."²²⁴

As you would suspect when cultures employ time in dissimilar ways, problems can occur. As Novinger states, "When people of two different cultures 'use' time differently, their interaction can generate misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and ill will."²²⁵ A culture's conception of time can be examined from three different perspectives: (1) *informal time*; (2) *perceptions of past, present, and future*; and (3) *Hall's monochronic and polychronic classifications*.

INFORMAL TIME

Punctuality. In most instances, rules for informal time, such as punctuality and pace, are seldom explicitly taught. Like most of culture, these rules usually function below the level of consciousness. Argyle makes much the same point when he compares cultural differences in punctuality standards:

How late is "late"? This varies greatly. In Britain and America, one may be five minutes late for a business appointment, but not fifteen and certainly not thirty minutes late, which is perfectly normal in Arab countries. On the other hand, in Britain it is correct to be five to fifteen minutes late for an invitation to dinner. An Italian might arrive two hours late, an Ethiopian after, and Japanese not at all—he had accepted only to prevent his host from losing face.²²⁶

Status relationships as well as preventing someone from losing face can influence the use of time in Japan. As Nishiyama points out, "The time usage in Japan is usually determined by the status relationships between the people involved."²²⁷ What Nishiyama is saying, of course, is that someone in Japan would wait much longer for a person of higher status to arrive than he or she would if the person was of lower status.

As the above example demonstrates, reaction to punctuality is rooted in our cultural experiences. In the United States, the boss can arrive late for a meeting without anyone raising an eyebrow; if the secretary is late, he or she may receive a reprimand in the form of a stern glance. A rock star or a physician can keep people waiting for a long time, but the warm-up band and the food caterer had better be on time. In Latin America, one is expected to arrive late to appointments as a sign of respect. In fact, in Chile it is considered rude to be on time to social events.²²⁸ This same notion of time is seen in Spain, where, according to Lewis, there is the belief that "punctuality messes up schedules."²²⁹ In Africa, people often "show up late for appointments, meetings, and social engagements."²³⁰ There is a Nigerian expression that says, "A watch did not invent man." These two views of tardiness would be perceived as rudeness in Germany—in fact, it's almost an obsession.²³¹

Pace. You can determine a culture's attitude toward time by examining the pace at which members of that culture perform specific acts. Americans, because of the pace of life in the United States, always appear to be in a hurry. As Kim observes, "Life is in constant motion. People consider time to be wasted or lost unless they are doing something."²³² From fast-food restaurants, to one-stop gas stations, to microwave cooking, to computers that use fast processors, Americans live life at a very hectic pace. Even the expression "rush hour" describes how commuters in major cities are hurrying and dashing to get from point A to point B. Most other cultures would not even have a literal translation for the two words "rush hour." Children in the United States grow up hearing others tell them not "to waste so much time" and advising them that "actions speak louder than words." Think how those expressions differ from the Latin proverb, "Haste manages all things badly," or the Mexican saying, "You don't have to get there first, you just have to know how to get there."²³³

As you can see, many cultures view time differently and hence live life at a pace different from that of most people in the United States. Asselin and Mastron point out that "The French do not share the American sense of urgency to accomplish tasks."²³⁴ The Japanese culture also treats time in ways that often appear at cross-purposes with American goals. Drawing on the Japanese culture for his example, Brunsin illustrates how pace is reflected in the negotiation process:

When negotiating with the Japanese, Americans like to get right down to business. They were socialized to believe that "time is money." They can accept about fifteen minutes of "small talk" about the weather, their trip, and baseball, but more than that becomes unbearable. The Japanese, on the other hand, want to get to know their business counterparts. They feel that the best way to do this is to have long conversations with Americans about a wide variety of topics.²³⁵

Indonesians are yet another group that does not hurry. They perceive time as a limitless pool. According to Harris and Moran, there is even "a phrase in Indonesia describing this concept that translates as 'rubber time,' so that time stretches

or shrinks and is therefore very flexible."²¹⁶ For the Chinese, who also value a slow pace, "the important thing is to complete the task, no matter how long it takes."²¹⁷ In Africa, where a slow pace is the rule, "People who rush are suspected of trying to cheat."²¹⁸

As you have already read, nonverbal behavior is often directly linked to a culture's religious and value orientation. This notion is made manifest when you turn to the Arab culture. As we discussed in Chapter 3 when we looked at Islam, most Muslims believe that their destiny is a matter of fate. The Arab connection to the pace of life and time is clearly pointed out by Abu-Charieh: "Throughout the Arab world, there is nonchalance about time and deadlines; the pace of life is more leisurely than in the West. Social events and appointments tend not to have a fixed beginning or end."²¹⁹

Manifestations of pace assume a host of forms. One study, for example, pointed out that even the speed at which people walk reflects a culture's concept of time. People from England and the United States move faster than people from Taiwan and Indonesia.²²⁰

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

How a culture perceives and uses the concepts of past, present, and future was discussed in Chapter 5 when we looked at cultural values as they applied to the perception of time. Let us review some of those findings so that you can see how time is tied not only to cultural values but also to nonverbal communication.

Past. As the word *past* tells you, cultures with this orientation attach importance to the past, and use what went before as a gauge for their current perception of people and events. Richmond, McCracken, and Payne offer a summary of the link between valuing the past and comprehending the present: "Cultures that have a past-oriented philosophy tend to apply past events to similar new situations. These societies have respect for the elderly and listen to what their senior citizens have to say regarding the past."²²¹ They also have a strong sense of history and established social institutions. Knowing that a culture is past oriented can give you insight into how members of that culture view the world and other people. For example, the British place much emphasis on tradition and are often perceived as resisting change. A statement often heard in England, whether people are talking about daily life or being asked about the monarchy, is "We have always done it this way." The cultures of China, Japan, and India, with their long histories and strong sense of pride in their cultures' persistence for thousands of years, also use the past as a guide to how to live in the present. Reflect on the Chinese maxim that advises, "Consider the past and you will know the present," or the saying from India, "Learn about the future by looking at the past." The Irish and Irish Americans also take great pride in their past. As Wilson notes,

"Irish Americans, with their strong sense of tradition, are typically past-oriented. They have an allegiance to the past, their ancestors, and their history. The past is often the focus of Irish stories."²²²

American Indians also use the past to help explain and understand life. Still and Hodgins explain this approach in the following manner:

Most American Indian tribes are not future oriented. Very little planning is done for the future because their view is that many things are outside of the individual's control and may affect or change the future. In fact, the Navajo language does not include a future tense verb. Time is not viewed as a constant or something that one can control, but rather as something that is always with the individual. Thus, to plan for the future is something viewed as foolish.²²³

Present. In this orientation, the past is not nearly as important as the present. Present-oriented people see the future as ambiguous, capricious, and, in a sense, beyond the control of the individual. Because the past is over and the future is unpredictable, present cultures, such as Filipinos and Latin Americans, enjoy living in the moment. These cultures tend to be more impulsive and spontaneous than others and often have a casual, relaxed lifestyle. Mexican Americans also have a culture that "tends to focus on the present and a more flexible attitude toward time."²²⁴ What is important is what one is doing now. So strong is the cultural desire to disregard time that Crouch advises, half jokingly, that you should "take off your watch" when doing business in Mexico.²²⁵

Future. In future-oriented cultures, what is yet to come is most valued. Change, taking chances, a stress on youth, and optimism are all hallmarks of cultures that hold this orientation. This view toward the future is held by most Americans. As a people, Americans are constantly thinking about what is coming. Very young children even play with the toys (dolls, cars, guns, and so on) that rush them to, and prepare them for, adulthood. As we noted during our discussion of pace, having an eye to the future often produces a very low tolerance for extensions and postponements. What you want, you want now, so you can dispose of this moment and move on to the next. In the classroom, U.S. students longingly watch the clock as it counts the minutes to the end of class—and cues them to move on to another class. In addition, as Adler notes, future-oriented cultures welcome innovation and "have less regard for past social, cultural or organizational customs and traditions."²²⁶

MONOCHRONIC (M-TIME) AND POLYCHRONIC (P-TIME)

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall advanced another classification of time as a form of communication. Hall proposed that cultures organize time in one of two ways: either

CONSIDER THIS

Differences in time orientation, like all aspects of nonverbal communication, can create communication differences. At a business meeting involving individuals from the three orientations discussed above, you might hear something like the following conversation:

Past orientation: Why don't we look at how much success we had with a similar merger with an Indian company five years ago?

Present orientation: Just wait a second! It really doesn't matter what we did five years ago. The key is what we want to do now.

Future orientation: Worrying only about what happened in the past or is going on now is stupid. We need to focus on what we need to do to make money, we need to think about what this merger will mean in the future.



REMEMBER THIS

Cultures have very different attitudes and perceptions toward the past, present, and future.

monochronic (M-time) or polychronic (P-time).²⁴⁷ Hall's classifications represent two distinct approaches to perceiving and utilizing time.

M-time. As the word *monochronic* implies, this concept explains time as linear and segmented. More specifically, "A monochronic view of time believes time is a scarce resource which must be rationed and controlled through the use of schedules and appointments, and through aiming to do only one thing at any one time."²⁴⁸ Novinger sums up the characteristics of monochronic cultures by noting, "Cultures that are monochronic have a predominantly linear and sequential approach to time that is rational, suppresses spontaneity and tends to focus on one activity at a time."²⁴⁹ Cultures with this orientation perceive time as being *tangible*. When speaking of the M-time experience Hall states, "People talk about time as though it were money, as something that can be 'spent,' 'saved,' 'wasted,' and 'lost.'"²⁵⁰ To act out this orientation would mean to value punctuality, good organization, and the judicious use of time. The English naturalist Charles Darwin abstracted this view of time when he wrote, "A man who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life." The time clock records the hours you work, the school bell moves you from class to class, and the calendar marks important days and events in your life.

Cultures that can be classified as M-time include Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the dominant U.S. culture. As Hall explains, "People of the Western world, particularly Americans, tend to think of time as something fixed in nature, something around us and from which we cannot escape, an ever-present part of the environment, just like the air we breathe."²⁵¹ In the business setting, M-time cultures schedule appointments in advance, do not run late, and have "a strong preference for following initial plans."²⁵² In addition, when doing business, M-time people "tend to emphasize getting contracts signed and then moving on to some new endeavor."²⁵³

P-time. People from cultures on polychronic time live their lives quite differently than do those who move to the monochronic clock. The pace for P-time cultures (Arab, African, Indian, Latin American, South Asian, and Southeast Asian) is more leisurely than the one found in M-time cultures. One reason for this is that people and human relationships, not tasks, are at the center of polychronic cultures. As Smith and Bond point out, "A polychronic view of time sees the maintenance of harmonious relationships as the important agenda, so that use of time needs to be flexible in order that we do right by the various people to whom we have obligations."²⁵⁴ These cultures are normally collective and deal with life in a holistic manner. For P-time cultures, time is less tangible; hence, feelings of wasted time are not as prevalent as in M-time cultures. Their members can interact with more than one person or do more than one thing at a time. Gannon offers an example of the multidimensional nature of P-time when he talks of the Turkish culture. "Polychronism best describes the Turkish ability to concentrate on different things simultaneously at work, at home, or in the coffee house."²⁵⁵ Because P-time has this notion of multiple activities and flexibility, Dresser believes it "explains why there is more interrupting in conversations carried on by people from Arabic, Asian, and Latin American cultures."²⁵⁶ African cultures also take great stock in the activity that is occurring at the moment, and emphasize people more than schedules. As Richmond and Gestin note, "Time for Africans is defined by events rather than the clock or calendar."²⁵⁷ For Africans, the person they are with is more important than the one who is out of sight.²⁵⁸ This leads, of course, to a lifestyle that to outsiders appears to be spontaneous and unstructured.

Within the United States, there are co-cultures that use time differently from the dominant culture. Mexican Americans frequently speak of "Latino time" when their timing varies from that of the dominant culture. Burgeon and Saine have observed that the Polynesian culture of Hawaii has "Hawaiian time,"²⁵⁹ a concept of time that is very relaxed and reflects the informal lifestyle of the native Hawaiian people. And among Samoans, there is a time perspective referred to as "coco-nut time," which is derived from the notion that it is not necessary to pick coconuts because they will fall when the time is right. African Americans often use what is referred to as "BPT" (Black People's Time) or "Bang-loose time."²⁶⁰ This concept, which has its roots in the P-time cultures of Africa, maintains that priority belongs to what is happening at that instant. Statements such as "Hey, man, what's happenin'?" reflect the importance of the here and now.

Two points should be made before we conclude our discussion of M-time and P-time. First, while we have talked about M-time and P-time as being two very separate and distinct categories, we would suggest that it is much more realistic to perceive Hall's two classifications as points on a continuum. There are many cultures that do not fall precisely into one of the two categories contained in Hall's analysis, but instead contain degrees of both M-time and P-time. For instance, we agree with Gesteland when he lists Austria, New Zealand, Russia, most of East-Central and Southern Europe, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, and South Korea as cultures that contain some traits associated with both M-time cultures and P-time cultures.²⁶¹ Second, it is important to remember that how a person "acts out" M-time or P-time characteristics is contextual. In one setting, you might be extremely prompt (M-time); in another situation, you might decide that what you are doing now is important and postpone your next appointment (P-time). Hall offers an excellent example from Japan on how the setting can determine which orientation a person utilizes:

The Japanese time system combines both M-time and P-time. In their dealings with foreigners and their use of technology, they are monochronic; in every other way, especially in interpersonal relations, they are polychronic.²⁶²

In Table 7.1, Hall and Hall summarize the basic aspects of monochronic and polychronic time. Their condensation takes many of the ideas we have mentioned and translates them into specific behaviors.

IMAGINE THIS

David Thom was sent to Mexico by his employer, a computer chip company, to try to negotiate a large contract that would allow his company to start producing chips in Mexico. The contract would mean a savings of millions of dollars for the company. His Mexican contact person, Santiago Guzman, invited David to a dinner party that he and his wife were hosting. Santiago told David the party would start "around eight on Friday night." David arrived a few minutes before eight so he could make a good impression. When he arrived, Santiago and his wife were still dressing and had not even begun to prepare to receive guests.

What went wrong?

TABLE 7.1 Comparison of Monochronic and Polychronic Cultures

MONOCHRONIC TIME PEOPLE	POLYCHRONIC TIME PEOPLE
Do one thing at a time	Do many things at once
Concentrate on the job	Are easily distracted and subject to interruption
Take time commitments (deadlines, schedules) seriously	Consider time commitments an objective to be achieved, if possible
Are low context and need information	Are high context and already have information
Are committed to the job	Are committed to people and human relationships
Adhere to plans	Change plans often and easily
Are concerned about not disturbing others; follow rules of privacy	Are more concerned with people close to them (family, friends, close business associates) than with privacy
Show great respect for private property; seldom borrow or lend	Borrow and lend things often and easily
Emphasize promptness	Base promptness on the relationship
Are accustomed to short-term relationships	Have short tendency to rebuild lifetime relationships

Source: Adapted from Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall, *Understanding Cultural Differences: Germans, French, and Americans* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1990), 15.

Silence

An African proverb states, "Silence is also speech." We contend that silence can send nonverbal cues concerning the communication situations in which you participate. Observe the poignant use of silence when the classical composer strategically places intervals of orchestration so that the ensuing silence marks a contrast in expression. Silence can be a powerful message. There is a story of how the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson "talked" in silence for hours to the famous English writer Thomas Carlyle. It seems that Emerson, on a visit to Europe, arranged to meet with Carlyle, who was his idol. Emerson maintains they sat together for hours in perfect silence until it was time for him to go, then parted company cordially, congratulating each other on the fruitful time they had had together.

Periods of silence affect interpersonal communication by providing an interval in an ongoing interaction during which the participants have time to think, check or suppress an emotion, encode a lengthy response, or inaugurate another line of thought. Silence also helps provide feedback, informing both sender and receiver about the clarity of an idea or its significance in the overall interpersonal exchange. In most Western cultures, talk is highly valued, and it is often difficult to determine the meaning behind someone's silence, because it can be interpreted as an indication of agreement, anger, lack of interest, injured feelings, or contempt. Calero notes that for many Americans "silence can be a very frightening experience. There are often occasions when it is embarrassing, humiliating or makes us appear to be fools when we remain silent."³³ This is one reason why Americans will usually try to fill up the silence with "small talk."

SOME CULTURAL EXAMPLES

The intercultural implications of silence as a means of interpreting ongoing verbal interactions are as diverse as those of other nonverbal cues, as Crystal helps to illustrate:

Cross-cultural differences are common over when to talk and when to remain silent, or what a particular instance of silence means. In response to the question, "Will you many me?" silence in English would be interpreted as uncertainty . . . In 1980, it would be considered a denial if the woman were to continue to stand there and an acceptance if she ran away.³⁴

Knowing how various cultures use silence is essential information for anyone who interacts with a culture different from his or her own. As Braithwaite points out:

One of the basic building blocks of competence, both linguistic and cultural, is knowing when not to speak in a particular community. Therefore, to understand where and when to be silent, and the meaning attached to silence, is to gain a keen insight into the fundamental structure of communication in that world.³⁵

As we have already noted, silence is not a meaningful part of the life of most members of the dominant culture in the United States. Talking at coffee houses, talking on cell phones, watching television, listening to music with an iPod, and other sound-producing activities keep Americans away from silence. Reflect for a moment on the popularity of radio and television programs called "talk shows." Numerous studies have pointed out that most Americans believe that talking is an important activity and actually enjoy talking.³⁶ Beamer and Varner point out that Americans "often feel responsible for starting a conversation or keeping it going, even with strangers."³⁷ Other cultures also have a similar positive view of talking over silence. Within the business context, Lewis notes that "a silent reaction to a business proposal would seem negative to American, German, French, Southern European and Arab executives."³⁸ It seems that there is a link between cultures that emphasize social interaction (Jewish, Italian, French, Arab, etc.) and their perception of and use of silence. In fact, talking in these cultures is highly valued. In the Greek culture, there is also a belief that being in the company of other people and engaging in conversation are signs of a good life. The concepts of solitude and silence are overshadowed in Greek history and literature, which contain numerous references with allusions to rhetoric and dialogues. The culture that produced Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates is not one that will find silent meditation very appealing. This is in sharp contrast to cultures in which a hushed and still environment is the rule. We now will look at a few cultural variations in the use of silence, so that you might better understand how a lack of words can influence the outcome of any communication event.

In the Eastern tradition, the view of silence is much different from the Western view. Easterners do not feel uncomfortable with the absence of noise or talk. There is a belief in many Eastern traditions that words can contaminate an experience and that inner peace and wisdom come only through silence. Barnlund says of Buddhism, "One of its tenets is that words are deceptive and silent intuition is a truer way to confront the world; mind-to-mind communication through words is less reliable than heart-to-heart communication through an intuitive grasp of things."³⁹ Silence is also used by many Asian people as a means of avoiding conflict. Chan explains this idea when he writes, "A typical practice among many

Asian peoples is to refuse to speak any further in conversation if they cannot personally accept the speaker's attitude, opinion, or way of thinking about particular issues or subjects.²⁷⁶

Silence is both important and complex in the Japanese culture. In many instances, people are expected to know what another person is thinking and feeling without anything having to be said. Some scholars even refer to this mode of communication as "implying rather than saying."²⁷⁷ Because of the emphasis placed on silence in the Japanese culture, it can serve a variety of purposes. First, among family members, silence is actually seen as a way of "talking." In the following example, Kerr offers an explanation of how silence takes the place of words for the Japanese: "When people say 'There's no communication between parents and children,' this is an American way of thinking. In Japan we didn't need spoken communication between parents and children. A glance at the face, a glance back, and we understand enough."²⁷⁸

Second, silence in Japan is often linked to credibility. That is, someone who is silent is often perceived as having higher credibility than someone who talks a lot. Jaworski makes this point when he notes, "Reticent individuals are trusted as honest, sincere, and straightforward. Thus silence is an active state, while speech is an excuse for delaying activity."²⁷⁹ Finally, the Japanese also use silence to avoid both conflict and embarrassment.²⁸⁰ The Japanese view of silence is reflected in the following proverbs: "It is the duck that squawks that gets shot," "Numerous words show scanty wares," "A flower does not speak," and "The mouth is to eat with, not to speak with." Compare these perceptions of silence with the American saying, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." Or with the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson when he notes, "Speech is power: Speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel." You can easily imagine how the use of silence might create communication problems when people representing these two divergent styles come together. For example, Adler says that during business negotiations between Japanese and Americans, each will give a different interpretation to the same silent period. The Japanese use the silence to "consider the Americans' offer; the Americans interpret the silence as rejection and respond by making concessions."²⁸¹

Silence plays a dominant role in the Indian culture. The Hindu believes that "self-realization, salvation, truth, wisdom, peace, and bliss are all achieved in a state of meditation and introspection when the individual is communicating with himself or herself in silence."²⁸² As you would suspect, to accomplish these states you have to remain silent. Many Scandinavian cultures, like Asian cultures, also have a view of silence that differs from the one found in the dominant culture in the United States. For example, in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, silence conveys interest and consideration. In fact, your silence tells the other person that you want them to continue talking.²⁸³

Some U.S. co-cultures also differ from the dominant U.S. culture in the use of silence. Many American Indians place a premium on silence. As Hoeveler points out, "Silence is a major value in Native American culture, for silence is the token of acceptance, the symbol of peace and serenity, and the outward expression of harmony between the human and natural worlds."²⁸⁴ Native Americans also believe that silence, not speaking, is a sign of a remarkable person. It is a gesture of respect to persons of authority, age, and wisdom. The famous Nez Perce leader Chief Joseph is quoted as saying, "It does not require many words to speak the truth." Johannesen, in discussing the meaning of silence among American Indians, noted that for this co-culture "one derives from silence the cornerstone of character, the virtues of self-control, courage, patience

and dignity."²⁸⁵ Among Navajos, someone who does not use silence and responds too quickly when asked a question is considered immature. In social settings, silence is the rule when a Native American is meeting a stranger, during periods of mourning, when dealing with someone who is exceptionally angry, or when greeting someone who has been gone for a long period of time.²⁸⁶

Two points should be obvious from our discussion of silence. First, you must be careful not to assume that people are communicating only when they talk. Second, because of cultural variations in this form of communication, it behooves you to know cultural attitudes toward talk, noise, and silence. This knowledge can save you from both anxiety and ethnocentrism in intercultural communication encounters.

SUMMARY

- Nonverbal communication is important to the study of intercultural communication because people make judgments about others based on their nonverbal behavior, use nonverbal messages to create impressions, and use nonverbals to manage interaction.
- Nonverbal communication is culture-bound.
- Nonverbal communication involves all nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that (1) are generated by both the source and his or her use of the environment and (2) have potential message value for the source or receiver.
- Nonverbal messages may be intentional or unintentional.
- Nonverbal communication has five basic functions: to repeat, to complement, to substitute for a verbal action, to regulate, and to contradict a communication event.
- Nonverbal actions seldom occur in isolation.
- Nonverbal communication and culture are similar in that both are learned, both are passed on from generation to generation, and both involve shared understandings.
- Studying nonverbal behavior can lead to the discovery of a culture's underlying attitudes and values.
- Studying nonverbal behavior can assist us in isolating our own ethnocentrism.
- The body is a major source of nonverbal messages. These messages are communicated by means of general appearance, skin color, attire, body movements (kinesics), posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, touch, and paralanguage.
- Cultures differ in their perception and use of personal space, seating, and furniture arrangement.
- We can understand a culture's sense of time by learning about how members of that culture view informal time and the past, present, and future, and whether or not their orientation toward time is monochronic or polychronic.
- The use of silence varies from culture to culture.

are pictures from magazines and newspapers that you believe are showing the following facial expressions: (a) anger, (b) joy, (c) sadness, (d) fear, (e) revulsion. Show these pictures to people in various cultures and see what interpretations they give to the facial expressions.

Take someone from a culture different from your own and demonstrate examples of his or her culture's use of communicative body movements (kinesics). What similarities are there between your movements and his or hers? What differences are there? What are the areas of potential misunderstanding?

Small groups, produce an inventory of common American gestures. An example of one is the "OK" gesture: the thumb and forefinger of one hand form a circle, and the rest of the fingers on that hand

DISCUSSION IDEAS

Why is it useful to understand the nonverbal language of a culture?

What situations might you need to interpret the nonverbal behavior of someone from another culture? What problems could arise from not understanding differences in nonverbal behavior?

Give your culture's interpretation of the following nonverbal actions:

Two people are speaking loudly, waving their arms, and using many gestures.

A customer in a restaurant waves his hand over his head and snaps his fingers loudly.

An elderly woman dresses entirely in black.

A young man dresses entirely in black.

An adult pats a child's head.

Two men kiss in public.

arch above the "O." What other gestures can you think of? Compare your findings with those of the rest of the class and make a master list.

4. Watch a foreign film and look for examples of differences in proxemics, touch, and facial expressions. Compare these differences to the dominant culture of North America.

5. In a small group, discuss the following sentence: "Our nonverbal actions usually are a reflection of our culture."

6. Discuss in a small group why you believe there are touch taboos in your culture. Groups will be most productive if they are composed of people from a variety of cultures.

4. How can studying the intercultural aspects of nonverbal behavior assist you in discovering your own ethnocentrism? Give personal examples.

5. How late can you be for the following? (a) a class, (b) work, (c) a job interview, (d) a dinner party, (e) a date with a friend? Ask this same question to members of 2 or 3 cultures other than your own.

6. What is meant by "Nonverbal communication is rule-governed"?

7. In a small group, discuss the following topic: Are there more cross-cultural nonverbal behaviors that are alike or more that are different?

Cultural Influences on Context: The Business Setting

Live together like brothers and do business like strangers

ARAB PROVERB

You will never know a man till you do business with him

SCOTTISH PROVERB

CULTURE AND CONTEXT

There is a well-known saying that everyone has to be somewhere. And while that expression might seem obvious and even inconsequential, it is not only true but also central to the study of human communication. The next three chapters are about some of the places where people, especially in the intercultural setting, find themselves.

We begin with the following truism: communication does not take place in a void. All human interaction is influenced to some degree by the cultural, social, and physical settings in which it occurs. These settings are called the *communication context*. What we are proposing is that your culture specifies the appropriate communicative behavior within a variety of social and physical contexts by prescribing certain rules. When communicating with members of your own culture, you and your cohorts rely on internalized cultural rules that stipulate the appropriate behaviors for the specific communication situation. These rules enable you to communicate effectively with each other, and since they are a product of your enculturation, you do not have to think consciously about which rules to use. But when engaging in intercultural communication, things can be different, because you and your communication partners may be operating under very dissimilar sets of rules. To be a competent intercultural communicator, you must be aware of how diverse cultural rules influence the communication context. Otherwise, you may encounter a variety of surprises—some of which could be embarrassing, detrimental, or both!