



Confidence



Relaxed



Trustworthy

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION: THE SILENT GIVEAWAY

GOAL:

To present unrecognized options of non-verbal communication.

KEYWORDS FOR APPLICATION:

1. Verbal Communication
2. Non-verbal Communication
3. Territoriality
4. Intimate Zone
5. Casual-Personal Zone
6. Civil Inattention
7. Social-Consultative
8. Public
9. Body Types
10. Chatter in the Head
11. Self-Talk

Of all the communication that a person witnesses (verbal or non-verbal), the non-verbal silence is the most interesting and informative, by far. Albert Mehrabian (1960) researched silent/non-verbal communication and found it *more believable than verbal communication*. It is an independent messaging system that is used differently by every person. How good are you at reading people? We are all constantly sending messages, whether we realize it or not!

The content of this article is to encourage thoughtful and accurate consideration of unspoken attributes of humankind. By increasing our personal and researched knowledge about unspoken body language, we increase our potential understanding and appreciation of human physical and behavioral characteristics.

Not intentionally learned, but so very revealing is blushing, shaking, sweating, smiling, laughing, crying, and similar behaviors show nervousness. Think of “The Look!” (whatever that is!), a pat on the back, a pat on the “rear,” and even a drop (or no drop or elevation) in the voice at the end of a sentence. Add to these examples just a very few of the many non-verbal behaviors--voice tone while moving the hands, shrugging the shoulders, wearing a certain color, decorating a home in a certain color, listening to a specific type of music, or having a scented candle in the room. These are examples of unspoken silence making up our non-verbal communication.

Non-verbal (silent) communication is called the “transparency effect.” It says that we are all more transparent than we realize! However, the key to recognizing the “transparency effect” in others is to interpret the non-verbal communication we witness correctly.

TERRITORIALITY (PRIMARY, SECONDARY, PUBLIC)

Humans have a sense of territoriality. It enables us to invite or disinvite social interaction. We have all sorts of signs, signals, and effects to establish our territory without saying a word. It comes from two types of learning—biological and social. For instance, regarding biology, male animals often fight off other males to defend females. Socially, humans declare possessions and spaces of their own and set boundaries on possessions and areas within our environment. Our social areas and possessions might include our side of the bed, our desk, wallet, closet space, car, etc.

The expression of PRIMARY territoriality can be represented as non-verbal and verbal. We use non-verbal “markers” to remind others as to what is “ours.” For instance, we place a sign of our name on the desk, put numbers on our house, and often put our initials on items. Oh yes, we all say, “This is MINE!”

SECONDARY territoriality involves belongings we have for a limited time. We borrow books, have special food items for a snack, your name on a pencil, etc. They are actually or figuratively borrowed or soon to be used up. They usually require a marker of some kind that allows for temporary access to the item.

PUBLIC territoriality involves items that are shared by the public. That is, buses, roads, park benches, grass and trees in the park, etc.

“Territorial Invasion” is when someone else takes over a part or all of our territory. “Contamination” occurs when someone *destructively* takes over your territory---and that often becomes a legal matter.

Remember when you were in a crowded room, and someone keeps staring at you? If you were led to believe that the person doing the staring is a “difficult person,” the invasion becomes a “Psychological Territorial Threat” that causes stress. Therefore, this nonverbal threat causes stress and an increase in blood cortisol excreted by the adrenal glands. Our body, in that type of situation, tends to become stiff. We pull in our elbows and turn our bodies so that our back faces a threat in an attempt to reestablish our territory as we feel the “territorial violation.”

Determine another’s comfortable space by watching their behavior (e.g., a handshake or a hug) and allow that person to tell you their personal acceptable closeness nonverbally. Note the amount of extension of the arm to your extended hand for a handshake, the intimacy (or not) of a hug, or even the desire for a private desk or cubicle. These many “little things” tell “big stories.”

As a leader in a work setting, it is best to encourage group conversation flow between people in an open non-curtailing environment rather than in a cubicle or confined workspace.

Proxemics is the study of personal space as a part of territoriality. It determines what we do, think, and how we react. Such as---

INTIMATE ZONE is for our family, close friends, and spouse. It is about 18 inches from us.

CASUAL-PERSONAL ZONE is for normal conversation. It is about 18 inches to 4 feet from us.

CIVIL INATTENTION is for the person with whom you have eye contact for a fraction of a second, then avert your eyes/gaze away from that person.

SOCIAL CONSULTATIVE is for most day-to-day activities while recognizing personal autonomy and privacy while conducting a discussion. It ranges from 4 to 12 feet from us---known as an area of a formal conversation.

PUBLIC is from about 12 feet from us to what you can see or hear. It includes observable activities.

DIFFERENCES IN CULTURES AND SUBCULTURES

Some cultures require distancing the person from strangers; whereas, other cultures value closeness. For example, in Tanzania, being too far away from another person as a matter of personal choice means the given message is that you reject that person; therefore, it is best to sit close to another person. Other cultures, such as the Arab culture, desire to be as close as possible when conversing—close enough to feel a person’s breath (bad breath or otherwise).

SPACE, COLORS, AND MOOD

Research shows that we shape our environment by determining our space, color, and mood. The physical management of these factors in our environment helps assess our behavior and other people’s behavior. The setting, in general, also triggers conscious and unconscious perceptions. Our perceptions, in turn, determine our behavior.

Space—

Three factors determine the non-verbal spaces created by people. They are---

1. The flow of traffic: The requirements of personal movement within buildings are an example. Studies have shown that in an apartment house, the people living near the stairwells are more likely to boost the interpersonal interactions. (MIT 1950 study) Another example is the exits within certain buildings that are somewhat hidden—take as an example, the casinos that are laid out in a manner that often discourages finding your way out until you become aware of the layout.
2. The direction people face: When people face each other, there is an increase in the possibility of social interaction. The family table usually requires people to face each other, which increases the opportunity for verbal and nonverbal communication. The barstool, in comparison, does not face another person, thereby decreasing verbal and nonverbal communication.
3. The leader’s location: The “leader” (or someone in charge) is usually at the head of the table—and is the person more likely to be in control. If this person is not at the head of the table, he/she is located somewhere in a central location of the involved persons. (Remember that leadership means the encouragement and active involvement of others; so, where are you currently, as the leader, in encouraging others’ nonverbal participation and involvement?)

Colors---

All colors have meaning and cause an influence a person's impressions and behaviors. When different colors are studied, some colors have consistencies in their interpretations, and some do not. Even color brightness has a significant meaning.

The color of white seems to impart a feeling of goodness; whereas, black seems to give a negative sense. Bright colors provide a sense of intensity. In contrast, passive feelings can be related to black, white, blue, and pink. Research shows that white uniforms or uniforms with white seem to be more positively responded to by referees than totally black uniforms in the sports world. According to some studies, more penalties for teams wearing all black were reported to have occurred. Physical aggressiveness was reported to increase by merely wearing black.

(The question for you is related to how do people see you if you wear **black**? Do you see *yourself* as more aggressive—or not? In this case, more likely, the way YOU FEEL when you wear a certain color usually results in you *acting the way you feel*. Your behavior is related to how you think, in this case, most often identifies your degree of aggressiveness, or lack thereof.)

The color of black is not always associated with death in some cultures. Blue and white in Asia are often the colors of a funeral. In Ghana, red is often combined with black for this occasion.

Red is a lucky color in Asia. International research has found that ovulating women will unpredictably often wear red. Red, being a bright color, is an attention-seeking color. The color has been found to attract a male's attention toward females. Research has determined that men have the same effect on women if they (males) wear red---and women found that men wearing red were more sexually desirable and of higher social status.

Mood---

A nice warm cup of "something" or a hand warmer helps to promote a personal feeling of warmth and trust toward another person. If you provide a cold drink or cold pack to another person, there is reported to be an increase in the recipient's loneliness. (Perhaps this knowledge can be used by safehouses and disaster shelters in times of community stress and should be an example of the fact that "*All behavior has meaning*" as a universal concept!!

Body Types---

Body and faces can send many different messages. Regarding the *static features* of the body and face, research tells us that:

Body Shapes (Identified by William Sheldon)--

1. Endomorph is a heavier (fat) body type. He claimed that the digestive system probably works slowly. This person, usually, is relaxed and friendly.
2. Ectomorph is a skinny body type. He claimed that the nervous system of this person probably dominates.
3. Mesomorph is a more muscular body type. He claimed that the muscular system probably is predominant.

Body Height---

1. The worldwide income for males is two percent more per one inch of height than females. Females over 5' 8" earn about 15% more than shorter females.
2. In romantic relationships, women seem to prefer taller men, especially if they live in a dangerous neighborhood.
3. Men often lie about their height on dating profiles—a tendency to exaggerate. Females often minimize (lie) about their weight on dating profiles.

Why has height become important? It has been speculated that size is a dominant factor in the animal kingdom because, in the animal kingdom, it tends to be bigger and stronger. The dominant animals lead the pack, the herd, or the group.

Waist-To-Hip Ratio in Women—

1. Men appear to be more attracted to women that have a waist to hip ratio of 0.70. Fertility seems to be increased with, at least, this ratio.
2. If the waist to hip ratio gets to 0.85 or higher, health issues are more likely to occur—diabetes and heart disease. These diseases cause women to be less fertile usually.
3. It appears that men are more attracted to women who have a hip-ratio that signals fertility—and maybe the fact that they are, also, more attractive.

Weight---

1. The shift to the approval of increased weight has increased in the past 125 years in the U.S. There seems to be a connotation that heavier means more wealth and the availability of food.
2. In some Arabic cultures, the fathers like to boast about their “heavier” daughters as evidence of the father’s ability to provide food.
3. In the U.S. and different than 125 years ago, the waist to hip ratio applies. The range difference of 0.70% often indicates proper nutrition and fertility.

Faces---

1. The neutral face (without expression) is determined by others to identify the personality of the person.
2. In 1950, there was an agreement that the neutral face can identify a personality. Research findings indicated that people who wore glasses were seen as smarter because it suggests that they read a lot. Broad-set eyes became a metaphor for broad-mindedness. Conversely, narrow set eyes became a metaphor for narrow-mindedness. If the corners of your mouth turn up, it was thought that you must be a happy person.

Where some of the neutral face research findings *appear, sometimes* to be true, it is also true that health conditions could be the reason for what is seen.

Personality Traits---

Social scientists assume that we all have varying amounts of five personality traits. These are conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and extroversion. Assessments of photos show a *significant correlation* between the person's photo personality assessment and the person's formal personality assessment.

Romantic Relationships---

John Gottman, a psychologist, noted a pattern of behavior in couples. He called them the four horsemen of the apocalypse: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and withdrawal. Criticism and defensiveness are verbal signs that relate to sarcasm. Contempt is a nonverbal sign expressed in the face. Withdrawal occurs when the couple no longer talks to each other—and that *is extremely toxic*. Staying happy in a marriage requires a couple to do the little non-verbal “things.” They include gentle squeezes, smiles, showing attentiveness—OFTEN!

In-Your-Head Self-Chatter and Self Talk---

Insecurity and self-doubt often bring a need to comfort our spirit. In a time of turmoil, either within ourselves or in the lives around us, we find a need to go to our “quiet place” to calm the voice in our head. It is an effort to change the way we think or feel. There is a need to deal with all the stressors during the pandemic and today's tumultuous political climate!

Self-talk is a reaction to the way we perceive things. Introspective self-talk can be helpful, or it can “back-fire.” Self-talk can cause physiological adverse effects—palpating heart, high blood pressure, and fight or flight feelings. All this inner-chatter gets the body “revved up,” which causes an inability to use our capacity to problem-solve. You are not alone in this ruminating behavior. Non-verbal self-chattering in your head is normal. The question is—how can you make introspective self-talk/chattering work positively? Finding someone else to talk to about your non-verbal chatter in your head helps to calm this internal chatter.

The idea is to have a personal “Board of Advisors.” Step back and decide who is the best person to help you deal with your negative internal self-chatter. Be deliberate as to the person with whom you converse. Who will give you that aw-ha feeling of reality? Select people according to your need at the time. Find people with whom you can share your thoughts, vent your internal feelings, increase your connection with positive perspectives, and broaden your perspectives. It might change the way you think and better understand the way you feel. Talking with a “supportive-other” helps to step back from personal ruminations into a more realistic world where things are removed from private interpretation. Through temporary distancing from your self-chattering in your head, things (over-time) do change—have a history of changing--and you will survive!

Sometimes, a chosen person will not listen but unload his/her self-chatter problems on you instead of listening to *your* self-chatter baggage. You don't want or need more internal baggage! He/she might be an unwanted member of your “Board of Advisors.” Continue your search for that appropriate listener.

RECOMMENDED READING:

“UNDERSTANDING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION” (Great Courses Course Guidebook)

By Mark G. Frank, Ph.D.
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www.mdcalc.com/nonverbal--pain--scale--nvps-nonverbal-patients

Behavioral Pain Scale (/behavioral-pain-scale-bps-pain-assessment-intubated-patients)

CPOT Pain Scale (/critical-care-pain-observation-tool-cpot)

Ethan Kross

Leading expert on controlling the conscious mind.

Award-winning professor at University of Michigan.

Author: Chatter: The Voice in Our Head, Why It Matters, and How to Harness It. (January 2021)

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