1

Meaning and Relationships in a Biological and Cultural Context

Focus points for note taking when reading this chapter:

- How far is our relating determined by biology and how far is it created by our culture?
- How does culture interact with biology in our relationship activity?
- Everyday conduct is partly verbal and partly nonverbal: consider carefully the role of language and nonverbal body language in your relationships with other people.
- How does NVC [Nonverbal communication] "work" such things as power, gender and identity into a relationship?
- How do NVC and language convey our sense of ourselves, our attitudes towards others and our sense of ease (or not) in a relational situation?
- How does our communication send both relational and content messages?

When those of us from a Western culture first think about human relationships we tend to assume that they are results of the emotions that two people have for one another. You like someone, so you become friends; you love someone, so you become romantically attached, or, stated differently, we are friends with someone because we like them; we get romantic because we love someone. These assumptions don't place much emphasis on biology or culture, though we live our lives both as biologically animal and as culturally situated individuals. Our emotions might therefore have a biological basis, even if they are expressed in a culturally understandable way. Floyd (2004) for example, points out that many communication processes and outcomes have physiological markers, and that heart rate

changes when we experience not only anger, but sexual arousal and love; that parts of the endocrine system regulate hormone production that can be tied to family conflict or marital depression; and that galvanic skin responses and pupillometry have been used to assess liking, preference, and aversion to both things and people. At a contrasting level of analysis, Manusov & Milstein (2005) recently analysed the vast media frame through which the historically important 1993 handshake on the White House lawn between Yassir Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin was interpreted. The handshake was seen as 'sending a signal' to various political groups about the reception that their views would receive from the powerful figures who played a major part in the interaction.

This simple pairing of examples brings up the fact that the analysis of relationships is available at many different levels, from the microbiological analysis of chemical changes wrought by sexual desire or depression and individual endocrine performance effects on a pair's marital interaction to the oppressive cultural machinery that has historically directed women to a place of relational inferiority, treating them as the property of fathers and husbands for centuries, for example. Yet even now we do not think it odd that parents have the sort of relational power that allows them to take their children to a vacation spot of the parents' choosing without the children being consulted, that children may be denied their choice of playmates by disapproving parents, and that some marriage ceremonies still ask 'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man? The media may debate the 'rightness' of same-sex marriages and we may feel horror when a paedophile is convicted at the same time as we share with our friends mildly amused joking references to Michael Jackson who was acquitted of such charges. So even if relationships are based on biology it is clear that immediate individual psychological and social communicative processes combine with distant societal and sociological forces to influence our ways of looking at them in a living society where people do not satisfy themselves merely by passing around self-rating questionnaires or the contents of their catheters but actually talk to one another in a social context.

Contexts for analysing relationships

The mystery that a book about human relationships must confront therefore is that there is simultaneously far too much to be said and far too little known about the nature of relationships, far too much that is commonsense and far too little that is understood about the reasons why relationship processes are either common or sense, and far too much that is personally important about the everyday practical consequences of understanding relationships for it to be left only to science, even if that could be restricted to one sort of science (from the physiological to the sociological).

In brief, then, both of these above levels, the physical/physiological and the media frames in a culture, affect human relationships and the ways in which behaviour in them is created and then understood. Accordingly, we must not allow our first thoughts about human relationships to overlook either the biological or the many contexts that create and modify expression and interpretation of personal preferences. Even if desire has a physical basis, real life practical constraints limit our ability to act on our emotions and 'we can't we do it in the road' even with our spouse. Culture constrains expression of biologically-based desire. This book explores research on relationships with an emphatically contextual lens and teaches that even individual liking is not just individualistic and desire is only infrequently the simple origin of actual relational behaviour. Biology and culture, personal meaning systems created in early childhood, communication, 'audiences' for the performance of our relational behaviour, and nonverbal communication which goes beyond – and modifies the meaning of – the felt emotion and the spoken word modify relationships. Other contexts (the papers or TV, for instance) both facilitate and limit this apparently most private of areas – *personal* relationships. Human relationships are not simply created by liking or attitudes about another person. They are based on many other features which a rich field of research has uncovered in the last 25 years.

Biology: the animal background

Since human beings tend not to think of themselves primarily as animals, we assume that when it comes to mating, there may be more at work than simple individual biochemistry. All the same we understand that in the animal world there are dark forces at work which limit the opportunities for mating success. Darwin (1859) observed that most organisms reproduce very rapidly, and that even slowly reproducing animals such as elephants could cover the globe in a few centuries if there were not other factors that limited their reproductive success. One of the things which influences success is competition within a species (the stags with the strongest muscles mate more frequently than other stags). Another factor is the availability of the resources that the animal needs to survive, such as their specific foods and habitats. A third element that limits reproductive success results from competition for the same resources: for example, if elephants and goldfish both need water, the fact that elephants can drain the pond makes life difficult for the goldfish.

As we look around at the people on our bus, can we see such relational principles essentially still at work, even if they have been modified by thousands of years of social civilization? Yes, say Kenrick & Trost (2000) who point to a sociobiological basis for human mate selection. In competition with other members of the species, those human beings who possess particularly attractive characteristics will be at an advantage in the selection of reproductive mates. Likewise, those

people who command more resources than others (the strong versus the weak or the wealthy versus the poor) will be at a reproductive advantage. Finally, those humans who are able to brush aside the competing attractions of competitors for attention will be more likely to secure the attachment of their beloved. A large amount of research has been accumulated to demonstrate that human beings are subject to their biological impulses in ways that many people fail to recognize or take into account sufficiently. For example, dominance hierarchies are evident in human relationships where some people are on top and some occupy a lower position can be related to animal dominance hierarchies and are based on repro-ductive characteristics such as strength and testosterone. Buss & Dedden (1990) suggested from an evolutionary perspective that even the way in which humans comment negatively about other individuals reflects evolutionary concerns. They found a tendency for women to derogate other women in terms of their looseness, implying that men would not be able to know whether any resultant offspring was theirs (i.e. the suggestion is that the competitors are genetically unreliable because they sleep around); the corresponding tendency for men is a derogation of the reproductive abilities of competitors, such that women could not rely on rewarding reproductive activity (i.e. the suggestion is that competitors have lim-ited apparatus and relevant skills). Similar sociobiological and evolutionary claims have been made to explain tendencies towards rape, jealousy and spouse abuse ('mate retention' as they call it) which Shackelford, Goetz, Buss, Euler & Hoier (2005: 447) describe as 'designed to solve several adaptive problems such as deterring a partner's infidelity and preventing defection from the mating rela-tionship'. In short, the emphasis on biological explanations for human relational behaviour has a substantial basis.

Culture: the large overlay

Although one cannot deny the relevance of such work, you might feel that in an evolved social world, the biological impulses are not crudely animalistic but are shaped by membership of organized and 'civilized' society. Thus, although our biological bases cannot be denied neither should it be allowed to obscure the ways in which our distinction from the apes has brought us TV, the police, and rituals of Valentine's Day. Atop an undoubted biological base is constructed a super-structure of social conventions that also has to be given due weight in any full analysis of human relationships.

   On a personal note, the first lectures I ever attended as an undergraduate were from Niko Tinbergen, who won a Nobel Prize for his work on animal ethology, and I won a Distinction in an exam on animal behaviour at Oxford. My general drift has since been towards the social and away from the biological, and this book will reflect that. I do not deny that biological factors play out in relationships, but I choose to focus on the socially developed forms of influence, and in particular I

attend most specifically to the social psychological and communicative aspects of human behaviour that make relationships more than the pheromones or biological resources from which they undoubtedly draw.

For me it is less important that human relationships are sourced from biological urges than that the presentation of such urges takes a socially modified form. The Chinese, Arabs and Canadians manifest desire differently, although they share animal biology with one another. What, I therefore ask, makes human relationships specific to a culture and how can we explain the fact that humans driven by the same stirrings in their loins and the same micro chemicals surging through their veins, nevertheless manifest a staggering range of marriage ceremonies? Even between such similar cultures as the USA and UK the styles of relating are noticeably different in certain respects, such as the degree of initial 'openness' in conversations with strangers.

Daily practices and everyday experience

Start by looking at things we tend not to notice: the cycles of daily life, that differ between cultures (which organize themselves around different sorts of time frames, different religious festivals, even different arrangements for 'the week' some starting it on Sunday some on Saturday). Begin by thinking about the humdrum activities in our own culture and the structures of social experience that bring people together whether they like one another or not (Wood & Duck, 2006) and also ask whether your relational behaviour might be influenced by subtleties of the calendar. Okay, not subtleties – we all get bombarded with information about birthdays, and the necessity of acknowledging anniversaries – but what about things like day of the week? Are Wednesdays good for relationships? Alberts, Yoshimura, Rabby & Loschiavo (2005) say no. In a study of daily reports of individuals' relational activities, it became clear that Wednesdays are actually bad for relationships, confirming Duck, Rutt, Hurst & Strejc (1991) who showed a tendency for greater conflict on Wednesdays. Perlman & Serbin (1984) likewise showed that days of the week are not relationally neutral, and that people experience greater loneliness on the weekend than they do on other days, even if the number of interactions that they have are actually the same on all of these days. People expect more 'action' on weekends, and are more disappointed when it doesn't happen then than they are on other days of the week.

Let's assume that relationships are not experienced as the same all the time, on all days, at any point in the calendar. This might not seem like a particularly important observation at this moment, because it feels like common sense, but when you read further into the book and find that researchers are reporting about relationships as if the calendar did not exist, then we may want to return to this observation. We all knew already that relationships are variable, and that even when we are reading research that acts as if a relationship is the same through all

time, we know that our own relationships are not like this. When we read research, however convincing the statistics, we need to connect it with our everyday experience, and ask whether it fits. When it does not, then either we are learning something exciting, or the researchers got it wrong.

Uncertainty and practicality

So far we have three such contexts: biology, culture, and everyday life variation. A fourth is uncertainty: we may be very confident that a date will go well *before* it happens, but afterwards, we might end up sobbing on the bed. Things don't always work out as we hoped. This is something to bear in mind when we discuss research based on questionnaires which assess only people's guesses about hypothetical scenarios. In every imaginary scenario things always go well, there are no problems, just roses, bluebirds and sunsets, and nobody changes their mind. Surprisingly, researchers very often base sweeping conclusions on such imaginary reports (Dragon & Duck, 2005), and although there will be many examples pointed out to you during the course of this book, you should keep an eye out for it when reading research for yourself.

LISTEN TO YOUR OWN CONVERSATION

Pick two days and a couple of hours randomly selected in the future (next Thursday 10.00 am–1.00 pm and Friday 6.00 pm–9.00 pm, for example) and then when those times come, keep an informal record of the people you happen to be talking with and the subjects of conversation and also the ways you felt about it. Identify similarities and differences between the different times. Are there any major patterns? Do you talk with particular people about particular sorts of things? Is it harder or easier to list the topics covered with friends than with strangers? Does time of day appear to make any difference or no difference to the topics and styles of conversations?

Some relationships are composed by circumstances over which partners have little emotional control. The workplace, the living place, and the social environment are all made out of passages, offices, rooms, buildings that are close to buildings, rooms, offices, and passages where other people live and work. These environmental contexts shape our relationships, influence the kinds of people we meet, and constrain or facilitate relationships: we are likely to know people we

meet a lot, yet even those we love deeply may never be real partners if we live in different countries. The fact is that relationships are conducted at a distance as a feature of modern life (Sahlstein, 2004) and email, instant messaging, and mobile phones have all affected, for large parts of our population anyway, the ways in which relationships are conducted and conceptualized (See Chapter 6). Such movements in society are part of what we need to explore in understanding human relationships: changes in the way that relationships get done are impor-tant, because changes in the way we *do* things can result in changes in the way we *experience* things (Duck, in press).

Society also contains blueprints that shape our thoughts about relationships and how to do them. For example, we all know what a 'mother' or a 'friend' is, but we would not understand relationships of obligation that are familiar in Japan such as 'amae' where each partner identifies with the self-interest of the partner and sees a direct connection between outcomes for other and self. Also we proba-bly wouldn't assume that a relationship like 'wife of a brother' could be more important in some cultures than 'sister' or that it may be impolite to address an older brother by his first name – rather the *title* 'brother' should be used. We may also not appreciate that in a society which stresses individualism we assume that relationships are formed from individual preference whereas other cultures (e.g., Colombia) emphasize that relationships are based on the interconnectedness of persons in networks who do exercise '*palanca*' (or 'leverage'/favours) on one another's behalf as a part of everyday life (Fitch, 1998). Some cultures look at rela-tionships in terms of the good that accrues to the family overall rather than to the individual (Gaines & Ickes, 2000), so two people might get married because it would be good for the families, not because they fall in love in the way our Western culture expects.

KEEP A JOURNAL OR KEEP/READ A BLOG

Do the same exercise as the above one (p. 00) over a longer period time and take special note of relationally relevant interactions. Record whether you thought they would be important before they happened and whether they turned out to be so. What does a relational blog look like, whether yours or someone else's? How does it match up with the sorts of things you read in research reports about relationships?

Although we are often amused by these 'odd' (from our perspective) ways of relating, we simply do not realize how much of our own relating is influenced by

our own culture because our own culture is usually taken for granted as the 'normal' way to do things, just as the people from other cultures do about their own practices (Fitch, 2003). As you read this book you should tune up your ability to notice what is hidden in your daily relational experience. Let's start here with the media as an unnoticed force on your relationships.

We might not ponder the ways in which views of relationships are shaped by ideological influences such as media, yet magazines and TV shows regularly depict 'the right way' to have marriages, conduct romances, or be friends (Duck & McMahan, 2008). Magazines run quizzes like '10 ways to improve your marriage', 'Intimacy: the five steps'. This constant 'below-radar' barrage shapes expectations about relationship conduct. Duran & Prusank (1997), for example, looked at the advice about 'relationships' contained in men's and women's magazines and found that there was a great deal of it and it concerned a large range of relationships (e.g. marriage, dating, friendship), relational issues (e.g. conflict, sexual relations, initiating relationships), and advice-laden presentations of how they *should* be conducted. Duran & Prusank: concluded:

> Given the various configurations of relationships and the ambiguity they generate, it is logical to assume that men and women are turning to the media as one source of information concerning relational issues. Researchers interested in the study of interpersonal dynamics cannot ignore the influence of media messages which overtly and covertly make their way into the public consciousness and serve to (re)shape and (re)frame relationships. (1997: 186)

You may feel that these are just magazine articles and are interesting but do not really influence anyone – but if they do not have any effect then why do people keep reading them and why do people compare their relationship experiences with the magazines' recommendations and buy millions of self-help books that tell them how to do relating or how to win friends and influence people? Can you honestly say that you have never read such an article nor been influenced by the portrayal of relationships in films and TV or compared your way of doing relating with the way other people in such sources do them? It will be worthwhile for you to discus this matter with your classmates and see the extent to which there is conformity concerning the ways in which relationships could be conducted. Think of the number of times other people have commented about whether someone should have treated a friend the way they did. Consider how many times someone has given you advice about the sorts of ways to carry on with your relationships. All these things feel normal and usual, but in fact as the rest of this book will show, they are the places where an ideology about relationships is put into effect, the place where cultural stereotypes of relating are enacted in everyday life. They are where we are influenced by social norms concerning the emotions that (we may have assumed at first) are purely personal experiences.

CLASS EXERCISE

Collect examples from the media that present standards for relation-ships. Look for quizzes about the number of times that people have sex or the number of feelings that they express or the way in which they talk to one another. But don't overlook reports about paedophilia or child pornography and the implicit condemnation contained in such reports. Discuss the results in class.

Quality and appropriateness in relationships

These notions suggest that there is a *right* way to do relating and that it can be articulated and written down, as Montgomery (1988) points out: any reference to 'quality' is also a reference to social norms and ideologies that prefer one way of doing things over another. Few of us would immediately recognize this as a means of social control, yet the idea of 'quality' lays the ground for a kind of social influence that sets a standard for other people to use in commenting on the ways in which we conduct relationships: 'It's not right', 'He should not treat friends that way', 'She was disloyal to her parents', 'He betrayed her; true friends don't do that'. Comment and criticism based on social expectations are also available to everyone of us as we conduct our own relationships ('I felt like hugging him but it would have looked bad'). The Little Person Inside Our Heads tells us when we are doing something that we would find hard to justify to other people, even if that 'something' is the conduct of personal relationships. These feelings arise because sociological context, structural factors and social forces are ever-present ways in which we decide what is 'appropriate' in human relationships (Goodwin & Cramer, 2002); politeness rules encourage us often to conceal our true emotions in public ('be nice even if you don't really feel it'); we may exaggerate or misrepre-sent expression of our interest in someone or our relational feelings about them, as when we smile at boring strangers at parties or kiss embarrassing relatives at family gatherings. Furthermore, even the highly positive expression, 'I love you', can be judged inappropriate if it comes from the 'wrong person' or at the 'wrong time'. Thus, it is clear that *having* (or *expressing*) emotions is not all that we need to understand in learning about human relationships: we need to think more about contexts and what limits the social legitimacy of indicating emotions in public places (Is it OK to hold hands in the street? Not in China).

But there is a deeper aspect of contexts for relationships. Wood (1995) observes that women assume a disproportionate share of responsibilities for home-making

in marriage and child care in parent–child relationships. She indicates that if we explain such observations only in terms of individual attitudes and values then we mistake the degree to which attitudes are constructed by cultural views of 'a woman's place', views represented in literature, TV shows, talk, use of language and even Internet games (where women are often depicted as objects to be chased while men get on with the really important business of decapitating fighting lizards). Foley (2006b) points out that many social organizations, such as the priesthood or the police reinforce particular views of relationships – e.g., by telling battered women that they should 'tough it out' because marriage is a relationship that 'requires that women obey their husbands'. For this reason, many battered women stay in abusive relationships because they receive no support from cultural institutions which takes the view that a wife's duty is to oblige her husband, come what may (J. West, 1995).

Communication as a context for 'quality'

Obvious, too, but often overlooked, is that language is the medium through which many relationship activities are conducted. We talk, write, call, text, or email friends, lovers, parents, children, neighbours, or colleagues – and obviously use language to do that, even if the SMS (Short Message Service [Texting])/MTMF language is special (Chan & Cheng, 2004). Language, however, is not a neutral medium but provides a formative context for discussion of relationships. Think what is implied by metaphors to describe relationships: 'bonding' or 'couple' (Baxter, 1992). 'Bonds' and 'couple' are both metaphors implying ties, connection – chains, even.

We should reflect on ways in which language structures our thinking about relationships along culturally normative lines. Magazines, norms, friends, and 'others' all shape our views of acceptable relationship practices but do not need to explicate cultural norms ('Be loyal to your friends'). The terms in which they tell stories about friends can play into cultural norms anyway. For example, friends' stories about their behaviour can point out loyalty, and hence adherence to that norm of friendship. Furthermore in ways that we will explore later, everyday talk serves to present our opinions of the ways in which the world *should* be viewed. Communication, language, and all that is culturally encoded within it are thus crucial bases for establishing conduct for human relationships and their quality.

Although it might appear, then, as insignificant activity, nevertheless as we gossip with friends so we select descriptions of behaviour that record approval or disapproval as compared to cultural norms ('Sure, I'll help you. What are friends for?'), or decide whether a person was being good or bad ('He's so reliable', 'No he's just boringly predictable'). In such subtle ways as selection of what to include in a story or the ways to gossip about others' behaviour, people reinforce social

norms, and their language embodies norms for us. Language thus *structures* meanings about human relationships as well as reporting them (Duck, 1994). For example, we are used to explaining relationships in terms of emotion, love and attraction, but language also loads in metaphors that set up context and 'take a view' about the ways in which people are *supposed* to progress in *building* a relationship (Allan, 1993). The way in which we describe the development of a relationship is a story imposed on a number of occurrences perceived within a particular culture as a *reasonable* path (Baxter, 1992). By describing relationships in particular ways, cultures provide contexts for individuals not only to view the way relationships are *supposed to* develop, but also to speak with culturally-shared vocabularies for representing relationship growth. 'We fell in love' is a commonly accepted explanation for romantic involvement in most Western cultures; 'It is a good match for both families' is more acceptable in many other parts of the world.

What we should not overlook are the subtler influences on relationship conduct that are created by contexts of talk that enact social norms or invite moral judgements about relational behaviour. Indeed, on the day I was writing this, a politician running for the leadership of a UK political party withdrew from the contest because of newspaper revelations of an affair with a 'rent boy' and TV commentators were unrestrained in offering viewers a context for judging the behaviour!

The conduct of relationships will ultimately be judged by social communities rather than by partners alone (Simmel, 1950). Relationship partners often articulate that behaviour may be judged by others (e.g., 'What will the neighbours think?' and 'What do we tell the kids?' are common thoughts in couples considering divorce – see Chapter 4). Muraco (2005) even showed that heterosexual college students evaluate friendship behaviours in context and see them more positively when the persons are described as heterosexual rather than as gay – even when the behaviour is identical. J. West (1995) notes that when we talk of relationships breaking up our cultural reference point is placed within a powerful language of 'failure' that makes partners think carefully about their relational skills. Many people stay in painful relationships because they do not want other people to think them failures.

Thus we have to recognize that even relationship behaviours do not mean much without being placed in some larger conceptual contexts. Attempts to focus explanations for relationship processes only on the inside of the relationship or the individual partners' choices and emotions are incomplete and limiting because they overlook important social, sociological, and cultural contexts that 'prefer' certain sorts of relationships and regard other forms negatively (Goodwin & Cramer, 2002; VanderVoort & Duck, 2004). Whenever we talk about relationship quality or assess relationships as 'good' or 'bad' or partners as 'skilled' or 'unskilled' or evaluate people as 'good friends' or see divorce as a relational failure rather than a bold or realistic move then we are essentially backing into an ideology that sets a standard and also has set criteria for 'quality' (Montgomery, 1988).

This book looks at relationships therefore not just as individual emotions but as illustrating ways in which an individual's social cognition reflects social context through communication and the practicalities of membership of a society. We start examining human relationships by looking at language and talk, since these are broad public contexts for relating, but we must not overlook NVC (nonverbal communication), a biologically based system for expressing emotion in ways that modify the meaning of talk (e.g., Ever seen anyone say they are interested while nevertheless yawning?).

Communicative contexts for doing relationships

Two scholars once wrote that 'We converse our way through life' (Berger & Kellner, 1964), and in the case of everyday relationships, you cannot get away from that fact. If you were to sit and list the things that you do with friends, then top of the list would surely have to be 'talking' (Wood & Duck, 2006). Talk composes relationships – whether they are starting, getting better, disintegrating, or just carrying on. Everyday talk creates intimacy (Wood, 2006), pulls families together (Bruess & Hoefs, 2006), enacts friendship (Metts, 2006) and 'does' social support (Foley, 2006a). Talk changes relationships, expresses emotion, handles conflict, and indicates affection, but it also shares attitudes and 'does identity' (Mokros, 2006). Talk declares love; desires, goals and relational fantasies. We talk to handle conflicts, disputes and irritations, to get out of relationships, and deal with daily hassles (Kirkpatrick, Duck & Foley, 2006). We talk to exact revenge (Foster & Rosnow, 2006), deal with in-laws (Morr-Serewicz, 2006) and to forgive (Waldron & Kelley, 2005).

In carrying out these activities we *choose* the words to use and even casual talk selects descriptive preferences or registers a decision to stay silent (Nicholson, 2006). Silences and words both report our *assessment* of the world and attempt to persuade others to endorse that view (Carl & Duck, 2004). Relationships are persuasive and they provide context for other considerations, such as whether you *should* do a favour for your friend. In everyday communication, we are influenced by things friends say and we rarely do something without considering the relational consequences.

There is more to human relationships than talk, though. It is the broader context of *communication* as a whole that is the basis for relating, including not only talk but 'paralanguage' (such as sarcastic tones of voice that communicate feelings) that modifies a communication (for example the facial expression or posture that we adopt) – something said with a wink can carry different meaning if attention is paid only to 'the content' of the speech. Indeed an important claim is that every spoken message contains not one but two elements (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967): the *content* and a *message about the relationship* between speaker and

listener. You cannot utter a word without also simultaneously indicating how you *feel* about the other person.

Communication is thus not merely the passing of messages between persons but the whole processes by which meaning and identity are managed (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). Additionally, relationships are managed by such things as politeness and 'face work' (that is, attending to whether someone loses face from the way in which you treat them – García-Pastor, 2005). This context includes NVC (i.e., nonverbal communication), silent messages of touch, smiles, warm and tender eyes, and bodily postures that convey culturally accepted messages of invitation, approval or rejection as well as subtleties of the conversational text itself. For example, talk shapes interactions towards power usages and Antaki, Barnes & Leudar (2005) indicate that therapist talk serves to reformulate what the client has said, adding an overlay of interpretation. Whenever we summarize what someone has said (whether intentionally or not), we add a commentary that frames what the person said, and we can thereby indicate our (dis)agreement with it.

Silent language: nonverbal communication

Bodies talk. Whenever we sit, stand, walk, position ourselves next to someone, or look at someone else, we give off messages, some of which we may not have intended to make obvious (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). Equally, we can learn that someone dislikes us without a single word being said, that he or she is deliberately lying to us (Searcy, Duck & Blanck, 2005), or that a person finds us sexually attractive or appealing (Keeley & Hart, 1994). Also, through usage of spacing (closeness or distance, for example), messages of intimacy or dislike can be conveyed in a given culture, just as they are by words. From the nonverbal accompaniments of speech, human beings deduce overtones about relationship messages, as when a sensitive comment is made more comforting by a tender touch or supportive embrace. The study of NVC covers an enormous amount of material on which many books and journals are available (See 'Further reading' listed at the end of the chapter), so coverage here is skimpy. You need to know some key terms however: *Proxemics* – the nonverbal messages conveyed by being close or distant from someone and by general space usage; *Kinesics* – the messages conveyed by the way in which someone moves around or the postures which a person adopts; *Chronemics* – the messages conveyed by ways in which time is used, for example by hesitancy in speech or by a person showing up 'fashionably late'; *Haptics* – the messages of touch; *Eye contact* – the messages (usually liking, or honesty) conveyed by looking someone else in the eye. Eye contact is also used not only to convey emotional messages, but also to regulate social interaction and an interaction is not supposed to begin until you have 'caught someone's eye'.

Much of this sort of communication in relationships – whether spatial, paralinguistic (i.e. conveyed in the tone or style of the words) or based on gestures and facial expressions – is familiar to us, even if the terms used in research are abstruse. Yet just as kids may be able to ride a bicycle without being able to explain balance or the physics of motion, so we may be unaware of the rules and meanings that underlie familiar behaviours.

*Nonverbal communication (*NVC*)* is made up of, for instance, the spacing between people when we interact, the gestures, eye movements and facial expressions that provide context for but also supplement our speech, and a range of other cues (Keeley & Hart, 1994; Riggio & Feldman, 2005). It can be quite explicit and inter-cultural: Captain Cook (famous for revealing Australia and New Zealand to the European world) noted in 1774 that when he first met the Maoris, 'One fellow showed us his backside in such a manner that it was not necessary to have an interpreter' (Hughes, 1991: 258).

We never speak without adding to the message by powerful body language. Guerrero & Floyd (2006) show its relational relevance such that close proximity, touch, and gaze, along with reduced verbal fluency, longer times between the end of one person's speech and another's starting, and more silence distinguish romantic relationships from friendships. Nodding and vocal interest are more prevalent in friendships than in romantic relationships. There are even relational differences between the ways in which bodies are 'arranged' in complementary ways ('postural congruence' occurs when two people adopt the same posture – for example both leaning on a wall or both resting elbows on a table with head on hands); postural congruence occurs more in same-sex than in opposite-sex dyads. More than this, women display more direct body orientation and gaze, but men engage in more forward lean and postural congruence.

Yet it is important to recognize that such findings about relationships emerge against the background of the profound importance of nonverbal communication in general interactions and the inappropriateness that is indicated when nonver-bal behaviour mismatches the words spoken. Research has long told us that in such cases we are more influenced by nonverbal than verbal components of mes-sages (Argyle, Salter, Nicholson, Williams & Burgess, 1970). NVC serves to indi-cate messages of liking, feeling, attitudes about others, and attitudes about relationships; NVC also regulates interactions, making them smooth and relaxed or awkward and formal. Of course, the two are connected and the more we like someone the more relaxed the interaction becomes, so we signal liking not only by direct and single cues (e.g., lots of eye contact when we like someone), but also by sequences and the tone of interaction.

Are there social rules about space?

A large number of messages about status and liking are structured into interac-tions and a great deal of influence on social encounters is exerted by space and its

management ('proxemics'). These factors position people both literally and metaphorically in relationship to one another. Space carries forceful messages about relationships and is a powerful ingredient in the mix of nonverbal and verbal indicators of liking.

Space even gets into our talk about relationships. For example, we talk about being 'close' to someone. 'Close' is a word that literally refers to space and yet we use it metaphorically to apply to relationships, almost unthinkingly. We can even talk about 'growing apart' when we mean that our liking for someone is decreasing or our relationship with them is getting more difficult. In fact *spatial metaphors* run through much of our thinking about relationships and there is a reason for that: space influences the way in which we relate to others and it communicates messages of power, liking, and attitudes towards others. There is a rich array of metaphorical statements about power and position that are made in spatial terminology. For example, we talk of people being 'high and mighty', 'head and shoulders above the rest', 'the tops', 'way above the competition', 'the greatest'. Good experiences are 'highs'. We have *high* moral principles and are *above* doing anything mean such as showing *low* cunning.

Spatial metaphors also refer to 'inferiority' (derived from Latin *inferus*, meaning 'below' or 'lower'): people are of low status, lowly, lowdown no-goods, beneath (rather than above) contempt. A bad experience is a 'downer', and we feel low. In doing something bad, we may stoop *low*, or let others *down*. When we assert ourselves, on the other hand, we stand *up* for ourselves. Our language equates spatial position with moral, social or relational position and 'up' is 'good' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Powerful social rules govern actual rather than metaphorical use of space in social situations, too. These work through posture, gesture, orientation (i.e., the way our body is facing) and various other subtleties like eye movements but are so powerful that the very discussion of NVC is hard to do and we rarely refer directly to someone's nonverbal behaviour: to do so is rude or aggressive ('Wipe that smile off your face', 'Look at me when I'm talking to you'). The rarity of such comments emphasizes that the competent use of NVC is a prerequisite to relating to other people.

The rule system for competent NVC makes six basic assumptions: (1) the use of nonverbal cues is identifiable and recognizable; (2) the operation of nonverbal cues is systematic, even if occasionally ambiguous; (3) we translate feelings and intentions into nonverbal messages (i.e., we *'encode'*); (4) observers can interpret it (or *'decode'*); (5) whether we intend it, observers decode our behaviour as relationally relevant, even attending to signals that we thought successfully concealed; (6) NVC is judged in cultural context, such that a behaviour appropriate (or meaningful) in one culture may not be appropriate (or may carry another meaning) in another cultural context. For instance, the placing of the thumb and forefinger together as a circle means 'Perfect!' in the USA but is a crude sexual insult in Sicily, and US troops occupying Iraq have been trained on the cultural differences in

16

American and Iraqi nonverbal communication (see e.g. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4729262.stm.

Nonverbal communication is not only systematic in the above ways but also serves five functions for us (Patterson, 1992). These functions are to: (1) provide information about ourselves, especially our feelings or relational attitudes; (2) regulate interaction (e.g., by enabling us to see when someone has said all that they intend to say and it is our turn to talk); (3) express emotional closeness in relationships; (4) attempt social control (e.g. by dominating others); (5) engage in service-task function (i.e., to depersonalize certain contacts that would otherwise be 'intimate'. For example, think of the parts of your body that physicians can touch but which other people may not – unless they are remarkably close friends). Also some parts of the body can be touched in private but not in public (Davis, 1983), or in an informal setting like a bedroom but not, say, when you are in church.

TRY THIS IN CLASS

Pair off and start a conversation. After about a minute or so the instructor will give you a signal and you must now hold both your partner's hands and continue the conversation; after a second signal you should place both your hands on the other person's shoulder, one on each, and continue; and finally both hands on the waist of the other person.

Points to discuss: How it felt; how it changed; what factors made a difference (sex of partners, whether and how well you know them, depth of relationship if any). If you feel uneasy, what do you feel uneasy *about*, given that this is a class exercise, not an event occurring outside of class? How might you feel when you see your partner outside class now?

Territories in space

Let us begin with a large context for behaviour: the space in which it occurs. At first sight 'territory' may seem irrelevant to everyday human relationships, even though animals and governments use the concept a lot. Some birds attack invaders that come into their 'patch', dogs mark out territorial boundaries with body products, and governments put up their flags on their territory. Yet humans use space, too, in a systematic way that has territorial and relational overtones (i.e., we use space as if it is invisibly 'attached' to us or under our control). This occurs both in fixed settings, like offices, and in dynamic settings, during conversations.

Within the general study of 'proxemics', Hall (1966) differentiated space into *intimate* (i.e., direct contact to around 18 inches [46 cm] away from another person – obviously someone we know and like); *personal* (around 18 inches [46 cm] to about 4 feet [1.4 m] apart usually used when talking to casual friends or acquaintances); *social* (around 4 feet [1.4 m] to around 12 feet [4.2 m] apart – usually used for business transactions and impersonal encounters), or *public* (more than 12 feet [4.2m] apart – how a speaker at public events stands away from the audience).

As long as we can breathe comfortably and basic biological needs are met (e.g., we are not too hot/cold) then sociocultural and relational rules for distribution of space will be followed. In different relational contexts we are comfortable with different distances; imagine talking to friends, to a teacher, and going to a lecture – you would not sit as close to a teacher giving a lecture as you would to a friend telling a story. Another thing is that as we get to know someone better so we indicate this by holding conversations at smaller distances from each other. The more intimate we become emotionally, the more intimate we get spatially; we get closer in two senses and will more often touch people we know very well.

In relational settings the use of different sorts of space conveys different messages. Knapp & Hall (2002) distinguish four different types: Primary territories (always ours, central to our lives) such as our house, car, body, wallets and purses, or items claimed temporarily for our primary or sole use, such as cutlery in a restaurant, or a hotel bed); Secondary territories (not central to our lives, nor exclusive to our use, such as TVs in common rooms); Public territories (available for temporary occupancy by anyone – park benches or bus seats); Personal space refers to that space legitimately claimed or occupied by a person for the time being.

In the course of everyday interaction, entry into our spaces by other people sends different signals, depending on the space and the kind and duration of the entry. For example, if someone else sits on the same park bench, that is not a violation of our personal space, even though we might resent them using it. On the other hand, if someone sleeps in our hotel bed uninvited, then that is an invasion of our rights. We can therefore differentiate these entries into our personal space as either *Violation* (unwarranted encroachment into personal space, such as sitting in your assigned seat on a plane or putting their hand down your shirt), *Invasion* (longer-term violation of space, such as when the younger sibling moves into your bedroom after you leave for college), and *Contamination* (defilement of personal space, such as you would feel after a burglary or if someone throws up on your living room carpet). We can attempt to prevent such entries and violations by the use of 'markers' which stake a claim to the space (for example by hanging a coat over the back of a chair we wish to use in the library, or by putting up a 'No trespassing' sign). You might like to consider whether the gift of an engagement ring sends the same kind of (relational) message.

LOOK OUT FOR THIS IN THE MEDIA

With reference to news items specifically, how do people designate territory as theirs? Think not only about such things as national flags or name tags on desks or furniture arrangements, but look at ways in which two people claim property through nonverbal means in news stories. Discussion of relevant news stories reported by class members should generate at least 40 minutes of discussion if they have done their observations properly.

Claiming space is claiming power

Space rules carry information about status, ownership, and the relationship between participants. Human beings decorate their rooms, houses, cars, other possessions, and themselves in a way that indicates these things. For instance, furniture in offices is arranged in ways that indicate who owns what, who is superior to whom, and how much of the space is 'public'. Desks and tables are arranged to show power relationships between people, in addition to any reasons to do with lighting or ease of communication. For example, bosses usually make you sit across the desk from them as a distancing device to indicate their power and importance. By contrast, therapists tend to sit with nothing but a low table in between clients and themselves. This reduces physical and psychological barriers, promoting a context for informal and relaxed interaction.

Chang (2002) noted that in a Chinese courtroom, the defendant is placed on a low stool in the centre of the room, a position of inferiority consistent with the presumption in Chinese courts that defendants are guilty and there to be punished, not to be tried for guilt or innocence. We also use furniture in this way to make implicit statements about relative power in a relationship. For example, receptionists' desks are usually placed in your path and so communicate the receptionist's power to restrict your entry further into the office. It is *physically* possible to break the rules, but is a *social* offence. For example, moving your chair round the barrier so that you sit next to the boss, moving round to the other side of the table, opening a door marked 'Private', or sitting on a receptionist's desk, all violate a social rule. Such violations would most probably lead to comment, discomfort or possibly to the other person becoming angry. Someone who habitually violates such rules in conducting relationships will be seen as difficult to deal with (and they may have Nonverbal Learning Disability: http://www.nldontheweb.org).

Symbolic decoration of territory also indicates ownership and affirms control and power. The most obvious example is clothing: physically, I could put my hand in

your pocket, but socially … it could be. big mistake. The placing of posters or decorations on a wall can also indicate that the person claims that space and also states identity: a person putting Eminem on the wall claims a different identity from someone posting George Bush and Tony Blair shaking hands. Furthermore, if we observe an empty seat with a coat hanging over the back, we know it is a meaningful symbol laying claim to the space: the coat owner is indicating that he or she will return and is 'keeping' the chair. You might like to consider whether the same sort of principle is implicit in *relational* 'decoration' such as wedding rings.

A further way of claiming space is through *self extension*. Placing your feet on a coffee table, sprawling across an empty bench, and leaning across a doorway are all ways of claiming control over the space. Claiming space is claiming power, ownership, and, above all, status. As people are promoted in an organization, so this is symbolically recognized by larger offices, longer desks, taller chairs, and wider blotter pads. Space is a metaphor for status.

Most often spatial claims are *horizontal*: the floor space allocated to a person. Status claims, however, can be vertical too, as in 'higher' or 'lower' status. Kings, queens, judges and professors sit on raised platforms. Equally, temporary changes in status can be acknowledged by height changes as when a scoring footballer jumps up in the air or is lifted up in triumph by team mates. More subtly, persons sometimes bow or curtsy (thus reducing their height) when they are introduced to someone of much higher status, and in Ancient China persons introduced to the emperor had to reduce their height by hurling themselves to the floor and banging their foreheads on the ground. Nowadays, only Assistant Professors seeking tenure do this.

TRY THIS OUT IN CLASS

Divide the class into threes. The class instructor will now leave for five minutes. Each group of three should be instructed to set off a part of the classroom as their own, using any method they can think of. When the instructor returns, it must be clear which bits of the classroom 'belong' to each group. Discuss the ways in which people have done this exercise and what it teaches us about nonverbal communication and 'territorial markers' that people use.

Space and conversation

Space matters not only statically but in the dynamic flow of social encounters (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). To lean across someone's desk more than about half way

is a threat to them personally. To lean beside someone with your hand on the wall beside his or her shoulder at a party is to 'claim' the person: you are telling other people to 'Keep out'. The other person in these circumstances can obviously escape physically by brushing past, but to do so would be rude and violate a social rule about the relational 'meaning' of space. Likewise, invasion of someone's space by touching them can be a statement about intimacy, as can moving closer, crossing over the table to sit next to one another rather than opposite, though these may also be seen just as invasive. Guerrero & Andersen (1991) showed that the level of public touch between partners was actually curvilinear – lower for couples at early or late/stable stages of relationships, highest for those at middle or developing stages. They also found that public touch increased primarily in the hand and waist areas during intermediate stages of relationships. In short, dynamic use of space carries relational messages that affect the tone of an interaction and show degree of (dis)liking or hostility/friendliness.

Nonverbal systems of meaning

You may be starting to see a problem. What exactly is '*the*' meaning of space in social encounters? At some times, or physical closeness indicates intimacy (e.g., when we sit next to people whom we like), but at other times it can indicate personal threat and cause a rise in blood pressure (Floyd, 2004). The two kinds of meaning are attached to eye movements as well. Gazing at a person's eyes is usually, but not always, an indication of intense liking; we look at people more often if we like them. In the West, eye contact (i.e., when two people look one another in the eye) indicates interest, liking, and acceptance (Keeley & Hart, 1994), but in the East inferiors may not look superiors in the eye because it is regarded as disrespectful or challenging. Pupil size marginally increases when we see someone or something we like (Walker & Trimboli, 1989). Yet, as with proximity, staring and gazing can be threatening also. An intense stare can be used as a threatening cue both in animals and in humans. The stare is a stimulus to flight, and drivers who are stared at when they stop at traffic lights will accelerate away faster from the junction when the lights go green (Ellsworth, Carlsmith & Henson, 1972). Like physical closeness, eye contact thus can indicate threat or dominance, as well as liking.

How do people decide the intended meaning, then? The interpretation of space rules is learned within a specific culture. The cultural system guides us not only on the interpretation of individual cues but on how to put different cues together and make sense of the whole context. This happens because the verbal–nonverbal communication system is a *system* of parts (like space, eye contact, touch) that provides a context to help us to decode people's meaning but also is a system within a cultural system of meaning that 'explains' how they work together (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). Individual cues like proximity hardly ever happen in isolation and we can learn the full relational message by attending to the *system* of cues, not to

just to one. We work out relational meaning from eye-contact-plus-context or from proximity-plus-words. When someone stares and smiles, then we know we are favoured; if someone stares and frowns, then we are in trouble.

If we add two positive messages together, what do we get? Does eye contact plus closeness take the intimacy level beyond what people can bear? Argyle & Dean (1965) proposed an equilibrium model, namely, that the appropriate intimacy level of an interaction is held steady by balancing proximity and eye contact. As proximity increases so eye contact will decrease (unless the two are lovers where the two cues are 'appropriate' together); that way, the total level of signalling for intimacy will stay about right. If proximity decreases then eye contact should increase to maintain the equilibrium. This works with other signals for intimacy, too. For example, as an interviewer's questions become more personal, so the interviewee reduces eye contact when giving answers (Carr & Dabbs, 1974).

Nonverbal signals as interaction regulators

NVC serves another important function and *regulates* social behaviour. There are social rules about speakers' turn-taking, for instance, and interactions do not run smoothly if one or both partners violate(s) the rule. Think briefly whether you could state precisely what the rules of social behaviour are. (You could even try to list them for yourself before reading on and then check your list against mine). These behaviours are termed 'social skills' and the teaching of such behaviours is called 'Social Skills Training,' or SST for short.

Interactions have to be started, sustained, and ended in culturally appropriate ways, and this is usually managed by nonverbal means. Two nonverbal signals are generally used to start typical interactions: one is eye contact (in this case, 'catching someone's eye'); the other is orientation (i.e., we need to face the right way and have our body oriented openly towards the other person). It is inappropriate, rude, and extremely difficult to open up a conversation without looking at the person and having them look back. It is also hard to continue an interaction when one is wrongly oriented.

TRY THIS OUT

Have a conversation with someone outside of class, someone you know well. Before you respond to anything they say or before you make any spontaneous contribution to the conversation at all, count silently to three, then speak normally. With a different person try responding immediately and as often as possible. What do these disruptions of the chronemics of talk do to the conversations and what do people say about your performance?

A person can decline to engage in conversation merely by refusing to establish eye contact or orientation. Busy waiters and bartenders do it all the time. However, eye contact conjoins with other cues to regulate interactions in other ways also (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). Eye contact, gaze, looking, and eye movements are associated with 'floor-sharing' (i.e., turn-taking in conversation) and with power and dominance of interactions. Speakers look at listeners less than listeners look at speakers, but speakers start to signal that they have come to the end of their 'speech' by looking at the listener and re-establishing eye contact; this lets the listener 'take over the floor', if desired (Kendon, 1967). Socially anxious people tend to avert their eyes too frequently and so disrupt the flow of the interaction by breaking the rules (Patterson, 1988). High power, on the other hand, is associated with high levels of looking at a listener whilst you are talking whereas less powerful or less expert people tend to look only when listening (Dovidio, Ellyson, Keating, Heltma & Brown, 1988).

Our conversations are regulated also by other factors, some to do with the general rewardingness that is expected in social encounters (Burgoon, Coker & Coker, 1986), and some to do with the general rules about turn-taking (Cappella, 1991). We alter speech patterns and conversational turns as a result of the 'reinforcements' that we receive. Reinforcements here are nonverbal cues that reinforce, encourage or lead us to increase behaviours. Several forms of reinforcement for speaking are available, especially smiling, nodding, and gazing at other persons (Gatewood & Rosenwein, 1981). The same nonverbal cues will encourage and reinforce quite subtle parts of behaviour. One can influence the production of plural nouns, use of abstract concepts, or particular kinds of topic, each of which can be reinforced and increased by specific nonverbal encouragements from a listener (Argyle, 1967).

However, there are also social expectations about amount of gaze, and people who do not gaze enough are violating such an expectation. Without such reinforcements, speakers will often stop, under the impression that the listener is bored, is becoming less involved in the conversation or else, perhaps, wants to intervene (Coker & Burgoon, 1987). One way of 'taking the floor' (or getting a word in edgeways) is to stop being reinforcing and to signal one's disinterest. The listener sends a strong signal by this: 'Please stop talking. It's my turn now'.

Does nonverbal communication show how we really feel?

An important role of nonverbal communication is to convey attitudes (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006; Keeley & Hart, 1994). These may be attitudes about self (e.g., conceited, diffident, mousey, shy, humble); attitudes towards the other person (e.g., dominant, submissive, attracted, disliking, hostile, aggressive); or attitudes about the interaction (e.g., affability, comfortableness, relaxation, intimacy, nervousness).

We tend to assume nervousness and anxiety just from the presence or absence of certain nonverbal behaviours. This is not surprising, given that increased body movement tends to occur in association with speech dysfluencies or errors

(Hadar, 1989). Several studies find that such cues are the ones used by police or customs officers in detecting criminality or smuggling (Searcy, et al. 2005). However, there are many reasons for nervousness apart from criminality (such as embarrassment, low self-esteem, shyness) and such nonverbal cues do not necessarily indicate anxiety, deceit, and the like. In a provocative paper, Stiff & Miller (1984) looked at the behaviours that people show when they lie and the behaviours that people use to determine when someone else is lying to them. The crucial behaviours that we use are response latency (i.e., the time the person takes before starting to answer a question) and speech errors (i.e., interruptions to the flow of speech). Facial expressions are generally less useful for detecting deception, but they do indicate nervousness. Obviously this is very relevant to relationships – particularly beginning ones – since people who appear shy or nervous may be unfairly distrusted or disliked (Bradshaw, 2006).

One feature of real lying is that it must be *learned*. In order to understand what lying is, we have to be told what the truth is and what it means to lie. Therefore lying involves some concentration ('cognitive load'): we are emotionally involved, so we experience stress. In fact, lying as normally understood (i.e., saying something that is deliberately false) seems to be quite rare in close relationships, and deception is most commonly practised in relationships in the form of *withholding* of information. Indeed, L. West (1994) has shown that deception between relational partners most commonly involves withholding a thought or feeling, either positive or negative, with the intention of maintaining the current level of relational intimacy or sparing a partner's feelings. Naturally enough, what is omitted cannot be accompanied by nonverbal cues, though hesitancy in speech can indicate that something else is being omitted.

If we are talking to someone we know, then they may be acquainted with us well enough to spot behaviours that give us away, so we pay close attention to our behaviour and try hard to control anything that might 'give us away' or 'leak' true feelings. The whole experience is therefore arousing for us. In a clever study looking at these factors Greene, O'Hair, Cody & Yen (1985) had subjects lie (about where they had been on holiday) to a confederate of the experimenter. That was the easy part; many people can lie that they have been to Puerto Rico, especially if you have been told in advance that the question will be asked. The difficult part – which the subjects were not actually expecting – was what to do when the confederate became intensely interested in the trip and asked all sorts of details about it. Greene et al. (1985) found that subjects can control leakage of the fact that they are lying up until the point when they suddenly have to think hard and carefully about what they are saying.

[Un]Skillful use of nonverbal cues

Poor social skills could take two forms: poor encoding or poor decoding. *Encoding* refers to the ability to put feelings into practice, to 'do what we mean' (e.g., to act assertively if we want to assert, to look friendly if we feel friendly). Conversely,

decoding refers to the ability to work out what other people mean, by observing their nonverbal communication and correctly working out their intent. Some people are inept at this. For example, sometimes you may read in the papers that a fight began in a bar because someone was staring 'provocatively' at someone else. Perhaps, one person really was staring inappropriately (poor encoding) or perhaps the other just thought he or she was doing so (which would be poor decoding on this thinker's part) or perhaps drink caused their respective social psychological judgements to decline in validity.

People with poor social skills

The list of people who show social skills deficits is well established. At the extreme end, patients with schizophrenia are very poor at decoding nonverbal signals (Hooley & Hiller, 2001), as are some violent prisoners (Howells, 1981); and depressed patients (Gotlib & Hooley, 1988), particularly when describing themselves (Segrin, 2000).

Some shy, lonely, or psychologically disturbed or depressed people have poor NVC and seem nervous, embarrassed, or socially incompetent when their NVC communicates negative attitudes about themselves or their feelings towards the encounter (Bradshaw, 2006). Persistently lonely people have poorly adapted eye movement, smiles, gestures, and nods (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006), but this is often because they have essentially disengaged from the social world and stopped trying. Other people who have poor social skills are depressives and schizophrenics (Segrin, 2006), children who are unpopular at school (Asher & Parker, 1989) or who become bullies or victims of bullying (Boulton & Smith, 1996; Smith, Bowers, Binney & Cowie, 1993). Such skill deficits not only are symptoms of their problems but may be partial causes (or, perhaps, may exacerbate and increase their problems). Also, partners in distressed marriages – especially the husbands – are poor at decoding one another's meaning and/or poor at encoding their own feelings, often communicating feelings as negative ones when they are not intended to be negative (Noller & Gallois, 1988).

By contrast, those who are successful in their careers are better at social skills than those who are failures (Argyle, 1987), and physicians can improve their success in healing patients by improving their social skills (Hays & DiMatteo, 1984). Clearly, then, such socially skilled communication is of great significance. Although nonverbal behaviour usually occurs in the context of verbal behaviour also, it has been found that nonverbal cues exert 4.3 times more effect than does verbal behaviour on the impressions formed of a speaker (Argyle, et al. 1970) and the dominance of NVC is widely accepted. It is important, however, to pay attention to the context in which the cues are shown and which provides 'relational meaning' for people. For these reasons, correction of social skills problems is often attempted in training programmes (Duck, 1991). Such social skills training brings about improved social functioning in relationships and also improves the person's feelings about himself

or herself (Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990). On the other hand, Caplan (2005) showed that people with poor social skills could make good use of Internet interactions though this does little to improve their face-to-face abilities.

You have probably been noticing as you have read this section, that the whole idea of 'skill' and including such words as 'correction' and 'improvement' in the discussion of behaviour plays into the social norms about 'quality' in social behavior that were identified earlier in this chapter. You could discuss this in class. Why is one form of physical behaviour preferred over another?

We have plenty of evidence, now, that NVC provides an important context for relationships and represents a significant context for relational communication. NVC affects the way in which other behaviours and styles are interpreted, provides a context for comprehending emotions, sincerity, dominance, and feelings towards someone else, and has a significant impact on relational feelings and conduct. NVC not only conveys important relational meanings but also serves to control and moderate the conduct of relationships. Having established this basic context for relationships we can now go on to language itself and the context that it provides for the conduct of relationships.

Speaking up for yourself: using words

It ain't what you say: the role of language and paralanguage

Some people think that (and write that) communication is just about the sending of a verbal message from one person to another, but this is simplistic. Ever since Bartlett (1932) it has been known that the message that people 'receive' is not necessarily the one that was 'sent' and unless you are a person who has never been misunderstood, you'll know exactly what I mean. You may even have said 'I love you' to someone and found out too late that the sending of a message is not received the way you intended it, even when the other person hears it the way you meant it.

Communication involves a lot of other complex processes that are often overlooked. Messages are often complex and multi-layered – as for example in jokes or irony or sarcasm where the face value of the message is not the only way it can be interpreted. 'Yeah I really like your choice in music' can mean the opposite of what the words appear to say, for example. Second there is not always a message sent but there can be one received anyway. For example, I might blush and 'leak' to you that I am embarrassed when I did not intend you to know that. Or a person may brush up against another one's arm (no message intended, just the result of crowd jostling) but the other person could honestly believe that he or she had been assaulted or that you were trying to be familiar or intimate (message received). Obviously if the message sent was the same as the message received there could

be no argument about such things but there are plenty of familiar cases where there *can* be an argument about whether there was a message and if so what it meant. If communication were simply about the sending of messages then we'd all know whether it had happened and what the right interpretation of the message was. What we need to think about, then, is how such ambiguity happens and also why and when it does not – what 'straightens it out' for us?

We already have learned that 'communication' has both a content level and a relational component. Whenever I make a statement, it contains claims to be speaking facts but it also addresses your social 'face' in some way. A polite statement 'I'm sorry I am blocking your way' contains both a factual claim and a recognition that the other person has a right not to be obstructed. If I speak politely it is because I recognize your rights to be treated as a dignified human being. If I speak discourteously it is because I either do not recognize or else choose to ignore your rights to be treated nicely, and obviously you and I could argue about which of the two interpretations is right in the circumstances. In some situations we might even get into a fight about it: 'You always treat me disrespectfully. Who do you think you are?'

Originally stated by Watzlawick, et al. (1967), this claim actually does not go far enough. In fact communication is all about relationships and it cannot occur at all unless there is a relationship between the speaker and the audience, even if the two people are 'strangers' to one another. They share a similar cultural background but also recognize the ways in which their common society acknowledges strangers. You know how to treat strangers in your society. People in China know how to do it in theirs. In Japan there are 211 different forms of address that can be used to speak to another person and I have no doubt that strangers can be addressed in at least 30 of those ways, so you have to pick your stranger address terms pretty carefully if you do not want to be rude. Being rude is a form of communication: it recognizes that the content in a statement is not all that the statement communicates.

Paralanguage

The ways in which we *use* words are just as important as the words themselves. If I *shout* 'Fire!!', then it means more than just 'I can see pretty dancing flames': it means there is an emergency. I will therefore look at the structure, use, and form of language since they carry messages over and above the meaning of the actual words spoken. Researchers use the term *paralanguage* to refer to features of speech like accent, speed, volume, error-rate and tone of voice. Rather like NVC, however, paralanguage has meanings in relationships but also occurs within a system of meanings that serves to clarify what is intended. For instance, persons who shout 'Fire!' in an emergency probably also have some accompanying NVC that indicates at least urgency and possibly even panic and so distinguish them from someone shouting it out as a joke. Also notice that the way a person does the

shouting could convey messages about their credibility: Someone who screams 'Fire!' while looking distraught is likely to be believed; someone who shouts 'Yoo oo oo hooo! Fi i re!' may be disregarded.

These observations create two issues. How do people use language so that it conveys messages for (and about) speakers? How does language interface with NVC to affect human relationships? We might ask how accent, speed, volume, error-rate, tone of voice, and 'speech style' affect the relational impact of messages. We shall see that *power* is indicated by a communication's tone and shall learn how to structure messages to maximize their persuasiveness (see Chapter 5). Language style conveys more information than is contained in the sentence. For example, different actors can give different character to the same passage of Shakespeare just by speaking it differently. Thus a 'message' is more than the content of speech and is significantly embossed by a number of elements of speech not contained in the content alone (Wood, 2006).

Amount of speech

A measure of leadership in small group discussions is the amount of speech that a person contributes: the more often someone 'holds the floor' (by speaking) the more will observers assume that the person was leading the group's activities. In Stang's (1973) study, subjects listened to tape-recorded group discussions which had been arranged so that one person spoke 50 per cent of the time, another person 33 per cent of the time, and a third spoke only 17 per cent of the time. The most talkative person was seen as the leader, irrespective of the content of what was said, and the second most frequent contributor was rated the most popular. This is further confirmed and extended by Palmer (1990) who showed that management of 'floor time' is used as an important indication of someone's control of, and contribution to, the conversation.

Amount of speech is also affected by communication apprehension and social anxiety (Ayres, 1989), with highly anxious males talking less (and also using smaller amounts of reinforcing head nods) than less anxious subjects. Anxious people tend to withdraw from interpersonal interaction somewhat and to say very little. When they do speak, however, it is probably planned out and hangs together well because they have thought about it and it is important to them! Thus there is some truth to the common belief that fluency means something about expertise, mastery, competence, and truthfulness. From a person's verbal fluency, we deduce information about the kind of person that he or she is, how that feels inside, and whether anxiety is felt in the present setting. The other side to this belief is the assumption that persons' views of themselves, the kind of person they (think they) are, actually does affect fluency. Competent people simply do speak fluently: they know what they are doing and their fluency is a signal of that. Hence we are likely to deduce a person's competence from the *appearance* that they are composed and self-possessed, whether or not that is how they feel inside (Duck & McMahan, 2008).

Rules about speech

How does language change as a result of the situation or relationship in which the conversation takes place, and what are the influences of language and 'speech style' on social impressions that observers form? Where a linguist would be interested in the grammatical rules in a given society (the so-called *langue*), a social psychologist, communication scholar, or sociolinguist is more likely to be concerned with the ways in which people actually use the language (the *parole*). Social uses of language do not always follow the strict rules of grammar (e.g., on the radio this morning I heard an interviewee say 'I reckon there's lotsa workers as thinks the same like what I does' – and yet everyone could have a stab at knowing roughly what he meant to convey by this).

Language is 'situated' in various ways according to the goals of the interactants. As people's goals change, so does their speech. In a social setting, conversation is frequent and almost any topic of conversation is permissible in a chat with close friends. By contrast, when concentration is required, it seems perfectly natural that people converse less and speech acts will decline or that speech will be specifically task-oriented. Similarly, competent university lectures are supposed to contain information about the course, and competent professors do not normally just show holiday slides and talk about their vacation.

Just as in nonverbal communication, a significant aspect of verbal communication is an appreciation of the social rules that apply. Speakers in a conversation must be polite and recognize when it is appropriate to raise particular topics and when it is not. They must know when to match their speech acts to the rules, since evaluation of their competence depends upon it. Daly & Vangelisti (2003) indicate that especially competent conversationalists are excellent at picking up social cues of appropriateness, sensing the hidden messages in others' speech, and noting unspoken power dynamics in conversational settings.

Such sensitivity can apply to goals of the actors. In task-oriented discussions, people are happy with a language system containing technical jargon-based forms. By contrast, a conversation between friends is usually not task-oriented but socio-emotionally oriented. Because it is focused on feelings, 'atmosphere', and informality, a different speech style is appropriate – one where grammatical rules may be broken and where the transfer of information is less significant than is the aim of keeping people happy and relaxed. Of course, such 'atmosphere' is important in human relationships, and 'atmosphere' is another word for context, the underlying theme of this chapter.

Most cultures have two forms of language code available, a so-called *high form* and a *low form*. The high form is planned, formal, careful, precise, complex, full of jargon, and a little pompous. It appears in educational settings, religion, courtrooms, and on official notices: for instance, 'I was proceeding in a northeasterly direction towards my domestic establishment' and 'Kindly extinguish all illumination prior to vacating the premises'. The low form is informal, casual, direct and

simple. It is the most familiar form of everyday speech. For example, 'I was going home' and 'Kill the lights when you go'.

The two forms are used in different settings in appropriate ways. However, there are occasions when this causes difficulties and we deliberately break the rules to communicate a social message, like a joke or a distancing from someone. An example of the conveyance of social messages through use of codes is use of a high form in a casual setting to deflate someone, for instance, when your mother says 'Ms Weinstock, kindly clean your room'. This calculated misjudgement of the circumstances conveys a social message over and above the grammatical content. In a formal setting, however, if the message form is made inappropriate to the form of the encounter (e.g., informal language in a formal setting) the social result is negative (e.g., a judge called by his or her first name by a witness might fine the witness for contempt of court).

Movie experience: Watch '*My Cousin Vinny*' with particular reference to the way in which power is handled in the courtroom by the judge and the would-be lawyer.

One other message is conveyed by differences in use of high and low forms of code, and that is knowledge and hence power. Powerful and knowledgeable persons use jargon-based high code, while the rest use low code translations. One reason why do-it-yourself car repairers are usually 'one down' when going to buy spare parts is because they do not know the proper terminology. Asking for 'one-of-those-round-things-with-the-bent-bit-at-one-end' is a betrayal of low status in such situations. Use of technical terms is a way of claiming status, particularly if it is done deliberately to someone who does not know the terminology. Car mechanics could perfectly well talk about 'round-things-with-the-bent-bit-at-one-end', but they instead talk about 'channeled CJ47s' and so on. Social scientists could write about chatting and conversation, but instead they write about 'socially situated speech acts' and 'interacts' (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2004).

More about content

The content of speech carries two important social messages, one of which is *power* and the other is *relationship* between speaker and listener. Brown (1965) refers to these dimensions as *status* and *solidarity*. These two dimensions are very similar to two 'messages' conveyed by nonverbal cues also: dominance and liking.

Relationships between speaker and listener

In some languages (e.g., French, German, Spanish), there are two words that can be translated as 'you' in English, and in times gone by there were also two choices

in English (thee/thou, ye/you). The so-called V-form (*vos* in Latin, *vous* in French, *sie* in German, *usted* in Spanish) is actually plural, just as ye/you used to be in English, where the T-form (*tu*, *du*, thee/thou) is actually singular. Where the two forms still coexist, intimate friends and relatives are addressed with one pronoun (*tu*, *du*) and the other is used for people whom one does not know or whom one treats with respect (*vous*, *Sie*, *usted*). Thus the French say *tu* when talking to a friend, to someone younger, or to a person of lower status, but use *vous* for talking to a stranger, to an elder, or a parent-in-law. Use of the T-form therefore conveys messages of solidarity and intimacy, while the V-form conveys messages of formality, respect, and distance. Brown (1965) also notes that a status norm has evolved in countries which still use the two forms of address. The choice of just one single word (*tu* or *vous*) tells everyone about the speaker's status and familiarity relative to the other person and communicates something about the closeness of relationship between speaker and addressee. The V-form is used to address a person superior in status. The T-form is reserved for those of lower status. Persons who are of equal status both use the T-form to each other if they are close personally, but the V-form if they are not. German and French each contain special verbs (*dusagen*; *tutoyer*) to describe the switch from one form to another (i.e, to indicate that it is acceptable to be more intimate). The form of address carries a message about the power relationship between the speakers. The message can be a personal one ('I am superior to you'), a solidarity one ('We are equals'), or a political one ('All persons are equal; there is no hierarchical structure in society'). During the French Revolution, the peasant revolutionaries purposely addressed the toppled aristocrats as *'tu'* in order to reinforce by language the political changes that had taken place. It was meant to stress the new-found equality.

The early Quakers also decided to adopt the style of calling everyone 'Thou' in order to indicate the equality of all people. This T-form pronoun had previously been reserved for use only to close intimates, lower or equal status family members, and 'inferiors' like servants, children and pet animals. This style caused considerable amounts of abuse to be heaped on Quakers; indeed, in 1714 Thomas Ellwood found that it led to trouble between himself and his father, who evidently felt disrespected: 'But whenever I had occasion to speak to my father … my language did [offend him]: for I [did] not say YOU to him but THEE or THOU, as the occasion required, and then he would be sure to fall on me with his fists! 'Thou' was also used as an insult indicating moral distance or inferiority when two persons were otherwise socially equal. At the trial of Sir Walter Raleigh for treason, the prosecutor (Sir Edward Coke) berated Raleigh with the words 'All that Lord Cobham did was by Thy instigation, Thou viper; for I 'thou' Thee, Thou traitor' (Hughes, 1991: 98)

Our culture also knowingly distinguishes respectful forms and informal ones. Do you call your professor 'Professor Surname', or 'Chris'? What do colleagues call the same person? Do you call your father by a title (Dad, Father, Pop, or even

Sir) or by his first name? What does he call you? Whenever I discuss this with my students in class it is obvious that the difference is a very real one. Those people who use a title would feel uncomfortable using a first name and vice versa, but I make them choose either to call me 'Steve' – or else to use 'Professor Duck' but then to quack at the end of the sentence. (Actually 'Duck' is a Viking surname derived from the nickname for a hunchback) Mamali (1996) notes that political control can also be achieved by names and titles, since in some formerly Soviet countries it was the custom to address a person by his or her communist party title, thus subtly reinforcing the remembrance of the party and its control over social life.

TRY THIS

Try calling some of your professors by their first names without permission and see what reaction you get. More interestingly, see how it feels to you personally. If you really want an experience then try calling them 'Mac'.

Speech style, power, and relationships
Speech style can also represent a relationship of speaker to audience in terms of whether the speech is powerful or powerless (Lakoff, 1973). Powerless speech uses a high proportion of: *intensifiers* (very, extremely, absolutely, totally, really); *empty adjectives and adverbs* (wonderful, incredibly, amazingly); *deferential forms* (would you please? may I?); *tag questions* (isn't it? don't you?); *hedges* or *lack of commitment* (I suppose, I guess, maybe, it was … like); *hypercorrect grammar* ('To whom is it that you wish to speak?'); overuse of *gestures* during speech (suggesting lack of significance in the speech itself); *intonational patterns* that seem to 'fuss' and 'whine'; *lack of perseverance* during interruptions, and *acquiescence in simultaneous speech*. Note that since many of these forms are 'polite' in our culture, polite speech can seem powerless.

Using language to relate to other people

Content and types of talk
You already know that you do some types of talk with some people and not others. Goldsmith & Baxter (1996) discovered that everyday relating 'appears to be dominated by six kinds of talk event: gossip, making plans, joking around, catching up, small talk, and recapping the day's events'. The types of talk have a

taxonomy of types of talk arranged on three dimensions: formal/goal directed; important/deep/involving; and positive valence. Changes in speech are not simply strategies by which people change their relationships but are in fact ways in which they embody the nature of the relationship and even the small talk of everyday relating is making the relationship (Duck & Pond, 1989). Thus instead of seeing communication as something that is used by people in a relationship merely to achieve some desired goal or express a cognitive state or attitude, Goldsmith & Baxter see it instead as 'an *embodiment* of a particular kind of relationship constructed jointly by the parties' (1996: 89; emphasis added).

The advantage of such a way of looking at the connection of communication to relationships is that it notes the ways in which communication *is* relational and is not simply an instrument for making relationships. Communication generally, both verbal and nonverbal, involves relational activity – my whole point in this chapter – and the use of language is relational in and of itself.

A familiar example of talk shows the relationship between the speaker and audience: the profanity that is found in everyday speech (some estimates indicate that 13 per cent of everyday talk is profane; Winters & Duck, 2001). Most of us probably think that when someone curses they are simply being vulgar or inappropriate. People tend to swear when they are angry or have very strong feelings about something and the use of cursing or swearing words is a strong way to indicate emotion. However, such a view of swearing is limited (Hughes, 1991). The sorts of swearing that have taken place over the course of history, the sorts of slurs that are chosen for people, and the history of changes in the uses of such words show that swearing is not only relational and but also subtly about power. It involves social structure, hierarchy, rights, social position, the marginalization of groups, and the evaluation of attitudes. Let's think a bit about that and connect it to the topic of this chapter and the evaluation of ways of viewing the world (which is what 'context' is about).

Speech is persuasive and endorses (cultural) visions of the world (Carl & Duck, 2004), that is to say it proposes and embodies ways of seeing the world. Words are not idly chosen but express personality, attitudes and a person's view of the world and their self-identity within the culture. The same is true of swearing and cursing, which represent ways of seeing other people, ways of categorizing or denigrating other people and ways of enforcing interpretations of central features of life. Try to recall the last time you called someone a 'blackguard' (which your fifteenth-century ancestors would have felt to be a personal insult). How recently did you wish 'a pox on you' to someone, which your seventeeth-century ancestors would have found deeply offensive?

Hughes (1991) traces the changes in profanity that have taken place through history. Those words which we use as swear words – 'the F-word' for example – were once regarded as simple descriptions of activity and were ordinary language words without vulgar overtones. Instead, in fifteenth-century England the words that people used to belittle one another were to do with social position: a 'blackguard' was the lowest kitchen servant who washed the blackened pans, a 'Villain'

was a lowly member of the feudal system; a 'bastard' was an illegitimate child without legal rights; and like their modern counterparts, our ancestors often called one another the names of lowly regarded farm animals like 'pigs'. Hughes (1991) indicates that such words then were used as relational insults, conveying messages of status discrimination or implying that the other person was inferior. In much the same way modern swearing applies names that refer to parts of the body that are particularly unappealing. You can probably think of several examples of such names associated with nasty bodily functions, and even 'the pits' (as applied to a place of little value) is short for 'armpits'.

As Hughes has documented, then, many swear words convey relational position, but are moulded by a culture's concerns at the moment. When disease was especially disfiguring (as was smallpox), our culture used many disease-based terms as curses ('A plague on both your houses' in *Romeo and Juliet,* for example). Many of our profane phrases these days involve associating the target with morally debased activity (e.g., incest is alleged by use of the term 'motherfucker') and hence with morally tainted evaluation. The use of such terms in everyday life functions rather like gossip in that it comments negatively on moral character and social status. The implicit message of such a label is an invitation for the person to adjust their behaviour by taking a morally better pathway, so profanity makes moral judgements in a context of relationships.

LISTEN TO YOUR OWN CONVERSATIONS

Do you ever swear, use nicknames? How many of the swear words or derogatory nicknames imply some kind of relational commentary? Hatred and rejection for others is conveyed by nicknames just as are endearment and closeness. Whereas a lover may be 'Honey', 'Sweetie' or 'Sugar' – all metaphors to do with consumption of food, obviously – many nicknames of rejection are associated with the opposite end of the alimentary canal, such as 'he's a shit', 'an arsehole' or even a 'septic' (septic tank = Yank, in Cockney rhyming slang) which was current in Second World War Europe.

Do you ever gossip? Bergmann (1993) shows the relational force of gossip. It serves as a form of relational control – we gossip about other people's relational activity ('I hear they're having an affair.') or their treatment of one another ('He is really mean to her'). Such comments act out a social control of other's behaviour by moralizing about it and supporting a view of what is 'right' in relationships, so gossip structures our social world. Listen out for use of gossip as social control.

Structure of talk

One aspect of language is the way in which it can be used to indicate the relationship between the speaker and the listener. We are all sensitive to the relational messages conveyed by different forms of speech, and we change them as relationships develop. Processes of growth in a relationship are managed through communication; we can indicate to a partner and to the world at large that we have grown closer simply by subtly changing the way in which we address the person. As Knobloch & Haunani Solomon observe, 'A question fundamental to the study of interpersonal communication and close relationships is how the characteristics that people associate with the relationships are evident in their conversation' (2003: 482). Not only does communication require the sorts of coordinated behaviour between people that I was discussing in the preceding sections, but it also requires that people present their dyadic understandings about the relationship through their talk. To start talking of 'us' is to claim that a relationship exists or is coming into existence; to encourage greater intimacy in language is simultaneously to instigate greater intimacy in relationship.

Such internal features of speech convey messages of connectedness that are evident to outsiders as signals of the relationship between two speakers. Planalp & Benson (1992), Planalp (1993) and Planalp & Garvin-Doxas (1994) have shown that judges can discriminate between conversations of friends and of acquaintances on the basis of the coherence and internal structure of the conversation. There are systematically observable differences in the conversations of friends and acquaintances (typically evidence of mutual knowledge), and that the level of accuracy in discriminating such conversations is about 80 per cent. From Knobloch & Haunani Solomon's (2003) recent confirmation of the importance of this element of intimate speech it is clear that there are structured aspects of speech, forms and contents of language, and features of conversations that give off cues to everyone that a conversation is between intimates and not simple acquaintances. Thus language not only indicates amount of relaxation and competency in an interaction but it also shows degrees of relationship. For one thing, the speech of friends usually includes reference to 'taken for granted' aspect of their relationship, such as their mutual knowledge of one another or their common understanding of specific events or places. For instance, if we hear a conversation between two people swapping their names and addresses we'd be likely to assume that the people are not friends but have just met; if we hear them discussing 'Joe's new date' we are likely to assume that they know one another and have mutual friends.

Equally, partners develop private languages to personalize their relationship (Hopper, Knapp & Scott, 1981) and there are eight types (nicknames for the partners; expressions of affection and terms of endearment; labels for other people outside of the relationship; confrontations; requests and routines; sexual references and euphemisms; sexual invitations; teasing insults). Even long-term married partners use nicknames for one another (Bruess & Pearson, 1993), such as 'sweet pea' and 'pussycat' and it turns out that greater marital satisfaction is

associated with greater numbers of such 'personal idioms' in the relationship. Couples without children use the most nicknames and those later in life use the fewest. Also, brothers and sisters routinely use such personal idioms, especially nicknames, to insult one another, rattle one another's cages, and make reference to alleged parental favouritism (Nicholson, 2006). The use of such idioms thus serves to create either coherence or conflict between relational partners but simultaneously serves to exclude other people and so to draw boundaries around the relationship by using language that other people do not understand. In short, language conveys degrees of intimacy, is a powerful developer and definer of relationships, and is used to indicate many privacies in relationships. It conveys relational messages by its structure as well as by its content.

Since there are public and private languages, both high and low forms, informal and formal styles and so on, you might have thought of a rather good question: what messages are conveyed by 'switching' between styles during a single conversation? What relational messages are conveyed, for example, by a switch from high to low forms of speech? Low form is typically associated with informal, friendly settings while a high form goes with formality and emotional distance. A switch from low to high is a distancing strategy that shows disapproval, aloofness, dislike, and hostility. By contrast, a high–low switch is an affiliative strategy that indicates liking, approval, and a desire to become more friendly. For most of his career, Giles (e.g., Giles, Taylor & Bowhis, 1973) has been showing that we 'accommodate' our language (whether language style, speech style, accent, code or content) to our interaction partner if we feel attracted. We play down the distinctiveness of our own individual style of speaking and accommodate, or move towards, that of the other person ('convergence'). For instance, parents frequently accommodate and talk 'baby talk' to young children whereas adults adopt the code form preferred by the powerful actor in a given setting (e.g., they talk formally to their boss but informally to their peers). Also, speakers often adapt their speech to be more similar to that of their conversational partner, particularly when they wish to relax that person or ingratiate themselves (Giles, et al. 1973). Such 'convergence' can involve speech rate, silences, choice of language (where the speakers are bilingual), regional accents, or vocal intensity and loudness (Giles & Powesland, 1975). The higher prestige language is usually adopted in a bilingual community as long as partners like one another (Giles, 1978). Divergence is equally powerful (Bourhis & Giles, 1977). When speakers dislike their partner or the ethnic group from which he or she comes, they will adopt extremely different speech styles, occasionally refusing to speak in the partner's adopted language (e.g., persisting in speaking Welsh to disliked English weekend-holidaymakers in Wales).

Language itself indirectly and directly conveys important *relational* messages. However, it does not do it on its own in the course of normal everyday interactions. It is a part of a system. We can be both verbally close and nonverbally intimate, for instance, and this could be important in indicating relational intimacy – yet it

could be problematic if the two 'channels' (verbal and nonverbal) do not match up, as we'll see below.

KEEP A JOURNAL

Listen out for two samples of talk, one where you can tell that one person is a stranger to the other and one where you can tell that the persons are friends. Make some notes on the differences.

Listen to some everyday conversation and see if you can find evidence both for and against the idea that such conversation is implicitly persuasive and all about the alignment of people's rhetorical visions and world views.

Putting verbal and nonverbal together

So far, I have been looking at the components of communication separately as linguistic and nonverbal forms; but obviously, in real life they occur together most of the time. In relationships especially, they most often go together and amplify one another. When we say angry things, we usually look angry; when we say 'I love you', we usually look as if we mean it. Thus NVC can *complement* verbal messages. However, verbal and nonverbal messages can also be put together in conflicting or complementary ways. Use of NVC can help in learning and children learn better about addition and subtraction when told by both speech and gestures about the plus and minus signs (Singer & Goldin-Meadow, 2005). This might explain why people gesture vigorously when they are on the telephone and the person at the other end of the line cannot see any of it! However, researchers have been interested for a long time in looking at the inconsistencies between the two channels (verbal and nonverbal). For instance when I say nice things but frown, or when I shout 'I'm NOT ANGRY,' how do observers interpret such inconsistencies? Do you have examples of this from your everyday life as a student?

Facial messages are long established as the most powerful components of such contradictions (Zaidel & Mehrabian, 1969). They are seen as conveying the real messages and as giving the true evaluation of the *person*. Words, on the other hand, are assumed to relate to the person's *acts or deeds*. 'Well done' said with a scowl, for instance, indicates grudging praise for someone who is disliked. Young children have particular difficulty with such inconsistent messages and tend to treat all such messages as negative, whichever channel conveyed the negativity (Bugental, Kaswan & Love, 1970). For adults, the human relationships in which communication

occurs normally give people very strong cues about the overall 'meaning' of the inconsistency. While the NV channel is still seen as the more important ('Actions speak louder than words', after all), the most likely thing is that an observer will actually work out the 'true meaning' from the context built into the relationship.

SOMETHING TO TRY WITH NONVERBAL AND VERBAL BEHAVIOUR

Pair up with another student and take it in turns to say the following with a happy expression, a sad expression and no expression. After you have done the nonverbal part, repeat the exercise using only your voice modulation to convey the different tones to the speech.
'I'm too tired for this.'

'I thought the movie was poor.'
'I like the color of your shirt.'
'You are my favourite person.'

Discuss what it feels like to do this exercise in the various modes. Which is harder, the nonverbal or the verbal? What do you think might be the reasons?

SUMMARY

This chapter has begun our investigation of human relationships by looking at some of its biological and cultural bases as evident in everyday life nonverbal behaviour, verbal behaviour and the way in which these two systems interact together. We looked at nonverbal behaviour as an indicator of relational state and also as a regulator of interpersonal interaction. We also looked at the messages which are sent by the tone and quality of speech, as well as by its content, noting that relationship messages are always contained in speech, whatever its content otherwise. Language and nonverbal communication (even down at the level of usage of space) both convey implicit as well as explicit messages about power, control, liking, many of them based in cultural expectations and norms. Every time we speak we convey social messages about how much we like someone and what we think is our relationship to them – not just by explicitly saying so in the content of our talk but also by the style of the language and the accompanying nonverbal communications. Identity management is achieved by both verbal and nonverbal means, and the form of speech is as important as minute movements of face, eyes, and body that make up the whole

nonverbal system. These fundamental building blocks thus create the basis for all human relationships before we even get to the topic of emotion.

You should now be in a better state to begin understanding the way in which relationships work in terms of basic mechanisms and you should now be more inclined to look out for people's behaviour at the nonverbal level and also for some of the subtleties of their speech patterns. You should now be aware of the way in which speech sends relational messages all the time, and more attuned to seeing the way in which the media and the conversations that you have in everyday life work within those frameworks to construct your relationships and your understanding of them.

SELF QUESTIONS

What are your particular styles of nonverbal communication? Can you identify the use of power in the forms of speech that someone uses? What sorts of nonverbal invasion do you find particularly offensive?

Pay attention to the behaviour of people in elevators (life) where space is confined and close physical proximity is unavoidable. How do they deal with this? Look at the way in which people use lack of eye contact in order to remain comfortable in a confined space. What happens if you face towards other people in an elevator instead of turning to face the door?

If you find someone's comments offensive then can you now analyse what they are saying (or more importantly *how* they are saying it) that makes their comments aversive?

What is on the desk or walls of your room that shows: (a) it is your space; (b) who you are?

What other markers can you find in the world to indicate people's claims on the territory or claims to an identity? Take another look at graffiti.

FURTHER READING

Antaki, C. (2004). Conversation analysis. In S. Becker, & A. Bryman, (Eds.), *Understanding Research Methods for Social Policy and Practice* (pp. 313–317). London: Policy Press.

Antaki, C. & Widdicombe, S. (Eds.) (1998). *Identities in talk*. London: Sage.

Guerrero, L.K., & Floyd, K. (2006). *Nonverbal communication in relationships..* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.

Journal of Nonverbal Behavior

Keeley, M., & Hart, A. (1994). Nonverbal behaviors in dyadic interaction. In, S.W. Duck, (Ed.), Dynamics of relationships [Understanding relationships 4]. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Knapp, M.L., & Hall, J.A. (2002). *Nonverbal communication in human interaction* (5th edn.). New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Manusov, V., & Patterson, M.L. (2006). *Handbook of nonverbal communication,* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Remland, M.S. (2004). *Nonverbal communication in everyday life* (2nd edn). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Spitzberg, B.H., & Cupach, W.R. (2002). Interpersonal skills. In M.L. Knapp & J.A. Dally (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (3rd edn). pp. 564–611. Thousand Oaks, CA: *SAGE.*

PRACTICAL MATTERS

- Social skills training may be used effectively to improve performance in a variety of practical settings and involves training in NVC and sequencing of people's conversational style, or attentiveness to the relational implications of actions and words.
- Argyle (1967, 1975, 1983) reported on lengthy programme of research to make people's nonverbal behaviour more appropriate to the situation.
- General 'pepping up' of depressives' responsivity in social encounters is shown to contribute to patient recovery (Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990).
- Lonely and shy people can be trained to adopt new styles of social behaviour that enhance the skill of their performance (Jones, Hansson & Cutronas, 1984). Such training can also be directed at conversational turn-taking or topic management and general interpersonal communication competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002).
- Nonassertive persons benefit from training related to posture as well as to other behaviours more obviously related to request-making (Wilkinson & Canter, 1982).
- Managers can be trained to use their powers in more effective ways by attending carefully to the speech patterns of employees (Lovaglia & Lucas, 2006).