

# 6

*We first make our habits, and then our habits make us.*

—JOHN DRYDEN

## Gendered Nonverbal Communication

### Knowledge Challenge:

- How do women and men differ in their typical use of nonverbal communication to regulate conversation?
- To what extent does physiology explain men's generally lower vocal pitch?
- How accurately do women and men interpret emotions?

The Lego Group is one of the most successful toymakers in history. With Legos, you can build a castle, a skyscraper, a military tank, a robot, or a spaceship. Using Legos to build things that allow them to take on the world is what children do, at least what boy children do. Since Legos debuted in 1949, the plastic bricks and gears have attracted predominantly male children.

In 2011, the giant toymaker decided to increase its market share by going after the girl market with a new line of Legos called Friends. In place of the strong primary colors that stayed on its regular Legos, Friends were pink and other pastels. Ideas for what to build changed too: Instead of machines, castles and such, girls were encouraged to build homes, patios, and beauty parlors and to decorate them to the hilt.

Pink Legos and beauty parlors might seem pretty innocent. They are only toys, so what's the harm, right?

Toys are not as innocent as we might first think. They are among the many "small" ways that culture socializes children into gender. In playing with regular Legos, boys are encouraged to build things that give them power and expand the space they command—spaceships and tanks for instance. Friends, in contrast, encourages girls to build and decorate domestic spaces, and their adventures consist of going to beauty parlors. The toys encourage boys and girls to see themselves and their options in distinctly unequal ways.

The sex stereotyping of Friends did not go unnoticed. Parents who don't want their sons and daughters hemmed in by sex stereotypes resent toys that embody and reproduce rigid images of males and females. Teachers too note the influence of sex-typed toys in narrowing girls' and boys' senses of who they can be and what they can do. As it turns out, a lot of children don't like sex-typed toys either. Working together, people who want less sex-typed toys formed Let Toys Be Toys ([www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk](http://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk)) to bring pressure on toymakers and the stores that sell sex-typed toys. The grassroots effort gained steam and was supported by Change.org. In 2013, huge toy retailer Toys "R" Us responded to the group's pressure by agreeing to have gender-inclusive photographs in its U.K. holiday toy catalogue, so consumers see boys and girls in play houses and spaceships, kitchens and fire trucks.

After Legos, what's the next issue? Coloring books, specifically Buster's (2014) *The Beautiful Girls' Colouring Book*, complete with flowers and butterflies to color, and *The Brilliant Boys' Colouring Book*, featuring space zappers and protective gear to color. So far Buster has resisted calls for nonsexist book titles and content, but stay tuned.

The issues involved in the Let Toys Be Toys campaign introduce us to the nonverbal dimension of communication, which is extensive and important. Scholars estimate that nonverbal behaviors carry from 65 (Birdwhistell, 1970) to 93% (Mehrabian, 1981) of the total meaning of communication. That's not surprising when we realize that **nonverbal communication** includes all elements of communication other than words themselves. Nonverbal communication is not limited to gestures and movement, but also includes inflection, volume, physical appearance, and environmental factors, and artifacts such as children's toys.

Like language, nonverbal communication is learned through interaction with others. Also like language, nonverbal communication is closely related to gender and culture. When we conform to cultural prescriptions for gendered nonverbal communication, we reflect and reinforce cultural views of the sexes (Butler, 1990, 2004). On the other hand, women who perform some masculine behaviors and men who perform some feminine behaviors challenge existing perceptions of the sexes. In other words, nonverbal communication continually reproduces or contests cultural meanings for femininity and masculinity.

## Functions of Nonverbal Communication

---

The three primary functions of nonverbal communication are to (1) supplement verbal communication, (2) regulate interaction, and (3) convey the bulk of the relationship level of meaning.

## Supplement Verbal Communication

Nonverbal behavior supplements, or adds to, verbal messages in five ways (Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2013).

1. Nonverbal communication may *repeat* words, as when you say, “Right!” while pointing to the right.
2. Nonverbal communication may *contradict* verbal messages. For example, you say, “I’m fine” while weeping.
3. Nonverbal behavior may *complement* verbal communication by underlining a verbal message. The statement “I never want to see you again” is more forceful if accompanied by a threatening glare.
4. Nonverbal behavior may *replace* verbal messages. Rather than saying, “I don’t know,” you might shrug your shoulders.
5. Nonverbal communication may *accent* verbal messages, telling us which parts are important. “I love you” means something different from “I love you” or “I *love* you.”

## Regulate Interaction

Nonverbal communication can also regulate interaction (Knapp et al., 2013). We use body posture, eye contact, and vocal inflection to signal others that we wish to speak or that we are done speaking. Similarly, we rely on eye contact to signal others that they have spoken long enough or that we want to hear more from them.

There are some gendered patterns of regulating interaction. Women frequently use nonverbal communication to invite others into conversation—looking at someone who hasn’t spoken, smiling when a new person sits down in a group. Men, in general, are more likely to use nonverbal communication to hold onto the talk stage. For instance, a man who is talking avoids eye contact with others to signal he doesn’t want them to jump into the conversation. This pattern reflects broad gender socialization that encourages women to attend to and include others and men to stand out and control situations.

## Establish the Relationship Level of Meaning

A final and particularly important function of nonverbal communication is to convey the relationship level of meaning that expresses relationships between communicators. The three primary dimensions of relationship-level meaning are *responsiveness*, *liking*, and *power*, each of which is linked to gender.

**Responsiveness** The first dimension of the relationship level of meaning is **responsiveness**, which is showing attentiveness to others and interest in what they say and do. Nonverbal cues of responsiveness include inflection, eye contact, and attentive body posture. Lack of responsiveness may be signaled by yawns or averted eyes.

Research shows that women generally are more responsive communicators than men. If you recall the lessons learned in gender speech communities, you'll realize that greater responsiveness is cultivated in feminine speech communities. Socialized to be affiliative, many women use nonverbal behaviors to indicate engagement with others, emotional involvement, and empathy. Females tend to smile and to maintain eye contact and direct body orientation, whereas males lean forward and adopt postures congruent with those of the persons speaking (Hall, 2006; Miller, 2011).

**Liking** A second dimension of the relationship level of meaning is **liking**. We use nonverbal behaviors to signal that we like or dislike others. Nonverbal cues of liking include vocal warmth, standing or sitting close to others, touching, and holding eye contact. Females are typically socialized to be nice to others and to build and maintain relationships, so it is not surprising that they are more likely than men to employ more nonverbal communication that signals liking, acceptance, and friendliness (Miller, 2011). For instance, when conversing, two women typically stand or sit closer together and engage in more eye contact than two men.

We can also use nonverbal behaviors to signal that we do not like others. A frown or glare communicates dislike, as does turning your back on someone.

**Power or Control** The third aspect of the relationship level of meaning is **power**, or control. Power refers to the degree to which people are equal to, dominant over, or deferential to others. Control is exerted in conversations by defining topics, directing conversation, and interrupting, all of which may involve both verbal and nonverbal communication. Although many nonverbal behaviors convey control messages, three are especially important: vocal qualities, touch, and use of space. In all three categories, men generally exceed women in engaging in control (Knapp et al., 2013). For instance, compared with women, men tend to use greater volume and inflection, which add force to their words and allow them to be heard over others.

Nonverbal behaviors may also express power through uses of personal space. Compared to men, women are more likely to surrender their personal space and less likely to enter others' personal space except to express liking. You can confirm this for yourself by watching people on campus and elsewhere. Notice what men and women do when walking toward each other on a sidewalk. Usually, women move to one side and they often do so well in advance.

Now that we have seen how nonverbal communication functions to supplement verbal communication, to regulate interaction, and to define the relationship level of meaning, we are ready to explore how it reflects and expresses cultural definitions of gender.

## Forms of Nonverbal Communication

---

We'll consider six forms of nonverbal communication that reflect or express gender.

## Artifacts

An **artifact** is a personal object that can both express identity and influence how we see ourselves. Beginning with the pink and blue blankets in which some hospitals still wrap infants, personal objects are used to define children as female or male. Parents send artifactual messages through the toys they give to sons and daughters. Play weapons, toy soldiers, and miniature race cars invite competition and active, rough play, whereas dolls, play houses, and makeup kits encourage nurturing, domestic activities, and attention to appearance.

Toy catalogues offer clear messages about cultural meanings attached to the sexes. In opening this chapter, we noted that the U.K. Toys “R” Us franchise agreed to have less sex-typed photos in toy catalogues. However, not all companies that sell merchandise for children have followed suit. Even in 2014, as we were writing this book, catalogues for children’s toys featured pastel-colored pages with pictures of girls playing with kitchen appliances, makeup, hair accessories, and pink tutus. Pages with bolder colors show boys playing with soldiers, science equipment, swords, shields, and building sets. Researchers Sharon Lamb and Lyn Brown (2006) drew three conclusions from their survey of toy sections in stores: (1) Toys are sex-segregated—different aisles for girls’ and boys’ toys; (2) the boys’ section features action toys (Spider-Man, NEO-Shifters), whereas the girls’ section features toys that involve fashion (wigs and makeup), taking care of homes (toy vacuums), and nurturing (dolls); and (3) toys for boys usually come in darker, bolder colors than do toys for girls.

It’s not just that vehicles, weapons, and construction sets are presented as “for boys” while toys of domesticity and beautification are “for girls.” Toys presented as for boys facilitate competition, control, agency, and dominance; those presented as for girls promote cooperation and nurturance. All of these are worthy qualities that can enrich the lives of all children of all sexes.

Highly gendered toys have not always been the norm. In the early 1900s, toys were seldom designated for boys or girls. A quarter of a century later, in 1975, the majority of toys—nearly 70%—were not gender marked. In fact, many 1970s ads for toys showed girls building airplanes and boys working in kitchens (Abadi, 2013; Sweet, 2011, 2012, 2013).

Toys are not the only artifacts that are gendered. If you look at wallets on the market, note that those marketed to females are more often pastel than those marketed to males. The same is true of razors, shoes, smartphones, and lots of other products. An interesting example of gendered packaging is for the beverage Dr. Pepper Ten. The commercials emphasize that Dr. Pepper Ten has 10 calories because “dudes don’t drink diet.” Ramping up the “it’s-a-man-thing” advertising, the ads for Dr. Pepper Ten proclaim, “It’s not for women.” And the packaging? Steely gray can with images of bullets—quite a contrast to the delicate tan bubbles on the diet Dr. Pepper that’s presumably for women.

Pay attention to the colors on packaging and marketing for products ranging from those for personal care (deodorants, shampoos, cologne) to those for recreation (bikes, video games, running clothes). You’ll notice that there are clear and patterned differences in how the same products are packaged for men and women.

## EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

**Guns Are for Girls; Tea Parties Are for Boys**

Even at very young ages, boys are more likely than girls to want to play with guns and girls are more likely than boys to want to play with tea sets.

**BUT**

Research suggests there's nothing about guns or tea sets themselves that makes them differently attractive to boys and girls. Researchers created a gun that was purple and covered with rhinestones and a tea set that was dark and covered with spikes. Guess what happened? Boys went for the spiked tea set and girls went for the sparkling gun. Researchers concluded that the children had learned from others that "boy stuff" is dark and

angular and "girl stuff" is glittery (Rivers & Barnett, 2011).

For years *Dora the Explorer* was the top commercial television program for girls and boys aged 2 to 5. But then Dora started getting more, well, girly. Dora moved to town so she doesn't go on adventures in nature. Dora replaced her shorts and shirts with miniskirts and lots of pink. Products to go with Dora as she changed include a magic kitchen, a shopping cart, younger siblings to care for, jewelry, and flower lip gloss. Boys, who had loved Dora the Explorer as much as girls, lost interest (Wade, 2009).

**TAKE A STAND:** When you were a child, what were your favorite toys and what do you think they taught you?

Although clothing has become less sex-distinctive than in former eras, fashions for women and men still differ. Men's clothes generally are not as colorful or bright as women's, and they are designed to be more functional. Pockets in jackets and trousers allow men to carry wallets, change, keys, cells, and miscellany. The relatively loose fit of men's clothes and the design of men's shoes enable them to move quickly and with assurance. Thus, men's clothing facilitates comfort and freedom of movement.

Women's clothing is quite different. Reflecting social expectations of femininity, women's clothing is designed to call attention to women's bodies and to make them maximally attractive to viewers. Form-fitting styles, clingy materials, and revealing cuts encourage women to perform femininity and sexuality. Women's professional clothing often has no pockets to hold wallets, cells, and keys. Further, most women's shoes are designed to flatter legs at the cost of comfort and safety—how fast can you run in stilettos?

Selecting clothing is particularly challenging for LGBTQ people. Laura Jane Grace, who fronts the punk band Against Me!, says transgender women like her find shopping for clothes "terrifying." They are sometimes asked to leave stores or refused access to dressing rooms. Further, even if they are allowed to try on clothes, the clothes may not fit well. Men's pants pinch women's rounder hips, men's shirts are often too tight in the chest for masculine-presenting women; and women's tops may not have enough shoulder room for trans women. Clothing for lesbians, queers, and trans people is offered by specialty retailers such as *fourteenstyle.com*, *Androgyny*, and *Saint Harridan*, started by Lea Delaria from *Orange Is the New Black* (Italie, 2014).

## EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

*Indecent Dress for Women*

Lubna Hussein, a 30-something Sudanese journalist, was arrested for violating Islamic law by wearing “indecent clothing.” Her offence? Wearing trousers. In July of 2009, Ms. Hussein and 12 other trouser-wearing women were apprehended in a café and sentenced to a fine and lashing with whips that leave permanent scars. Most of the accused women pleaded guilty and

accepted the punishment, but Ms. Hussein pleaded not guilty. For defying the court, she was sentenced to more lashes. Ms. Hussein printed invitations and sent e-vites asking people to come to witness her whipping. Embarrassed, the government offered to drop the charges if Ms. Hussein would agree not to wear trousers. She refused (Gettleman, 2009b).

**TAKE A STAND:** Who should decide what forms of dress are appropriate, indecent, and so forth?

Artifacts and what they mean depend on cultural context. This point is well made by Zainab, an international student in California, who emailed us a comment about the meaning that she, as a Muslim woman, attaches to wearing a hijab, a headscarf that many Western women regard as a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women.

**ZAINAB**

*Most Americans I have met think that the hijab [head covering] worn by Muslim women is oppressive. I must disagree with that. Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab are liberated from the stereotypes of women as sex objects. We are not oppressed by the standards of our culture, which are the standards that we should be judged by.*

Consider the commodities that women are encouraged to use to meet current cultural ideals of femininity. In the United States alone, the cosmetics industry is a multimillion-dollar business that makes its profit by persuading girls and women that they are inadequate as they are but can become adequate by buying and using the right products. Advertisements urge women to buy products to straighten curly hair and curl straight hair, extend short hair and style long hair, lighten dark hair and add depth to light hair, and remove hair on legs, under arms and at bikini lines. Cosmetic companies claim that using their merchandise allows girls and women to create a “natural look” by concealing blemishes, coloring skin and lips, and thickening and curling lashes.

**RIANNE**

*I've never really noticed how females are pressured to upkeep and maintain their appearances. It makes sense now since there's tools to apply makeup, change your hairdo, shape your eyebrows, change your lip color, add blush to enhance your*

*cheekbones. I'm tempted to stop shaving my legs and applying makeup in an effort to accept my natural state. I don't, however, think I want to continue to alter my body (in terms of applying makeup, shaving, etc.). If men can be regarded as handsome without having to work as hard, women should too.*

---

Some people use artifacts to challenge existing perceptions of masculinity and femininity. For example, some men wear one or more earrings, either because they like the adornment or to signal support of people who aren't cisgendered or straight. Women may wear military boots or may dress in other ways that defy conventional performances of femininity.

---

#### RAQUEL

*As a Puerto Rican I often felt like I was always different as a child. My skin was darker and there seemed to be no Puerto Ricans in the media to make me feel more pride in my ethnicity as a child.*

*I think it's very sad the things we do to conform to the ideal beauty. I have a friend who is Vietnamese who hates her eyes. She is very beautiful but she would rather have the Western eyes. I have another friend who is Italian and had the large Roman nose but right after high school she had rhinoplasty to "fix" it. When I was younger I wanted lighter skin even though all of my white friends said they were jealous of my "tan."*

---

## Proximity and Personal Space

**Proxemics** refers to space and our use of it. Space is a primary means by which a culture designates who is important and who has privilege. In strongly patriarchal societies, women are not allowed to own property; thus, they are denied the right to literal, physical space. Only in the mid-1990s did India begin to allow daughters to inherit property from parents.

Consider who gets more and less space in our society. Executives have large offices, although there is little functional need for so much room. Secretaries, however, are crowded into cubicles that overflow with file cabinets and computers. Generally, there is a close correlation between status and the size of a person's home, car, office, and so forth. Who gets space and how much space they get indicate power.

Think about the home in which you grew up. Who sat at the head of the table—the place typically associated with being head of the household? Did your father or stepfather have his own room, space, or chair? Did your mother or stepmother? Many men have private studies, workshops, or other spaces, but fewer women with families have such spaces. Some of our students initially disagreed with this observation and informed us that their mothers have spaces. When we discussed

the topic, however, it turned out that many of their mothers' spaces were kitchens and sewing rooms—places where mothers do things for other family members. Students whose mothers had spaces for their own work in the home often reported their mothers used parts of other rooms (a corner in the living room) or temporary spaces (using the dining room table as a desk when the table is not needed for meals).

**Territoriality** is personal space. Yet, not everyone's territory is equally respected. People with power tend to enter the spaces of those with less power, but the converse is not true. In general, men go into women's spaces more than women enter men's spaces and more than men enter other men's spaces. Also, men are more likely than women to challenge those who enter their territory (Knapp et al., 2013; LePoire, Burgoon, & Parrott, 1992).

## Haptics (Touch)

**Haptics**, or touch, from parents and other adults communicates different messages to boys and girls. Parents tend to touch daughters more often and more gently than they touch sons, which teaches girls to expect touching from others and to view touching as an affiliative behavior. Boys are more likely to learn to associate touching with control and power. This may explain why members of female softball teams exchange more team hugs and hand piles than members of male softball teams, particularly after negative game events (Kneidinger, Maple, & Tross, 2001).

---

### ROSEANNE

*A few months ago, I was out with this guy I'd been seeing for a while. We weren't serious or anything, but we had gone out a few times. Well, we were at his place listening to music when he started coming on to me. After a while, I told him to stop because I didn't want to go any further. He grinned and pinned my arms back and asked what I was going to do to stop him. Well, I didn't have to, thank goodness, because he didn't really push, but just the same I had to think there really wasn't anything I could have done if he had. That's always there when I'm with a guy—he could overpower me if he wanted to.*

---

Because men are generally larger and often stronger than women, they tend to have more physical confidence and to be more willing to use bodily force than women. Some men are unaware of how imposing their size strength is, especially to others who are smaller and less physically strong.

## Kinesics (Facial and Body Motion)

**Kinesics** are face and body movements. Kinesic behaviors more typical of women than men include tilting heads, smiling, and condensing their bodies to take up less space. Kinesic behaviors more typical of men than women include using large

gestures, taking up space, and entering others' territories. In combination, these gender-differentiated patterns suggest that women's facial and body motions generally signal that they are approachable, friendly, and unassuming. Men's facial and body communications, in contrast, tend to indicate that they are emotionally reserved and in control.

---

**ELAINE**

*I never thought it would be so hard not to smile. When you challenged us in class to go one day without smiling except when we really felt happy, I thought that would be easy. I couldn't do it. I smile when I meet people; I smile when I purchase things; I even smile when someone bumps into me. I never realized how much I smile. What was most interesting about the experiment was how my boyfriend reacted. We got together last night, and I was still working on not smiling. He asked me what was wrong. I told him, "Nothing." I was being perfectly nice and talkative and everything, but I wasn't smiling all the time like I usually do. He kept asking what was wrong, was I unhappy, had something happened—even was I mad. I pointed out that I was being as friendly as usual. Then he said, yeah, but I wasn't smiling. I told him that I just didn't see anything particular to smile about, and he said it wasn't like me. I talked with several other women in our class, and they had the same experience. I just never realized how automatic smiling is for me.*

---



---

**DUNCAN**

*When I was in high school, I played on the football team. On the day we were taking the team photograph, one of the seniors on the team yelled out before the photo, "if anyone smiles, I'm going to beat your ass." Football is a tough, aggressive game, so you're not supposed to smile when you're playing or having a photo in your uniform.*

---

Called by poets the "windows to the soul," eyes can express love, anger, fear, interest, challenge—a great range of emotions. Many women have learned to signal interest and involvement by sustaining eye contact, whereas men generally do not sustain eye contact during conversations. An exception to this rule is using eye contact to meet a perceived challenge. Men in our classes tell us that they would lose face and come across as wimps if they didn't return a stare.

---

**RANDALL**

*It sounds kind of stupid when we talk about it, but it's true that a guy has to return another guy's stare if he wants to hold his own. It's like a staring contest. Sometimes, on a street another guy will meet my eyes. When I notice, then he's locked*

*into holding the stare, and that means that I have to, too. It's like that old joke about the first one to blink loses. It's kind of dumb, but I'd feel strange not returning another guy's gaze. Like a wimp or something.*

## Paralanguage

Vocal cues that accompany verbal communication are called **paralanguage**. Paralanguage includes inflection, tone, volume, accent, pitch, and rhythm. Although there are physiological differences in male and female vocal organs (the larynx and pharynx), these do not account fully for gender differences in paralanguage. For instance, the larger, thicker vocal folds typical of male larynxes do result in lower pitch, but the difference between the average pitch of male speakers and female speakers exceeds that explained by physiology.

To understand why women and men tend to have divergent paralanguage, we must once again consider socialization. What vocal cues would you expect of someone taught to be deferential and caring? What would you expect of someone taught to be assertive, emotionally reserved, and independent? Your expectations probably closely match identified differences in male and female paralanguage. In general, women use higher pitch, softer volume, and more inflection. Men tend to use lower pitch and greater volume in order to assert themselves and command the conversational stage. Also consider the impact of smiling much of the time, which is more typical of females than males. Vocal pitch tends to rise when we smile because of the way lips are positioned.

## Physical Appearance

Western culture as well as many other cultures places high priority on physical appearance. Although striving to meet physical ideals is typically associated with girls and women, men are not immune. Members of both sexes often feel pressured to meet current cultural criteria for being physically attractive.

### EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

### Beauty for Sale

**Q: Isn't it mainly women who have cosmetic surgery?**

**A:** Today, both sexes have cosmetic surgery. Of more than one million cosmetic surgeries in 2013, women most often had breast augmentation, tummy tuck, liposuction, eyelid surgery, and breast lift (American Society of Plastic

Surgeons, 2014). The most popular surgeries for men are liposuction, eyelid surgery, rhinoplasty, and face lifts (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2014). Both sexes also increasingly rely on less invasive treatments such as soft tissue filler, chemical peels, and laser hair removal—13.4 million of these

procedures were performed in the United States in 2013 (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2014).

**Q: Isn't cosmetic surgery for people with lots of discretionary income?**

**A:** Although cosmetic surgery was once a luxury that only a few could afford, that is no longer the case. Cosmetic surgeries and procedures have become popular among all economic classes in the United States. In 2013, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons reported performing 15.1 million cosmetic surgeries, 13.4 million noninvasive cosmetic procedures, and 5.7 million reconstructive surgeries.

One in three people having cosmetic surgery makes less than \$30,000 a year, and fewer than one in three make more than \$70,000 a year (Dana, 2011). Even when the United States was in a deep recession and many people were unemployed, the cosmetic surgery industry grew. While Americans spent approximately 4% less on food and 7% less on entertainment, they spent 5% more on liposuction, 8% more on eyelid surgery, and 24% more on butt lifts.

**Q: But adults are entitled to make their own choices, right?**

**A:** Perhaps, but cosmetic surgery is not adults only. Increasingly Americans between 13 and 19 years old are having injections of botulinum toxin, which goes by the brand names Botox and Dysport. In 2009, 12,000 injections were given to people younger than 20 (Louis, 2010b). Consider Charice Pempengco, a Filipino singer. Before her appearance on *Glee* in 2010, Pempengco, who was 18 at the time, had Botox injections and a skin firming treatment "to look fresh" (Louis, 2010b).

**Q: So what's the big deal? Maybe appearance shouldn't matter so much,**

**TAKE A STAND:** To what extent do you think cosmetic surgery such as liposuction and Botox injections are different than wearing makeup or having body piercings or tattoos?

**but if you can afford to have cosmetic surgery, why not do it?**

**A:** All of us care about our looks. However, too many people seeking cosmetic surgery have unrealistic expectations that breast augmentation or a face lift will make their lives better. Many think others will like them more if they "fix" how they look. That's unlikely.

Cosmetic surgery also entails possible complications that are painful and sometimes disfiguring or disabling. Injections to hide wrinkles and lines can shrink and distort the face. Skin resurfacing can cause inflammation and discoloration of skin. Eyelift surgeries can make it difficult or even impossible to close the eyes completely. Breast implants decrease breasts' sensitivity to touch. Scarring, chronic pain, and nerve damage are other possible complications. Botox and Dysport injections in facial areas can result in facial nerve paralysis, an asymmetrical smile, and speech impairments (Louis, 2010b).

Another reason to think carefully about surgery that changes your appearance is that body ideals change. Years ago, when small-breasted Twiggy was a supermodel, women had breast-reduction surgeries in record numbers. Larger breasts are part of the current physical ideal for women, which goes a long way toward explaining why breast augmentation was the leading cosmetic surgery procedure in 2013 (290,000 procedures performed). And it's probably no coincidence that record numbers of women had lip augmentation when Angelina Jolie became a superstar (Louis, 2010a). When ideals for breast and lip size change, fashion-conscious people may need more procedures to reverse the earlier ones.

An increasing number of men feel pressure to measure up to social prescriptions for ideal masculinity. For them, the goal tends to be having buff, muscular bodies rather than losing weight (Roosevelt, 2010). Rob Lazebnik (2013) notes that male heroes in earlier eras (Johnny Weissmuller, Kirk Douglas, Cary Grant) did not have the super pumped bodies we see in today's male heroes (Hugh Jackman, Ryan Gosling, Liam Hemsworth). Even male news reporters such as Anderson Cooper and Jason Carroll and expert consultants such as Sanjay Gupta (medical expert on CNN) increasingly have toned bodies (Trebay, 2010).

Men who lack personal trainers and hours to devote to body sculpting may find today's masculine body ideals unattainable. The extreme nature of current masculine ideals was evident in *Crazy Stupid Love*. You may have seen the scene in which Ryan Gosling removed his shirt and Emma Stone's response was "Seriously? It's like you're photoshopped" (Lazebnik, 2013).

Action figures socialize boys at an early age to understand that the ripped look is the current body ideal for masculinity. As with other toys, action figures are more gender-typed today than in earlier eras. Consider one example: The 1973 G.I. Joe action figure, if a real man, would be 5-foot 10-inches tall, have a 31.7-inch waist, a 44.4-inch chest, and 12.2-inch biceps, but the more recent G.I. Joe Extreme, if a real man, would be 5-foot 10-inches tall, have a 36.5-inch waist, a 54.8-inch chest, and 26.8-inch biceps (Harrison, 2008).

Girls and women are more likely to allow concerns about appearance to affect their general sense of self-worth (Bulik, 2011; Davies-Popelka, 2015). Many women, particularly young ones, find it nearly impossible to resist the pervasive pressure to be thin (Davies-Popelka, 2015; Rhode, 2010; Weitz & Kwan, 2013). Many young women say they know that models are digitally altered and not

## EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

### A New Model for Models?

The fashion industry has long favored models who are alarmingly thin. For many years, critics have charged that using emaciated models encouraged eating disorders among women. The critics were largely ignored until 2006 when two South American models died: one from anorexia, and one from heart failure, which can be caused by excessive thinness.

In September 2006, Spain's top fashion show—Pasarela Cibeles in Madrid—required women who wanted to model to have a body mass index of 18 or higher. As a result, 30% of the models who expected to be in the show were

rejected as too thin (Woolfs, 2006). In December 2006, Milan pledged that it would keep dangerously thin models off its runways (Givhan, 2006). Taking note, in January 2007, the Council of Fashion Designers of America, based in New York, issued a memo suggesting that models be educated about eating disorders and that healthy snacks be provided for models backstage during fashion shows.

Currently, Crystal Renn is the reigning plus-size model. But what is "plus-size"? Renn is a size 12; the average American woman is a size 14. Says Renn, "It's simply bizarre that 'normal' is the new overweight" (Wilson, 2010, p. E1).

**TAKE A STAND:** To what extent should the fashion industry use models of diverse body sizes?

“real,” but still they dislike their own bodies for not measuring up to the manufactured perfection (Rhode, 2010).

---

**EMILY**

*Why do girls have to look nice all the time? My boyfriend rolls out of bed and goes to class or the mall or wherever. He doesn't have to shampoo and blow his hair or dress in clean, ironed clothes. His clothes are rumpled and his hair isn't even combed some days. Once when I had a really bad cold, I felt so bad I didn't do what I usually do before going out. I showered, but I didn't do my hair or put on blush and eye shadow, and I wore workout clothes. My boyfriend told me I looked like a slob just because for once I looked like he did.*

---

For many girls and women, concern about weight starts early. By third grade, 50 to 80% of girls say they want to lose weight (Rhode, 2010), and by the fourth grade, 40% of girls diet (Kilbourne, 2007, 2010; Weitz & Kwan, 2013). Today, 24 million people suffer from eating disorders and even more have unhealthy attitudes and behaviors regarding food (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2014; National Institute of Mental Health, 2010). Women make up between 85 and 95% of people with eating disorders, and 25% of college-aged women engage in bingeing and purging as a weight-management technique (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2014).

The consequences of eating disorders are substantial. Almost half of people who have eating disorders meet the criteria for a diagnosis of clinical depression. Further, roughly 20% of people suffering from anorexia will prematurely die, primarily as a result of suicide and heart problems (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2014).

---

**NIKKI**

*When I was growing up, my mother and grandmother were always on diets. They think being ultrathin is essential. Four years ago, when I came to college, I gained the “freshman 15.” When I went home for the summer, my mother and grandmother commented on how much weight I'd gained and how bad I looked. Mother got her doctor to put me on FenPhen, the diet pill. I'd heard it could be dangerous (you've probably read about the lawsuits against it), but I took the pills for two months and lost a lot of weight—more than the 15 pounds I'd gained. Then, I started having echoing sounds in my ears. I went to a doctor, and he said it was the result of taking FenPhen. The ringing is with me all the time, even though I've quit taking that pill. Being thin is fine, but it's not worth risking your health. I actually feel sorry for my mother and grandmother because they obsess over their weight and never enjoy eating food.*

---

When women are encouraged to focus so intensely on their bodies, they have less attention to devote to more important aspects of identity. For many young women in Western culture, the body has become an all-consuming project that takes precedence over developing character, integrity, and other components of identity (Barash, 2006; Davies-Popelka, 2015).

---

**KYLE**

*For me, the issue of physical appearance is really complicated because I'm transgender. Biologically, I am female, but psychologically and spiritually I am male. Every time I see my naked body or have my period, it's totally unsettling because I'm really a man and shouldn't have breasts or periods. Surgery scares me, but I may have it one day so that my body matches my self-concept.*

---



Karl Prouse/Catwalking/Getty Images

**Many current models are anorexic.**

In general, African-American women tend to be less prone to eating disorders and less likely to pursue unrealistic physical ideals (Banks, 2000; Walker, 2007). African-American women who identify strongly with their ethnic heritage are less vulnerable to obsession with thinness than are African-American women who leave their communities or who don't identify strongly with their race and ethnicity. In a letter to us, Daneen, a black student from a northern college, described the ideology behind the views of physical beauty that she and other black women in her community learned:

My family and my African American culture instilled pride in me. I was told that my full lips, round body, and rough hair encompassed the beauty and pride of my history. To want to be skinny or have straight hair or thin lips would be to deny my identity as a Black woman.

Because our culture is increasingly emphasizing men's bodies, more and more men are exercising, working out with weights, taking fitness supplements, and using potentially lethal steroids to develop muscularity (Roosevelt, 2010). In addition, some men develop eating disorders in an effort to stay slim. One eating disorder, binge eating, seems to be increasing among men. Approximately 7.5% of men between 18 and 65 report bingeing (Ellen, 2012). Male model Ron Saxon (2007) details his battle with binge eating in his book, *The Good Eater*. Gay men are particularly likely to be concerned about appearance and to develop eating disorders because physical appearance is linked more closely to self-worth and attractiveness to possible partners for gay than straight men (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011).

## Interpreting Nonverbal Behavior

Before leaving our discussion of gender and nonverbal communication, we should ask whether there are sex- or gender-related differences in skill at decoding others' nonverbal behaviors. The research that has addressed this question reports that women are generally more skilled than men at interpreting others' nonverbal communication (Hall, 2006; Miller, 2011). There is one exception to this generalization, and it's one that calls our attention to both biological and sociological influences on our

### EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

### Modeling Physical Beauty

For years, European-American features have been represented as the only standard of female beauty. Tyra Banks, Naomi Campbell, and other women of color who are successful models have skin color, hair, and features that are more like those of European Americans than like members of their own ethnic

groups. Women of color who have darker skin are often photoshopped so that they appear more light skinned as was Gabourey Sidibe, who starred in "Precious," for the cover of *Elle* magazine. In 2013, black models accounted for only 6% of the models in Fashion Week's runway show (Wilson, 2013).

**TAKE A STAND:** To what extent do you think the fashion industry should employ models whose features reflect diverse races and ethnicities?

gendered identities. Although overall women exceed men in their ability to decipher facial cues, men recognize angry faces more quickly than women (Bakalar, 2006). One explanation for this is that historically men's survival depended on having a keen ability to detect anger and other signs of possible aggression.

Although researchers agree that women are generally more skilled than men at interpreting nonverbal behavior, they disagree on why this is so. One explanation for women's decoding ability is sex-related brain differences—females' right brain specialization may make them more adept at interpreting emotions. Second, both cognitive development and social learning theories explain that, from childhood on, most females are encouraged to be sensitive to others, which requires being able to decipher others' nonverbal cues. Related to this is a third explanation: Women's social location encourages them to develop skills in attending to others and being able to read their feelings and needs. For example, a mother who is her child's primary caregiver learns to interpret her baby's subtly different nonverbal behaviors (crying, hand motions, etc.) as signaling the baby is hungry, needs a diaper changed, needs to be burped, or wants company.

---

#### KRISTA

*I buy the power explanation for women's decoding skill. I know that I learned to do this from my mother. My father is very moody, and you have to know how to read him, or there's trouble ahead. I remember, when I was a little girl, my mother would tell me not to ask Daddy for something or not to tell him about things at certain times because he was in a bad mood. I asked her how she knew, and she gave me a blueprint for reading him. She told me, when he was mad he fidgeted and mumbled more and that he got real quiet when he was upset. Later, she taught me other things, like how to tell when he's getting angry about something—his eyebrows twitch. She made it seem like a science, and I guess it was in a way. But she sure knew how to read his moods, and that's how we stayed out of his way when he was on the warpath.*

---

A fourth explanation comes from standpoint theory, which suggests that women's decoding skill results from their location as subordinate members of society. In order to survive, people who have little power learn to interpret others with greater power. Women's decoding skills probably result from a combination of biology, socialization, and persisting power discrepancies between the sexes.

You might think about your experiences and observations of others and ask which explanation of women's decoding ability makes most sense to you.

## Respecting Gendered Styles of Nonverbal Communication

What we've discussed in this chapter empowers you to be more effective in your communication and in your interpretation of others' communication. People who have been socialized in conventionally masculine speech communities may

perceive a woman who defers as less confident of her ideas than a man who advances his views assertively. Similarly, someone socialized in conventionally feminine speech communities might view a man as insensitive and domineering if he looks impassive, offers little response to her talk, and promotes his agenda. And some people make negative judgments of anyone who defies conventional expectations of gender and performs outside of the usual identity categories. Yet, such judgments reflect the communication rules we have learned, and our rules may not pertain to others' ways of communicating. It's insensitive to impose our values on behaviors that emanate from alternative social locations and the rules learned in those locations. Once we realize that people have different rules for communicating, we are more likely to interpret others on their own terms, not ours. This might lead you to ask for clarification of intent from conversational partners whose nonverbal communication patterns diverge from yours. For example, it might be constructive to say to someone less facially expressive than you, "I don't know how you're feeling about what I just said, because your face doesn't show any reaction. Could you tell me what you feel?" Conversely, understanding may be enhanced when someone with a masculine, assertive, nonverbal style says to his or her more deferential partner, "I'm not sure where you stand, because you seem to be responding to my ideas rather than expressing your own. I'm interested in your opinion." Communicative techniques such as these allow you to minimize the potential for misunderstandings that grow out of gendered communication styles.

There's another benefit to learning to understand and respect alternative styles of nonverbal communication. It enhances your personal effectiveness by increasing the range of options you have for communicating with different people in diverse contexts and for varied reasons. Now that you are aware of gendered patterns in nonverbal communication, reflect on your own behaviors. Which of the patterns typical of your gender describe your nonverbal communication? Are you comfortable with your style and its effects, or would you like to alter your nonverbal behavior in some respects? By reflecting on your own nonverbal communication, you empower yourself to consciously create a style that reflects the identity you assign to yourself.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have seen that nonverbal communication expresses cultural views of gender and reflects our personal gendered identities. Social definitions of women as deferential, decorative, and relationship-centered are reinforced through nonverbal communication that emphasizes their appearance, limits their space, and defines them as touchable. Views of men as independent, powerful, and in control are reflected in nonverbal behaviors that accord them larger territories and greater normative rights to touch others, particularly women, and to invade their space. Differences in women's and men's nonverbal behaviors often reflect these social definitions. Whereas many women embody femininity by speaking softly, condensing themselves, yielding territory, and displaying responsive facial expressions, men are likely to command space and volume, defend their turf, and display little facial expression to keep feelings camouflaged.

Recognizing the value of alternative styles of communication, both verbal and nonverbal, enables you to reflect critically on the patterns assigned by society. In turn, this empowers you to resist those social meanings that you find unconstructive, to revise your own nonverbal communication to reflect the identity you want, and to work toward changing social expectations for masculine and feminine modes of expression. In doing this, you participate in the processes of constructing the meanings of masculinity and femininity and the values assigned to different forms of communication.

## KEY TERMS

The following terms are defined in this chapter on the pages indicated, as well as in alphabetical order in the book's glossary, which begins on page 281. The text's companion website also provides interactive flash cards to help you learn these terms and the concepts they represent. You can access the site at [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com).

*artifact* 126

*Haptics* 130

*Kinesics* 130

*liking* 125

*nonverbal communication* 123

*paralanguage* 132

*Proxemics* 129

*power* 125

*responsiveness* 124

*Territoriality* 130

## GENDER ONLINE

1. To learn more about race and cultural representations of female beauty visit this site: <http://www.pale-reflections.com>
2. Online search terms: "cosmetic surgery," "Let Toys Be Toys," and "models' BMI."
3. Check out online responses to changes in Dora the Explorer by googling "Dora the Explorer, make over."
4. Tatyana Fazlalizadeh is an artist whose work includes public art to challenge street harassment. Learn about her "Stop Telling Women to Smile" public art by visiting this site: <http://stoptellingwomentosmile.com/>

## REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Look at the ads in magazines you enjoy reading. Describe the feminine and masculine ideals that are reflected in them.
2. Observe people in your classes, in restaurants and stores, and walking around campus. To what extent do you see gendered patterns of nonverbal communication that were identified in this chapter? For example, do women smile and hold eye contact more than men? Do men use larger motions and command more space than women?



3. Visit a store and study the packaging on products marketed to men and women. What differences are there in color, images, size, and so forth of the products?
4. Violate an expectation for nonverbal communication for your sex. Analyze how people respond both verbally and nonverbally.
5. Conduct an informal survey to learn how students on your campus define the physical ideals for women and men:
  - Ask five men and five women of a single race (preferably your own race so they feel comfortable talking with you) to describe their physical ideal for women and men.
  - Record their answers, and share your findings with those of classmates.
  - Compare physical ideals stated by people of different races and sexes.
  - To what extent are your findings consistent with those reported in this chapter?

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

1. *Transamerica* draws attention to the ways in which people perform gender even when they do not realize they are “performing.”
2. Sandra Metts. (2006). Gendered Communication in Dating Relationships. In B. Dow & J. T. Wood (Eds.), *Handbook of Gender & Communication* (pp. 25–40). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. This chapter offers a wealth of information on gendered patterns of nonverbal communication. Especially interesting are the detailed descriptions of nonverbal flirting behaviors.