

CHAPTER 6

Embodied Knowing and Nonverbal Communication

In this chapter, we will work together to:

- Explore how the body is a site of knowing
- Describe how the body can be a site of learning
- Distinguish the types of nonverbal communication
- Apply concepts of embodied knowing and nonverbal communication to your everyday life and, specifically, to your public advocacy efforts

What do these examples have in common?

* * *

Karen uses a wheelchair. She arises early; her personal care attendant assists her with grooming and eating and wishes her well for the day. Karen takes light rail to school, entering the train from an elevated platform at the first car. Two young men move from the area reserved for travelers with disabilities and sit toward the back of the car. At school, she meets with and reviews notes with her notetakers, she listens carefully to class lectures, and she struggles to get to classes on time, as her campus has slow and awkwardly placed elevators. Sometimes when Karen goes out to eat, servers ask her friends to order for her. Rather than feeling “wheelchair bound,” Karen enjoys the freedom and opportunities her wheelchair affords.

* * *

Shelley is now eight months pregnant. She is due soon, right in the middle of the semester, which is making her a little anxious. She has met with each of her professors to complete as many assignments as early as possible, and she has introduced her partner to each so they're not surprised when he collects or delivers her assignments. Tonight she has her American History class in a small room thankfully near the women's restroom. The only real drawback is that she can't quite fit in the desks; her professor has joked that her baby will be born with a



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The body (both our own and our experience of others' bodies) is fundamental to our learning about our world and our culture.

dent in her forehead from where the tabletop pinches Shelley's middle. The only other chair that doesn't have an attached desk is the professor's.

* * *

Angel is on the men's golf team. This weekend, they had a tournament down south, where they did very well. He was particularly pleased with his performance. However, the long drive back didn't do him any favors: He overslept his alarm, and after what should have been a very satisfying yawning stretch, his neck gave a subtle pop, leaving him tender and headachy. This afternoon he has a make-up midterm for his calculus class, and this weekend is another tournament.

* * *

One of your authors, Deanna, learned to ride a bicycle recently, at the age of 35. More fearful than the average little itty-bitty, she needed repeated coaxings from her partner, who would—as parents typically do with small children—run alongside the bike to get her to keep trying; there was a lot of swearing and squealing and panicky putting down of feet. But there came, after hours of attempts, a moment of certainty: The bicycle wasn't going to fall, not if she kept pedaling. Fearing that she wouldn't be able to ride the bike a week or two later, she approached the bicycle with the same anxiety she had at the start (at 35, it hurts to fall!), but her body understood what the brain did not.

* * *

What *do* all of these examples have in common?

Many of us are already familiar with “body language”—how we communicate nonverbally through, for example, our expression, movement, and tone. But, in this chapter, we take a comprehensive look at the body as communication; in particular, we explore not only how the body communicates, but also how communication produces (makes, enables, constrains, and breaths

life into) the body. We explore here three major ways of thinking about the body and communication: First, we examine the body as a site of knowing, a place where we, as people, learn about our world, our cultures, and our norms. As we illustrate in Deanna's example above, this way of thinking about the body is concerned with how we learn through our bodies. Second, we analyze the body as a site of being, specifically asking how we train and model our own and others' bodies through participation in cultures. This second way of thinking about the body would ask us to study Shelley's experience of sitting in her school desk, to explore how her daily, taken-for-granted performances, like sitting in that desk again and again, affect her identity and sense of self. Finally, we consider what many of us have come to think of as body language, exploring communication studies scholars' research on nonverbal communication (i.e., communication

Often what we do not say is more telling than what we actually speak.

that does not occur through words, like vocal inflections, gestures, and even use of space). The examples of Karen, Shelley, Angel, and Deanna, as well as your own experiences in the world, help to illustrate how complex communication is; often what we do not say is more telling than what we actually speak. In this way, whether it's the freedom and movement of using a wheelchair or the panicky attempts to relearn balance on a bicycle, whether we're making eye contact with someone who

seems different from us or raising our voices in celebration or anger, the body communicates. This chapter explores how.

DISCUSSION

In what ways does your body communicate? Maybe you smell something delicious and your stomach rumbles with hunger; maybe someone stands too close to you and makes you feel uncomfortable? What kinds of messages does your body tell you everyday?

Body Epistemology: Knowing

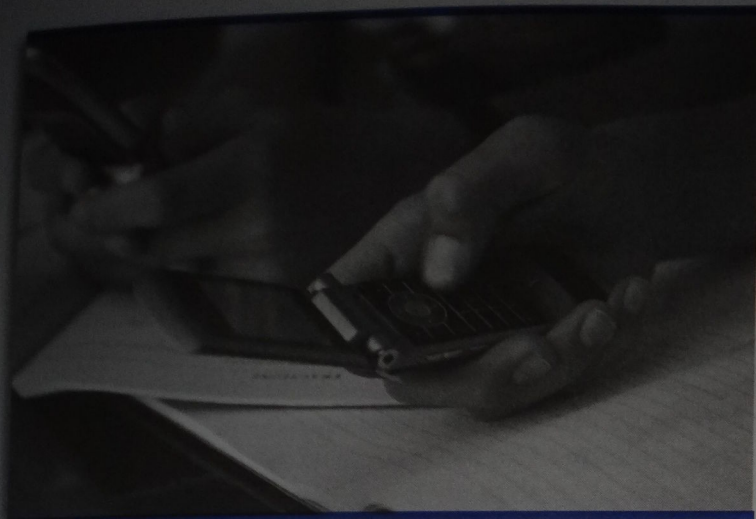
Whether we're learning to play soccer, sculpting in clay, or sitting in a desk for long periods of time, the body is in training; we are becoming who we are through our bodies' experiences.

The ability to discern what is mind from what is body is something that we hope this chapter complicates.

Our bodies are **epistemic**; that is, we come to know through our bodies. This may sound strange at first because many of us have learned to think of ourselves in two distinct halves: our bodies and our minds. Teachers, for example, often reinforce these divisions as they demand quiet focused time in class to think and encourage active, boisterous fun time during recess. Often we don't even think about these divisions any more; they just are. We take it for granted that our minds and bod-

ies are separate. A much more productive way of seeing the relationship between the body and the mind is to remember that the mind is, ultimately, part of the body—it exists in your body and is, therefore, connected in very strong ways. In fact, the ability to discern what is mind from what is body is something that we hope this chapter complicates—as anyone who has learned to ride a bike knows, having an intellectual understanding of how bikes work isn't enough . . . your body has to know what to do. The body, in this way, is a way of learning and knowing about the world.

Epistemology, in a general sense, is the study of knowing, or how we know what we know; as a fundamental aspect of not only philosophy but also of all areas of study, from forensic science to history to poetry, it is far too broad to treat comprehensively here. However, because you are interested in understanding communication more fully, it is worth your effort to develop an introductory understanding of epistemology. A favorite teacher of ours provides a useful way of understanding this concept. When she asks her students how they know the sun



SOURCE: Jupiterimages/Goodshoot/ThinkStock.

Body epistemology is how we come to know through the body. In everyday activities, our bodies complete all sorts of tasks, big and small, often without our noticing.

will come up tomorrow, they usually answer quickly, providing explanations ranging from how the Earth rotates around the Sun to “because it always has in the past.” At this point, the teacher, referring to their different examples, explains that we can know something in multiple ways, from the “scientific” to the experiential.

Though this may sound simple, the idea that we can know something in different ways has profound implications for how we live our lives. Each of us knows, for example, some basic truths about the way the world works; these can include the observation that jumping from the top of a building is deadly or that you have to wait your turn at the end of a line, and all points in between. What’s helpful about the study of epistemology is the way it asks us to consider not just

what we believe to be true, but *how* we know it’s true. The study of epistemology challenges the boundaries of what we know and what that knowledge might mean; consider these epistemological questions:

- Are there multiple truths? Can my truth that all people should be able to protect themselves in their homes co-exist with your truth that weapons in the home are dangerous and often result in accidental shootings?
- Just who gets to decide what’s true and what isn’t? For instance, if someone says that people shouldn’t have children if they can’t afford them, then we might ask *who says* we should base our reproductive freedom on our financial stability?
- Why should some people have more freedom than others when it comes to their bodies? Put another way, should people have different access to birth control, fertility treatment, or well-baby care, for example, because of their backgrounds, geographic locations, or incomes?

Epistemological questions such as these stress the importance of noticing how what we come to know as true is shaped and defined by the people who give rise to those truths. In this sense, truth as we are able to know it—that is, *our* truth—is partial and incomplete, privileging some perspectives and people and not others.

Epistemology asks us to consider not just what we believe to be true, but *how* we know it’s true.

Body epistemology locates how we come to learn and know within our flesh—our neurons, muscles, bones, and other tissues. In a very basic sense, the idea that we learn things through the body will likely ring true for many of us. For example, those of you who are athletes know that your bodies know some things you can’t readily explain, like how to hit a fastball or how fast your pace is when running or walking. You may have a similar experience with typing or texting: your fingers move so nimbly—they just know where to go—that if you stop to look at them, you may make more mistakes. Musicians and artists experience a similar kind of embodied knowledge. Those of us who wear glasses understand that our perception is inevitably shaped by our body’s strengths and limitations; even with corrected 20/20 vision, our peripheral vision may be limited, we may forget our glasses, or we may have smudges on them that keep us from seeing the same things as the

person seated right next to us. We might consider our strengths and limitations for each of the senses, for each of our abilities.

None of us functions perfectly: Even if we could discern something exactly as it happens, our understanding of it would be necessarily partial, shaped by our physical characteristics, our intellectual capacity to make sense of it, and our ability to render it sensible to others. Our understandings of the world emerge from our ways of moving through and discerning the features of

You are never objectively communicating the truth to anyone. If you believe you're "telling it like it is," you should remember that you're "telling it like it seemed to you."

the world; we might experience that world from a wheelchair, we might learn our limits (the limits of our bodies and the limits of our focus when we're in pain) when we're injured, we might develop muscle memory through our repeated experimentation (as in learning to ride a bicycle or to knit a scarf), or we might learn the degree to which we meet other people's expectations of our bodies and of us.

But what does this mean for you practically? There are several lessons implicit in the notion that the body is epistemic, a way of knowing. The first is that you are never objectively communicating the truth to any-

one. If you believe you're "telling it like it is," you should remember that you're "telling it like it seemed to you"; your listener or another observer might see it the same way or s/he might not. Your understandings emerge from your experiences, from the joint efforts of your mind and your body, and in order to know if you're on the right track, you'll have to compare them with someone else. This means remembering that there are multiple possible realities in any given situation, for any audience, for any given context. Imagine asking your university for a tuition decrease; you'd do well to remember that they won't see themselves as "money-grubbing weasels" or "heartless bureaucrats." Everyone wants to believe s/he is the hero of the story; it's your job as a communicator to try to anticipate the different possible needs and visions of your audience and shape your message accordingly.

A second lesson is that it is essential for us to pay attention to what our bodies are telling us. If we need to sleep more or eat better food or exercise, our bodies will tell us. If we are feeling

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uncertain about our message or antsy while listening, these clues are important for us to know too, as they signal our relationship to what we are learning or sharing with others. For example, if we find ourselves checking out of a conversation when the speaker says "partial birth abortion" or "handicapped," if we find ourselves nauseated and scared before giving an important speech because we haven't practiced enough, then our bodies are cueing us to practice more mindful behaviors, like listening carefully and compassionately or practicing more frequently with a live and supportive audience (or beginning the speech preparation process sooner).

A third lesson is that even if we don't pay a great degree of attention to the body as we learn, we are quick to notice distracting gestures and behaviors; most people are astute observers of other people's "tells." If we say one thing, our bodies just might say something different, something contradictory. A speaker who wants you to be excited about a particular volunteer project undercuts her or his own message when s/he speaks from the corner of the room with her/his arms crossed.

In what follows, we'll explore what it means for our bodies to serve as ways of knowing, and also how that insight helps us communicate more effectively in our efforts to resist or challenge harmful or dehumanizing messages. We'll also discuss the different types of nonverbal communication, the different ways your body "speaks" and how that might influence your listeners. If you intend for your communication to be meaningful to anyone other than yourself, then you'll want to learn from your body.

DISCUSSION

What kinds of knowledge does your body hold? How did your body come to know what it knows?

Embodied Learning

John, as he types these words, is sitting at his kitchen chair. The stiffness of the wood chair makes his back arch as he leans over his laptop. His back, like his eyes, is straining from too much time in the same chair, in the same position, doing the same thing: writing parts of this chapter. He feels the texture of the keyboard, ever so slightly, as he types, his fingers searching for the proper keys to make the proper word. When he hits the wrong letter, his fingers and wrist know it before his head or eyes, his right hand already hitting the “delete” button by way of correction. In the background his ears pick up the sounds of the Super Bowl (someone just scored, by the sounds of it); however, he is listening more for the commercials. Deanna, visiting from California, is sniffing on the couch, struggling with a nasty case of the flu; she is also typing, at work on a different chapter, and John hears these soft clicks too as he writes. From the kink in his neck to the ways his legs are coiled and achy under the table, John feels his body and tries to understand the messages it can tell him (among these, that he should probably take a break so he doesn’t catch the flu too).

While time has certainly passed since we sat with our laptops and wrote these pages, the notion of embodied learning represented here points to the ways the body comes to know. How we felt (sniffly or stiff) inevitably affected our writing. How is your own reading of these words, wherever you are, affected by your body? If you were to close your eyes, what is your body trying to tell you? And what do you want to do with all those insights? Will you change your posture, fix a cup of tea, or take a break and go for a walk? Maybe you were uncomfortable, lying in your dorm room bed the night before class, your eyes burning from too many hours of reading? Maybe you felt the baby kick, drawing your attention from the page to her or him for just a moment, your hand tracing the imprint of an elbow on your skin? Maybe you feel anxious because you’re worried about someone you love and would rather be with her or him instead of reading? What is your body telling you?

What we often forget is how we can learn anew by focusing on the body.

We suspect that you’ll agree that your body helps you know, that it’s a way you learn. All you have to do is think back to the last time you drove on some long car trip and suddenly realized you couldn’t remember the last 10 minutes. The body is able, as when swinging a golf club or strumming a guitar, to perform without your direct concentration. What we (teachers, students, communication scholars, etc.) often forget is how we can learn anew by focusing on the body.

Communication scholars have long known that seeking information through the body can open up spaces for coming to know, can teach us something reading or seeing or thinking alone cannot. Consider the following section from a popular Robert Frost (1916) poem, “Birches”:

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy’s been swinging them.
But swinging doesn’t bend them down to stay.

Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
 Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
 After a rain. They click upon themselves
 As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
 As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.

Now that you have read it, try reading it out loud.

Now, try it again: This time, focus on capturing the distant voice of the narrator. As you read, try to imagine the speaker as sage and wise and aged as s/he reflects back on her/his childhood. Can you remember the feel of the bark? Can you imagine the ice, crystallized upon the branches? Listen for the clicking of the branches as they sway. As you read the poem again, try to embody the speaker's voice. Pause where you think the speaker would, drawing, perhaps, a moment of silence between "left" and "and right." That moment signals a pause as the speaker's memory—as your memory—begins to fill with the image of the boy swinging on the branches, first to the left . . . then to the right. Try it again.

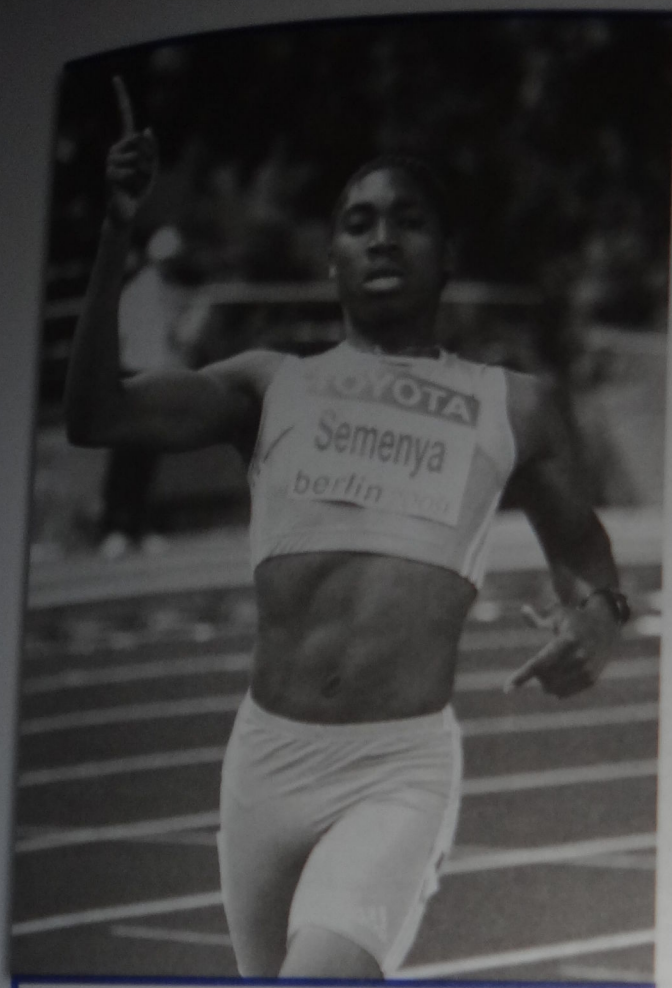
Go ahead and try it once more. If you've made it this far, then let's take one more step. Stand up and read the poem; feel the words in your body as you speak them. Can you feel your body sway, first left . . . then right? Do you feel drawn inward, shorter, or smaller? What expressions are on your face as you move this poem through your body? You should feel a difference in how the poem felt when you were reading, when you were speaking, and when you were speaking while standing. How was each reading different from one another? How did your experience of the poem change? Our bet is that with each reading of the poem, you came to experience Frost's words with greater complexity. Perhaps, as the poem moved from the page to your lips and your breath, you began to gather rhythm and expression. Perhaps you imagined a boy, swinging on a birch branch, smiling as the breeze ruffles his hair. Moving the poem to our bodies, helping it find full expression in our bodies, generates new possibilities for understanding the moment Frost wants us to experience.

DISCUSSION

Did you try the above exercise? If so, how did the exercise show you the importance of the body as a site of knowing? If not, why not? What about doing bodily exercises seems weird or silly? Where do we learn bodily lessons?

Saying that the body is epistemic doesn't just mean that our bodies learn, though that is a significant insight into how the body *knows*; it also means that we can use the body as a medium or a way to *come to know*. That is, if we want to know something, to study something, to understand something, we can turn to the body as a means of investigation. If we use the body as a way of understanding our world (as we did with the Frost poem), we come to know in different ways, in other, perhaps more subtle, nuances. Think about how moving that poem into your body makes it come alive in a way reading it on the page does not. We know Frost's poem in more complexity when we move it into our bodies because we must activate all our senses. From words on a page to a living voice and passionate body, this embodied performance gives rise to new ways of understanding the power of his words.

One final example of the power of the body as a way of coming to know: When John was writing his dissertation (the final, book-length research study he completed for the PhD), he experienced stress in a whole new way. Normally, John manages his stress pretty well; he accepts some



SOURCE: Mark Dadds/Well/Getty Images Sport/Getty Images.

Officials called into question decorated South African runner Caster Semenya's gender after Semenya won the 2009 World Championship Gold Medal in the 800 meters.

stress as a way of keeping him motivated. But the dissertation was such a huge project that he felt paralyzed with stress, unable to cope. He tried reading books on stress management, as well as talking with friends and the folks at the campus counseling center about how to cope. While these were helpful in some ways, it wasn't until he picked up knitting needles that he was able to relax. The feel of the yarn in his hands, the sense of accomplishment when he finished an afghan or scarf, brought a meditative calm he hadn't found in any other form. Knitting helped John refocus, and it helped him tackle the dissertation in manageable steps. His dissertation project became possible (and even sometimes fun) because rather than seeing the project as a 300-page monster, he knew it could be pieced together, chapter by chapter, like a blanket. The body, in this way, can be a powerful way of coming to know, of generating knowledge.

We do ourselves a disservice when we dismiss the body: We limit our potential. We need to recover the body from the margins of how we learn. We encourage you to make the most of this exploration. As we turn our discussion to identity, don't forget to consider how we come to know through the body. We'd argue that you didn't just learn your gender (or other foundational aspects of your identity) from reading about them; you learned your gender through the body, through your own doing and being.

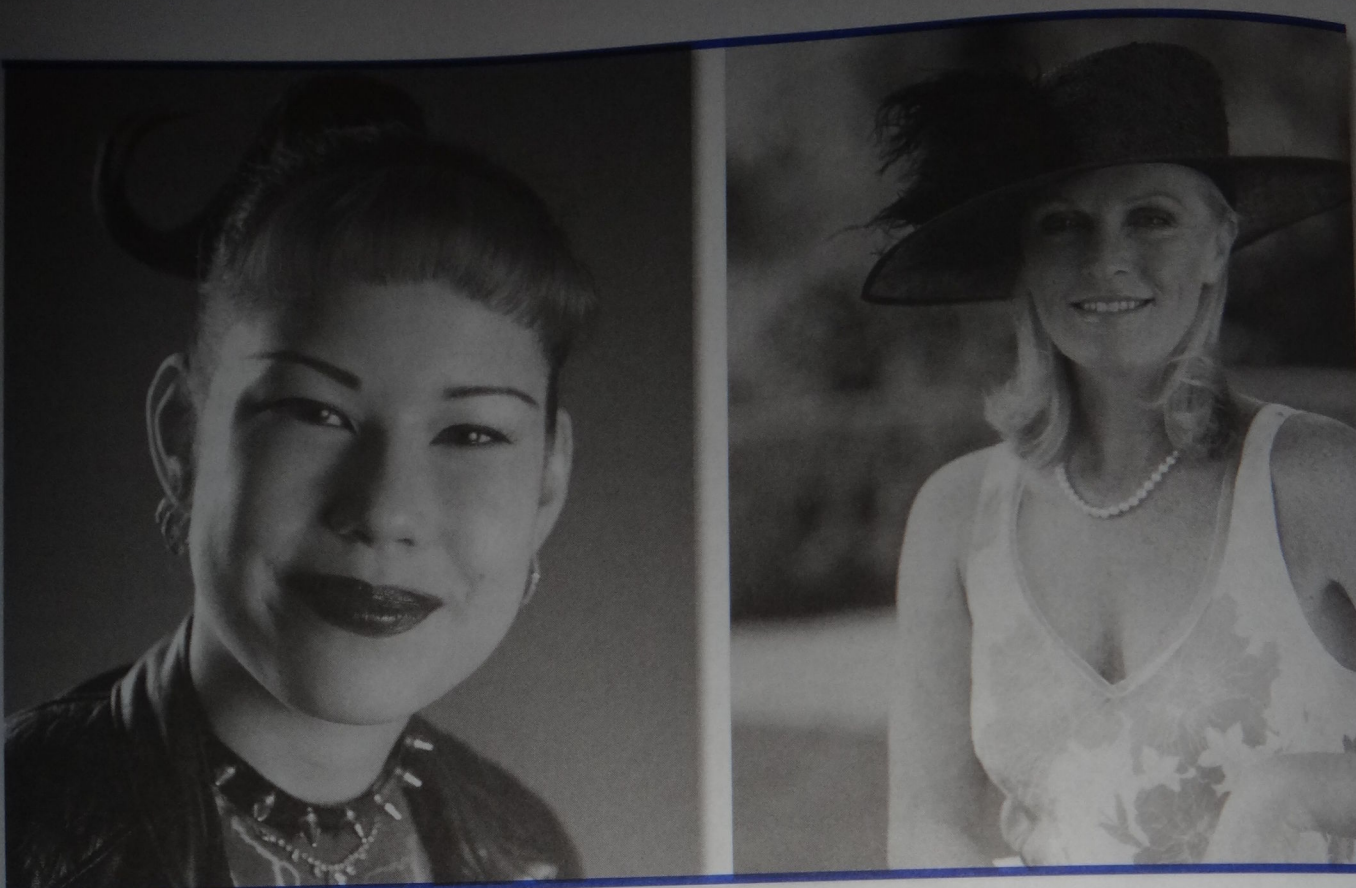
Body Identity: Being

Most of us spend our lives feeling pretty certain, for the most part, of who we are—of our values, of our backgrounds, of our identities. Often we can fill out a survey or a questionnaire and readily check or complete the demographic boxes for race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, income, marital status, and so forth. In recent years, our awareness with respect to multiraciality or to transgendered status—to aspects of our human identity that aren't quite so easy to box—has raised the possibility that identity just might not be as stable as we'd once assumed. Indeed, what these seemingly more complex identities have shown is that the "simple" boxes were never all that simple.

You might be wondering what's so complex about identity . . . You're either male or female, Black or White or Asian or whatever; if you're not gay or straight, then maybe you're bi, but it's really not that complex.

Except that it is.

One way to think about this is to consider the times when people didn't understand you or couldn't categorize you or punished you for not being manly (or womanly), not acting your age, not behaving as appropriate for your station in life, or for being too White, too girly, too butch. You get the idea. We expect that identities cut cleanly into categories that don't overlap too much; we expect that people will conform to our expectations of them. It's not coincidental that



SOURCE: Ryan McVay/Digital Vision/ThinkStock; Stockbyte/ThinkStock

How you use artifacts like dress and makeup can communicate more than individual style—you also shape perceptions and create meaning.

these punishments, these complaints or admonishments, focus on observable behaviors, on how we “do” (or don’t do) our identities correctly.

Researchers have, in their way, exacerbated this situation. For example, in communication studies research (as has been the case with a variety of other social sciences), there has been a long history of looking for strong, prevailing statistical patterns. In order to locate these patterns, researchers have tended to rely on demographic data—for example, race, sex, age, or educational level. This makes it possible to make claims about men or women, Whites or Pacific Islanders, people with a high school education and people in graduate school. Researchers who feel very strongly about this approach find it difficult to explore what it means when one of their study participants marks more than one ethnic box or marks both sexes; they may even discard that response in favor of more easy-to-interpret data.

But critical communication scholars hold that human beings are constituted in communication; they are, in a sense, an amalgam of all the communication they have experienced, will experience, and might experience in the course of their lives—all the reassurances and the challenges, all the assumptions and the expectations, all the questions and the lectures, the beatings and the caresses. We’d argue that while there is some value to drawing conclusions from broad statistical patterns, there is also value in examining the particular, the unique, the “abnormal.” We’d argue that there is value in understanding human identity as always in the process of being produced, as emergent and always changing. In this way, one can see how norms that surround gender shift over time (e.g., men wearing earrings or women wearing pants). Though we’ve already raised this issue in Chapter 4, we raise it again here for an important reason: Our bodies and our identities are inextricably intertwined. This **body-identity**

connection happens, for instance, in how others “read” our bodies and our actions in order to determine who we are. We perform our bodies through repeated actions, training the voice, gesture, and gait of our bodies, as well as through manipulation of the body through tattoos, shaving, and piercings. This shaping of our bodies—the fine attention to how we want others to read our bodies, and, as a result, the normalization of these bodily habits—is how our embodied or nonverbal communication shapes our identities. These connections between the body and the self require more attention.

We can’t just decide to be something we’re not, but upon closer reflection, we might find that we are much more than we think we are.

As we noted in Chapter 4, we do not mean to suggest that identity is so malleable as to be loose, swinging wildly from one status or position to another like a pendulum. We can’t just decide to be something we’re not, but upon closer reflection, we might find that we are much more than we think we are. Other communication researchers, including your authors, have argued that we can extend this analogy to other aspects of identity, such as race/ethnicity, sexuality, and ability (Fassett & Morella, 2008; Fassett & Warren, 2007; Warren, 2003). For example, even something as seemingly physical and “natural” as skin color is the result of centuries of behaviors regarding rules about who might marry or reproduce with whom. Because we repeat these performances again and again so often as to overlook them, this is a particularly difficult concept to explore. For example, it is the prevailing cultural, social, medical wisdom that disabilities, whether readily visible (which might involve the use of a wheelchair or communication in American Sign Language) or nonvisible (such as a mental illness like major depression or a learning disability like dyslexia), are stable, physical events: Something happened before birth or somewhere along the way to the present that left this person disabled. There is something about this language, about the way we talk about disability, that renders this aspect of identity finite, complete, and immutable.

Let’s take, for example, the experience of a student with a nonvisible disability, like major depression. This student lives the experience of her illness, working with doctors and other caregivers to create a treatment plan that helps her to manage symptoms in such a way as to continue working toward her degree. Leaving aside for the moment all the ways in which the health care system may be dehumanizing, reducing people with complex lives and goals to symptoms and treatments, this student also must reperform this identity again and again for others. She must register with the campus disability resource center, and she must “out” herself to faculty and staff when she needs accommodations (such as extended time for testing or a retroactive withdrawal for a course in which she performed poorly because she needed to miss multiple meetings for an extended hospital stay). Because she has a nonvisible disability, something that someone else could not readily discern without her disclosing, she will risk others telling her that she doesn’t seem “that bad” or sharing suspicions that she is taking advantage of the school and its faculty. This element of embodied experience is epistemic for her; she has a different relationship to the world and to the people in it because she encounters situations with her different body. Yet others won’t often recognize that her body will lead her to meaningful lessons about reality; most will suspect that her insights are “abnormal,” distorted, or the result of her illness.

Those among us who are nondisabled, for lack of a better term, however, don’t typically confront the ways in which we perform our own abilities as well. Like Whiteness or maleness, ablebodiedness is the norm by which we define others who do not meet that norm. Each unproblematic iteration of a behavior or an action—whether a complex yoga pose, running quickly across campus to pick up a book, easily reading page after page of a favorite novel—helps us to ignore our bodies, to take them for granted, to assume they will continue to work reliably in these ways in the future. But ability is not only achieved in the physical action; it also emerges in the communication surrounding ability and disability. An ableist perspective,

one that assumes, however subtly, that people who are disabled are limited or only able to do less than others with, presumably, fully functioning bodies (overlooking the fact that the disabled body is fully functioning within the range of its abilities, and that all bodies are necessarily imperfect), emerges in language like *handicapped* or *wheelchair bound*. Each demonstrates a lack of insight, however unintentional: *Handicapped*, as a word, suggests its origins: begging, with cap in hand. *Invalid*, a similar sort of term, suggests that the person is no longer a fully functioning member of society, that, whatever her/his disability, her/his other abilities are no longer relevant or useful. *Wheelchair bound* frames the other person in terms of her/his need for help in mobility; it assumes an able-bodied frame of reference, failing to acknowledge that with the wheelchair (and the privilege of owning one, as they are often quite expensive) comes greater choice and inclusion. That these conversations typically reflect a nondisabled person's discomfort with disability and the possibility that the same outcome might happen to her/him is an important reminder that able-bodiedness is a performance, one we may or may not be able to continue.

In sum, how we talk about and experience our bodies shapes our identities. In the most basic sense, if people tell you that you are “handicapped” and that way of thinking about yourself becomes engrained in your imagination, it will shape how you move, how you talk about yourself, and how you imagine your future. Our bodies and our identities are connected in these important ways. So how might we track the different ways our bodies communicate, especially if these modes of communication have such a powerful effect on who we are? In a sense, we shift here from how the body knows and becomes to how the body talks. In what follows, we discuss “body language” or what we more commonly call “nonverbal communication.” We present the major ways the body speaks without the use of words. Understanding these modes of communication means better understanding the various and often taken-for-granted ways our bodies communicate with those around us.

DISCUSSION

How do others perceive your body and your ability? What privileges and/or stereotypes come from others' perceptions? What consequences do these perceptions have for you, for others who may be like you, and for others who are different from you?

Body Language: Communicating

There are several different categories we might use to explore **nonverbal communication** in any given situation. The specific number of categories depends on whom you ask, but here we'll share what we perceive to be the most meaningful and useful aspects of nonverbal communication for analysis and application: chronemics, haptics, proxemics, artifacts, paralinguistic qualities, and kinesics (including facial expressions).

Chronemics

Chronemics is the study of how time functions as part of communication. For example, different cultures give different sorts of significance to time. In our Western industrialized society, we tend to fragment time, breaking it into smaller and smaller segments for appointments and employment time clocks and subway schedules, for example. We often lament the lack of time—“Who can ever get anything done?”—when we are often, in fact, highly (or perhaps) overly productive in terms of the amount of things we do in a given day. We struggle

with the balance between professional and personal time, compartmentalizing our families from our professions.

However, this struggle is not so rigid across the broad array of human cultures. For example, for certain Native American tribes, time is not a possession or something to control, but rather the copresence of the past, the present, and the future (a perspective that engenders a different responsibility to/for future generations, regarding, for example, how we protect and preserve the Earth's natural resources). Moreover, perspectives on time can vary across and within industrialized cultures. For example, while the United States embraces a "traditional" 40-hour work week based on the production assembly line of Ford and other corporations, countries such as France or Mexico have a different understanding of what constitutes an appropriate work week or number of hours in a work day or number of vacation days in a year. Even within the United States, we can have different understandings of time, even among people of relatively similar cultural backgrounds.

An awareness of these different understandings of time is important in developing successful and rewarding relationships with one another cross-culturally, especially in this increasingly globalized world. You may find yourself studying or traveling abroad, or you may be called upon to work in a multinational virtual project team at the office, or, in the more immediate future, you may need to consider how you perform your understandings of time and how these performances of time shape people's perceptions of you (and that these perceptions vary with people's cultures—age/generation, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity). You may think it's OK to arrive 10 minutes late for a speaking engagement, but if your audience does not agree, you're unlikely to have a meaningful or productive exchange of ideas.

Haptics

Haptics is the study of the significance of touch. As you're probably already aware, touch is significant in our formation of healthy, meaningful, and enduring relationships. For example, studies show that touch is significant in the growth and successful outcomes of premature infants, in the comfort and longevity of the elderly, and in the continued sense of connection between spouses or partners; even something as simple as a 20-second hug significantly increases levels of oxytocin, a hormone that helps us bond with one other. Important to the study of haptics is the question of how our needs for touch vary cross-culturally as well. The sort of touch that is appropriate for a family member or significant other isn't often what's appropriate for a new acquaintance.

Women and men, people of different ages or ethnic backgrounds, and people of different economic classes or sexual orientations have different relationships to power and touch. To consider the relationship between power and touch, it may help to recall times in your life when someone touched you without your permission; these could be as simple as receiving a hug when you're not a hugger, or as complex as having an employer touch your arm in a suggestive and uncomfortable way. Pregnant women often observe that their bodies become community property as soon as they begin to show, whether or not they welcome this attention. These unwelcome touches provide us insight into interpersonal communication, in how we constitute loving and nurturing relationships through holding hands or tousling someone's hair, as well as how we constitute oppressive or condescending relationships through uninvited contact.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of how people use space to communicate, including their relative (dis)comfort with intrusions into their personal space. For example, someone interested in better understanding how communication functions effectively (or dysfunctionally) to create an office

environment can look to how cubicles are positioned throughout a room and whether these encourage or discourage interaction between key decision makers in that environment. Or someone interested in better understanding how personal space needs vary cross-culturally could ask people at what point they think someone is a “close talker”—i.e., someone who speaks to you from an uncomfortably close nearness.

The question of space and how it communicates often figures prominently in whether we perceive someone as caring and compassionate. For example, studies of students’ perceptions of teacher caring suggest that the best teachers work to reduce the distance between themselves and their students, sometimes metaphorically, as in learning more about their lives and interests, but also sometimes literally, as in moving from behind the desk or the podium to walk or sit among the students. This latter finding is a matter of proxemics. Moreover, this is a finding that is relevant to you as you continue to develop and strengthen your public communication skills: You will be perceived as a dialogic, credible, concerned, and confident speaker if you appropriately reduce both the literal and figurative distance between you and your listeners.

Artifacts

Another area of nonverbal communication includes how people use **artifacts** to express themselves. Artifacts can include jewelry and clothing, other personal belongings like cell phones or computers or cars, or even money, buildings, or landscaping. As in our analysis of the typical classroom, we can look to Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric to remind us that we can analyze all manner of objects and situations for how they persuade. For example, you may or may not have given a lot of attention to your “look” today—the clothes you’re wearing, the accessories you’re wearing or carrying, your hairstyle or scent—but no matter: We can still consider these nonverbal communication, part of how you express yourself to and with others. Your decisions communicate to others and reinforce for yourself not only your self-concept and whether you think you’re fun, serious, or fashionable, but also aspects of your identity like your sexuality, gender, economic class, or commitment to particular cultural movements (like hip-hop, hyphy, goth, or emo culture, skateboarding or surfing culture, knitting or comic book collecting).

Paralinguistics

Paralinguistic qualities are of particular importance to people who frequently speak in public; these include aspects of your voice (like tone, pitch, or rate), aspects that modify how you say something—rather than the words you speak or what you say. One of the easiest ways to heighten your attention to paralinguistic aspects of communication is to listen to a storyteller or to be a storyteller yourself. Imagine reading a book such as *The Cat in the Hat* or *Where the Wild Things Are* to a small child with a very short attention span; there are many tricks you can try to keep her or him involved with just your voice alone: speaking louder or softer, faster or slower, keeping “in character” with a squeaky or froggy or wispy voice. These qualities are even more effective, generally, where they complement other aspects of your verbal (i.e., the story in this example) and nonverbal (i.e., how close you sit to the child, whether you gesture as you speak, the facial expressions you make, and whether you hold her/his hand or s/he sits in your lap) communication.

Similarly, whether you’re speaking in an intimate or public setting, you commonly modify what you’re saying. Whether or not you’re aware of it, you routinely modify your words with paralinguistic cues, and the vocal variations give life to the language choices you make. This is what, in relation to context, can make the same words suggest very different meanings; this is perhaps

most common with sarcasm (think of the different ways someone can refer to her/himself or someone else as a “genius”). It is also, in the case of rate, pronunciation, or enunciation, what builds you into a credible effective speaker. This particular type of nonverbal communication doesn’t just make you clear, like a good phone connection, it lends depth and meaning—it makes possible interpretations of what you say.

Kinesics

The study of **kinesics** addresses our gestures, movements, and facial expressions. This is perhaps one of the most pervasive forms of nonverbal communication in that it encompasses behaviors such as making eye contact and nodding, shaking hands and waving hello or goodbye, and shifting from foot to foot or tightly hugging your arms to your chest. Let’s imagine you run into someone in the hallway you’d rather not meet. You might speed up your pace, look down (perhaps at your watch or cell phone), and veer to the right or the left of the person, all in an attempt to avoid her/him. If this person notices you, s/he might think you are avoiding her/him, or s/he might just think you’re really distracted.

Kinesics play a significant role in public presentations. As a speaker, you might stand alert, use your fingers to enumerate key points (first, second, third or one, two, three), and make consistent eye contact and friendly facial expressions (which suggest you’re pleasant or concerned, and so forth), or you might grip the podium like it’s a lifejacket, avert your gaze from your listeners (choosing instead, perhaps, to look at your notecards), and stand shock still, or you might exhibit some combination or none of these behaviors; in any event, whether you mean for it to or not, your body communicates. Even your attempts to avoid communication communicate.

DISCUSSION

What would happen if we did not have nonverbal communication? How does nonverbal communication change from one context to another, for example, from face-to-face communication to computer-mediated communication?

Body Intentionality

Becoming more conscious of our nonverbal communication can create what feels for many like a dilemma: How do we ensure that we are clear and precise in our communication when someone can interpret anything we can say or do in ways we may not have intended?

In the 1960s, a group of researchers at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California (sometimes called the Palo Alto School or Group), including communication theorist Paul Watzlawick, articulated a series of axioms or laws about communication, one of which is especially relevant to this discussion: One cannot not communicate. This axiom raises an interesting question about our intentions: Can we mean something we didn’t intend? Put another way, if all our actions and words constitute communication, whether or not we meant them in the ways others interpreted them, does that make our intentions meaningless?

As we discussed in our analysis of Denny and Audrey, our intentions do matter and are relevant in our relations with others. As compassionate critical listeners, we do want to understand why people say what they do; in part, this is key in helping each of us reflect on our

One cannot not communicate.

communication, in helping us learn not only how to say what we mean in ways people will listen but also to be ethical and sensitive in our communication with others.

Nevertheless, our intentions cannot erase the fact of our actions. By this, we mean that while manipulative intentions can spoil a compliment, unintentionally hurtful comments still wound. This fact suggests an important lesson about nonverbal communication: Just like verbal communication, our nonverbal communication shapes our realities, which are, necessarily, partial and incomplete. Others will interpret our actions and behave accordingly; therefore, we have a responsibility to reflect consistently on both our intentions and their effects, as well as the intentions and effects of others' communication for us.

Public Advocacy: The Body as a Resource

That the body is not just a container for knowledge but rather a source of knowledge has important implications for our public communication. Whether you are speaking in a classroom or a boardroom, your body—and an awareness of the body as a site of communication—has much to teach you about the experience of communicating, about your degree of comfort with a given issue or discussion, about the context or the occasion, and about the audience.

Listen to Your Body

First, it is important to acknowledge your feelings about a particular speaking occasion or topic, whether you're experiencing excitement, curiosity, anger, or frustration. What you choose to discuss in public should inspire in you some emotional response; you should feel strongly about your argument and its value to your listeners. And, while to some extent your interest in a topic can deepen and grow as you research it, if you couldn't care less when you started your speech preparation, that's unlikely to change (in fact, it's likely to get much, much worse; however little you liked that topic when you chose it, you'll really hate it when you're sitting at the computer at 3 a.m. on speech day). Similarly, take care to read your body during the preparation and practice of your presentation; are you nervous about speaking in general, or are you nervous because you just don't know enough about your topic, or maybe because you feel uncomfortable or uncertain about your position? Your body can help you make good choices if only you'll respect its lessons.

Second, while it is important to focus more on our message than on ourselves, we would be foolish to pretend our bodies don't exist. The movements we make when speaking can either confirm or contradict our words: Not only can our bodies unintentionally say things we don't mean, they can also reveal feelings and beliefs we'd rather keep private. Effective practice for public communication involves concerted attention to our bodies; while we do not want to script our every move, we will want to make sure that our bodies don't belie our message. Effective speakers, even while speaking, acknowledge privately how they're feeling and adjust accordingly. If, for example, a speaker feels distance and resistance from her listeners, she might move closer to them or walk among them; if, however, a speaker is feeling very frantic or nervous, he might concentrate on taking calming pauses and subtle but deep breaths at appropriate intervals during the talk.

Be Intentional in Your Embodied Communication

An awareness of the body helps public communicators become more adept at understanding what their listeners are experiencing during their presentation. By carefully attending to how

the audience members are seated (their posture, where they're sitting in the room, and so forth), whether they are making eye contact (or instant messaging on their cell phones), and even their expressions (confusion, delight, frustration, etc.), a speaker can adapt her/his ideas, examples, or delivery accordingly. Similarly, an awareness of our bodies as audience members can help us become more effective and responsible listeners. As speakers and listeners, our actions become us: If we stand behind a podium clutching it for dear life, then we reinforce our fears and become apprehensive speakers; if we sprawl out in our desks and lean back as listeners, then we reinforce our disinterest and become apathetic to the speaker and her/his topic.

If our goal is to become more responsible and effective speakers, then it is important for us to reflect on our past experiences; our feelings in these moments, however uncomfortable, help us to learn. It is tempting to assume that if we've been nervous speaking in the past, we'll always be nervous speaking in public (not only is that very rarely ever true, but you're unlikely to be the exception); however, our nervousness (whether shaky hands or lots of *ums* and *uhs*) is our bodies' way of letting us know we've missed a step—perhaps we haven't chosen a topic that really matters to us (or perhaps one that matters way too much), or we haven't practiced enough to feel confident. If we ignore that warning and proceed anyway, then we're likely to have a negative experience speaking; if we continue to ignore repeated warnings, we come to think of ourselves as bad public speakers, which can, over time, become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is wise, when preparing for a speech, to keep notes about your creative process. Like a food journal, which helps you not only record how many calories you've consumed or burned but also what you ate and how you felt before/after you ate, this record of your planning and practice will help you document these easy-to-overlook excitements or discomforts. In these notes, be sure to keep track of what your body is saying: Do you need to practice more? Do you need to choose a different topic? Do you need to ask a peer or your professor how to cite your sources aloud in your presentation? Do you want to take up this topic in other, future speeches? Heightened awareness of how you feel when you communicate and the consequences of those feelings for the effectiveness of that communication will serve you well beyond a particular presentation, course, or degree. By becoming mindful of the body's relationship to the mind, you may begin to apply this cycle of reflection and growth to other communication contexts—in your relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and communities.

DISCUSSION

Reflect on your own past efforts at speaking in public—what was your body communicating? In what ways was (or wasn't) this consistent with your argument? You may find it helpful to review a recording of your performance. Another option would be to attend or view events where you can analyze speakers' nonverbal communication; be sure to explore the nonverbal communication of audience members, too. What are their bodies communicating?

KEY IDEAS

Artifacts
Body epistemology
Body identity
Chronemics
Epistemic
Epistemology

Haptics
Kinesics
Nonverbal communication
Paralinguistics
Proxemics