NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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ii
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS...........................................................................iv

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................1

II. NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION.................................................................6

   Different Studies of Nonverbal Communication...........................................8

   Subconscious Reactions..............................................................................8

   Body Language and its Origins.................................................................10

   Aspects of Body Language....................................................................11

   Male and Female Differences...............................................................15

   Importance of Body Language.............................................................17

III. FIRST IMPRESSIONS......................................................................................20

   Evolution of First Impressions..............................................................22

   Empathy and Creating Impressions.....................................................25

   Gender Differences in Empathy..........................................................27

   Accuracy of First Impressions..............................................................29

   Calculating AFI.......................................................................................30

   Gender Differences in AFI....................................................................31
AFI and Personal Correlations ................................................................. 32
Case Studies on Accuracy of First Impressions ....................................... 35
What Does it all Mean? .............................................................................. 37

IV. CASE STUDY AND RESEARCH: BODY LANGUAGE ......................... 39
Person # 1 .............................................................................................. 40
Person # 2 .............................................................................................. 42
Person # 3 .............................................................................................. 43
Person # 4 .............................................................................................. 45
Person # 5 .............................................................................................. 46
Person # 6 .............................................................................................. 47
Person # 7 .............................................................................................. 48

V. CASE STUDY AND RESEARCH: FIRST IMPRESSIONS .................... 51
Attentiveness ........................................................................................... 53
Confidence ............................................................................................... 54
Empathy ................................................................................................. 55
Enthusiasm .............................................................................................. 56
Honesty .................................................................................................. 58
Likeability ............................................................................................... 59
Professionalism ..................................................................................... 60
Extroversion ........................................................................................... 60
Competency ........................................................................................... 61

VI. CONCLUSION .................................................................................... 63
APPENDIX

1. SURVEY RESULTS .................................................................................................................. 70
2. SURVEY RESULTS TOTAL AND AVERAGE ....................................................................... 72
I never really put much thought into nonverbal communication until this past year. About a year ago I was studying abroad in Florence, Italy. I enjoyed presenting and communicate and was starting to consider looking down that path of interior design for my career. I was having a talk with one of my professor when he asked me, “What do you want to do with your career when you graduate?” I answered him that I hadn’t given it much thought. Before I even finished my sentence he interrupted me saying I was excellent at communicating and should look into it further for my future. Something in me sparked when he said that. I was always interested in communication and felt I was good at it but it was the first time someone else verbally agreed with me.

That discussion is what fueled my decision to write my honors thesis on nonverbal communication. For six months I researched and wrote about first impressions and communication and I have yet to become uninterested about the topic. Communication is a topic that because of my honors thesis I have become passionate about. I am hoping to keep pursing that drive in my future career path. I hope my enthusiasm is evident in reading my paper and that it encourages others to pursue what they are passionate about.

I first want to thank my family and friends who had to listen to me ramble about nonverbal communication for the past six months. I appreciate you listening to all of my
random facts about nonverbal communication and first impressions, some you might have enjoyed hearing and some you might have preferred not hearing.

I next want to thank my defense committee. I appreciate all of your understanding and cooperation in trying to find a date to present as well as participating in my honors thesis. I hope you are encouraged and inspired by my thesis it makes you give a second thought to your own nonverbal communication.

I wanted to give a special thank you to Dr Evans, my thesis supervisor. I am glad that you shared my passion in nonverbal communication; seeing you just as fascinated by my research helped encourage me to research more. Thank you for being so available for help and offering all of your time to work with me. I am glad I got the time to work with you one on one over the course of the last year. I appreciate all of the advice you put into my paper. If it were not for you I would probably still be writing my first chapter.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As humans everyone has learned how to communicate, whether it be speaking, facial and hand gestures or other body signals. Some learn as babies from watching adults; a baby’s first word is normally a milestone event. Others learn as toddlers and continue as they grow older. Some may take classes on language and speech. Normally as one grows older, the spoken word is emphasized but it is not the only way to communicate. What if one knew that what he or she was learning only skimmed the surface of successful communication skills? Body language is the original shared language of communication. Research has found that 93% of our interpersonal communication is nonverbal, leaving only 7% of communication involving actual words. To break it down even further, 55% of nonverbal communication is visual (body language, eye contact) and 38% is vocal (pitch, speed, volume, tone of voice). There are over 1,000 nonverbal factors that contribute to the messages people send in every interaction. Nonverbal communication is any form of communication that does not contain the spoken word such as facial expressions, the way someone is standing or is dressed, a person’s movements and mannerisms or vocal pitches and tone.

Body language sends messages to people that are more convincing than just words. These messages are more honest and reliable sources. They are influenced and
learned over time by neurological, familial, cultural and individual aspects of a person’s life. They are also influenced by biological gender differences that allow for men and women to communication differently. For example, men use only one side of their brain at a time; therefore, they absorb one message at a time. Women have more complex connections between both hemispheres of their brain which can absorb more information quicker. Some forms of body language are conscious like standing up straight, smiling and giving handshakes. But no matter how conscious people are of body language, slight slips and leakages are nearly impossible to control. In order for others to believe a person is being truthful body language must be congruent with verbal and nonverbal cues. One cannot hide their body language because it is always constant. A person is still communicating with body language by clothes, stances, facial expressions or silence. However, it can never be based on one signal. One must read several signals that suggest the same thought or emotion to properly assume that that signal is true.

Even though nonverbal communication is the majority of a person’s communication, why is it so important? According to Tonya Reiman, author of The Power of Body Language, research from Princeton showed that humans make initial judgments about a person’s attractiveness, likeability, trustworthiness, competence and aggressiveness within 100 milliseconds or one tenth of one second when meeting someone, and all those initial judgments are based on nonverbal communication signals. Each time someone meets another we take a tiny sample of their life and assume it portrays 100 percent of his or her personality. In 1/10 of second, people decide whether they can trust them, will like them and if they are competent. People have 1/10 of a
second to show using nonverbal communication that they are a decent, friendly, trustworthy person. Seems unfair but even if a person might think of themselves as open-minded and unlikely to cast judgments based on superficial facts, they will still judge you. Given this state of affairs, one could argue that it would defy the basic logic of evolutionary biology if people did not form immediate impressions of others. It happens in job interviews often. The first way a person is identified and judged for a job is by their body language. The interviewer looking to hire a person is immediately judging one to see if their personality will work well in the office. It is not based on their work skills or experience as it use to be. Without proper nonverbal communication, a person can lose a job before they even say a word.

Over the time of one’s life people subconsciously develop first impression interpretation skills but some are more accurate than others. Accuracy of first impressions, or AFI, is the ability of people to draw conclusions about strangers based on very little information and how correct that information is. By applying judgment policies based on generalizations of body language as well as stereotypes and folk knowledge learned from the wider society, people are able to make inferences about new people with very little information. Exposure to a person for just a few seconds produces first impressions that are often a remarkable accurate judgment of the other person character. Perceivers are typically extremely accurate at judging prototypical facial expressions of basic emotions such as happiness or sadness even when they are only exposed to that emotional facial expression for a fraction of a second. However, some perceivers who might be better at judging facial expressions may not do as well at
judging voice expressions. And even though one might be accurate at perceiving others, most are inaccurate about how others perceive them. AFI can be determined by different testing. It can differ between children and adults as well as male and females. In all likelihood, those individuals that have been identified as higher in AFI based on testing will reap social benefits. They tend to be more popular, less lonely, have higher salaries and obtain more raises. Being able to accurately judge others can be a good indication of your personality. People who were tested with higher AFI were seen by friends as warm, compassionate, considerate and capable of close relationships.

First impressions are subconscious but if one pays close attention to it it can be used to one’s advantage, especially in situations in the work place. For example the first way a person is identified and judged for a job is by their body language before they even speak. Another form is during presentation and project sales. Just as in a job interview, the audience in a presentation is immediately judging you to see if you are a person the company can work well with not on your work skills. When selling a project not only are you selling the product but you are selling your firm and yourself to gain the trust of the client. Once that first impression is made it can be rather difficult to change.

Examples of first impressions can be seen every day. One example is interior design students at Kent State University. As students are preparing to enter the job force and applying for internships with few jobs available, first impressions are incredibly important. Students are also presenting projects to clients and critics at least once or twice a semester. With creativity at its highest, it is easy to overlook that the project
cannot sell itself. Students must sell the project to the client, which means they are selling themselves as well as Kent State University. What if the students proposing a mediocre design project with a great first impression are picked by a client over students with better design solution but a negative first impression? This is where body language and communication skills are important. A student can have the best designed project in the class according to design criteria but if they cannot properly communicate and sell their design the project could be overlooked. Communication all stems back to that first impression and how accurate they are based on body language. People tend to overlook the fact that first impressions are important because some do not feel they are accurate or they can be changed. But if the first impression is a negative one, no matter how successfully the design might be a client might not want to work with them. Which leads us to try and determine; what are first impressions of Kent State interior design students based on nonverbal communication and how accurate are they?
CHAPTER 2

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Few people are fully aware of the power of nonverbal communication. Many people feel that speech is highest form of communication because as humans we are the only life-form that has that ability. Speech is typically learned, but people are born with the ability of body language. This is how we communicate as an infant. However, once words are learned, people tend to rely on them to get a point across. Body language is unlearned or unused in the process. The spoken word is emphasized because an individual is more conscious of it, therefore, has more control over it. One normally thinks before they speak, organizing their words properly to communicate to another their thoughts or feelings. But at any point does one think how to properly position their feet or hands so that their nonverbal communication matches their verbal? Most people do not because body language tends to be subconscious.

An individual controls less and less as they work their way down their body. People have more control over their face and less control over their feet. Someone who might appear interested in talking to you because of a conscious effort on their behalf to smile might really be telling you they want to leave because their feet are subconsciously turned away from you. This unintentional betrayal of inner thoughts and feelings is called “leakage”. One form of a leak is a micro expression. These micro expressions are only brief flashes or gestures that betray one’s inner feelings. They are intense facial
expressions that last less than a fourth of a second. When a person is lying or being deceitful, their body will display different leaks which alert a listener subconsciously something is not correct (Ekman 288). In order for others to trust a person their verbal and nonverbal communication signals need to align. Consciously we know to stand up straight or to smile, to give hugs to some people and shake hands with others but the majority of it is subconscious. The more conscious people become of it, the more they can use it to their advantage.

Nonverbal communication is an important part of communicating and should not be overlooked. When people discover how to read more subtle body language signals they can begin to understand what people are really feeling. They can read when a date is going well, when others are connecting with them or when others would rather be left alone. People can tell if what a person is saying does not match up with what they are feeling. Only a small percentage of communication involves actual words; 7% to be exact. The other 93% is nonverbal. About 38% is vocal nonverbal signals such as pitch, speed and volume of one’s voice and 55% of nonverbal is visual such as body language and eye contact (Gallo 10). How one’s body moves, what expression they make, how fast they speak and even where they stand or sit, the type of jewelry they wear or how long or short their hair is are all nonverbal messages far more convincing than spoken word (Feldman and Rime 352). There are over a thousand different nonverbal factors that contribute to the messages a person sends in every interaction. With verbal communication being only 7% of communication, it is not hard to see why nonverbal communication has a greater impact.
DIFFERENT STUDIES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication is broken into two main areas: vocal nonverbal signals and visual nonverbal signals. Vocal nonverbal signals, known as paralanguage, are the pitch, volume, tempo, nasality and speed of one’s voice. This includes laughing, crying, sighing, swallowing and so forth. (Neulip 302). Nonverbal visual signals are all visual signals that do not involve the voice. They can be broken down into subcategories. There is kinesics, or body language, which includes gestures, hand and arm movements, leg movements, facial expressions, eye gaze and blinking, and stance or posture (Neuliep 290). There is also the language of touch and space which is also called proxemics. It is the perception and use of space, including territory and personal space (Neuliep 305). All of the categories have endless subcategories which can be studied intensely in their own right. In order to better understand body language and first impressions, however, only the basics and overall concepts of body language will be discussed and broken down when need be.

SUBCONSCIOUS REACTIONS

Consciously when communicating, the brain is focused on decoding the spoken words in the conversation but the subconscious is reading the body’s many languages for nonverbal cues that are speaking the truth about one’s intentions. Emerging science in the fields of psychology, anthropology, linguistics and sociology show that nonverbal signals are the most honest and reliable source of communication since they are
subconscious. When a person’s words do not correctly reflect their body language our brain sends a signal alerting us something is wrong (Neuliep 287). Some call this a “sixth sense”, which we have inherited from our primate ancestors. During the primitive era, nonverbal communication was the only form of communication. Some experts believe that spoken language appeared on the scene only 160,000 to 350,000 years ago. Given that humans have walked the earth for two million years shows us how long people were able to survive on gestures and grunts alone (Reiman 17).

The truth is we do have a “sixth sense” in the form of a single class of brains cells, the “mirror neuron”, which have evolved from one that aided primates’ survival into one that helps human share knowledge, teach fine arts, learn to fight or show compassion, all based on reading another’s body language. New neuroscience research (Reiman 6) revealed that from birth a certain part of our brain is constantly wired and rewired based on our nonverbal interactions with others. This wiring and rewiring can change depending on which gender one is talking to, if they are a friend, enemy or stranger, if they are a family member or teacher. Each person is different; therefore, we rewire our brains each time we talk to another person. For example, a person might be able to tell when their brother is lying because he may not make eye contact so a person stores that for next time. However, maybe their friend might stutter when they are lying so they store that in a different place, rewiring their brains for each individual. The main problem is people have conditioned themselves not to listen to these signals. People deny their “gut reactions” because many feel they are not as reliable as rational thought. This is why many people advise others to go with their first instinct in a situation. First
instincts are the same as one’s “gut reaction” or their primitive instinct and are normally correct.

BODY LANGUAGE AND ITS ORIGINS

Body language is the world’s original shared language. It is what allows people to be able to go to a foreign country with a different language and still be able to ask for clothing, food or shelter without using a single word. Body language is everything a person can do with their body to say what they are trying to say without words. It is made up of a person’s facial expressions, the way they hold their hands and body, their movements and mannerisms, the pitch and vocal tone, and their eye contact. In an individual’s brain, they have a hair-trigger sensor that instantly tells us if a person in front of us is a friend or enemy. This traces back to our primitive ancestors who needed to decide if a person would help them gather food or steal theirs. Will this person protect me from wolves or toss me to them? Body language is all of the signs we give off that help others make those decisions (Reiman 24). When people are comfortable around others it is because their brains are sending signals of safety. One must feel safe around this individual; therefore, they want to spend more time around them. Just as when someone feels safe, if a person is sending off signs of anger one feels threatened and avoids them.

When people first meet others they are deciding whether this person is safe or not which traces back to our primitive ancestors who could not talk. An individual’s brain will scan others for hundreds of signs that will tell them if they will hurt or help them.
Some of those signals are hard-wired into one’s nervous systems, some are passed on by parents, and some are specific to culture. People evaluate others based on how close they are, their facial expressions, sex, age, race, grooming and social status all in a matter of seconds.

ASPECTS OF BODY LANGUAGE

While a significant portion of body language is universal, body language varies from different countries, cities, states and culture. Family traits, culture, entertainment and education all produce differences in how people communicate. There are four main aspects of that effect body language that can be identified; neurological, familial, cultural and individual.

The neurological aspects of body language is one recent breakthrough in the study of neuroscience. In 1996, Italian researchers Giacomo Rizzolatti and Vittorio Gallese at the University of Parm identified a previously undiscovered class of brain cell called “mirror neurons”. First found in monkeys and now in humans, mirror neurons are a type of motor neuron, a nerve cell that controls muscles and as a result how the body moves. The human brain has multiple mirror neuron systems that specialize in carrying out and understanding not just the actions of others but their intentions, the social meaning of their behavior and their emotions (Blakeslee 1). These neurons can sometimes be called the “monkey see/monkey do” neurons. These sensitive brains cells not only fire when people perform an action but even when they see, hear or suspect an action. Everyday experiences are also being viewed in a new light. Mirror neurons reveal how children
learn, why people respond to certain types of sports, dance, music and art and why watching media violence may be harmful. They can literally make a person “feel” that action in one’s body. For example, when people watch a football game it is not uncommon to hear a fan yelling at a quarterback to throw the ball while mimicking the motion of a throw. Or when someone gets hit in the stomach with a ball, it is not uncommon to grab one’s own stomach. They automatically have empathy for that person. People know how they feel because they literally feel what the other is feeling. These experiences are a person’s mirror neurons at work.

People use this technique in professional sports today to improve athletic performances. A hockey coach will show players highlights of film from a previous game. As the players are watching the film, the player’s eyes follow the action on the ice and their mirror neurons fire in response causing their corresponding muscles in their body to contract. Even though they are only watching the game, their muscles are “practicing” the plays and their brains feel as if they are in the game.

Another way you might have experienced your mirror neurons in action is when someone else yawns, blushes or laughs. All are contagious. When seeing someone yawn, a person will yawn in response. Same with laughter, seeing another laugh can cause a person to laugh even if they are unsure what is going on.

As people grow older, they interact with many different people and gradually fill their experience database with memories and other’s emotions. They use this database for clues as to how to interpret other people’s actions, anticipate what they will do next
and react so. Mirror neurons are not the only part of the brain involved in social interactions. Many other parts of the nervous system are used to interpret messages. For example, when people see someone experiencing anger, their amygdale, another part of the brain that stores memories of emotion, is triggered.

Another aspect of body language starts at a young age with parent figures. These aspects are the familial aspects of body language. Body language is not solely the product of brain chemistry or the primitive past. Signals are received from those around us starting from when we are born. These signals continually shape a person’s body language. Mirror neurons are used as babies; when someone smiles at them they are likely to smile back. They store these emotions in their brains. They imitate these gestures and mannerisms of their caretakers. Since they are just learning body language they have a tendency to mimic other’s expressions.

Andrew Meltzoff, a developmental psychologist at the University of Washington, has termed this tendency the “like me” theory of child development. He says that babies are constantly evaluating other people’s actions to validate their belief that others are “like me”. They start to do this before they are able to use language. This is one reason why it is important to smile at babies and use tender body language; people are priming them to respond to others in the same empathetic, bonding way.

The “like me” method continues as people grow older. Human beings prefer to be with those who are similar to themselves. Parents or caretakers initiate the babies ability to start mirroring others and empathetic behavior. As the child ages, they continue
to build this database. Eventually, children meet others who are similar and in turn mimic each other. Over time, one group will develop certain behaviors that are very different from another group.

Much about body language is defined by culture. Some people greet with handshakes, some hugs and others a kiss. These cultural expressions are dictated by what are called “display rules”, the specific expectations every group has about body language (Reiman 34). Cultural displays vary from country to country, state to state and even city to city. For example in the United States nodding one’s head up and down means “yes”. In Bulgaria, nodding your head up and down means “no”. In Puerto Rico, couples touch each other 180 times more often than couples in England. This is not because of biological aspects but how often their parents touched them, and their grandparents touched their parents and so on.

As the world becomes more culturally diverse, the norms of culture are becoming more alike. The more children are exposed to different cultures, the more likely they are to recognize a variety of people as “like me”. Studies show that the people who have the most contact with other cultures have the least bigoted views about others.

While cultural norms influence people’s body language, so does individual temperaments. Some traits are genetic, such that people are assertive, empathetic or aggressive. Others such as being shy or extroverted may not be genetic. All still impact how we communicate. The more extroverted one is, the more empathetic their gestures are and the more they are likely to use their entire body while communicating (Reiman
Some differences are caused by innate hormonal and biological differences. Another difference is gender. Men and women have different ways of transmitting and receiving body language signals.

MALE AND FEMALE DIFFERENCES

When it comes to communication, male and females differ. I am sure if you asked a husband, wife, girlfriend or boyfriend they would all agree with that statement. Women have a more complex connection between both hemispheres of their brain, allowing them to take in more information quicker. They are better at decoding nonverbal cues of others. Girls are also better at recognizing faces past infancy and starting at age 8 most American girls are able to label nonverbal actions more accurately (Reiman 33). Women can make quick judgments about a person’s intentions because their neural connections in their decision making centers, the frontal cortex, are more highly developed (Reiman 227). This might be due to our ancestors and their “motherly instincts”. Primitive women had to rely on decoding nonverbal cues quickly to decide if another person was a threat or danger to their child. Men have a less complex connection. They tend to only use one side at a time, taking in one message at a time.

Men and women have different ways of transmitting and receiving body language signals due to innate hormonal, biological and cultural differences. When it comes to facial communication the main differences are eye contact, smiling and gazing. Women tend to smile and laugh more to meet role expectations or to cover-up uncomfortable situations rather than out of genuine feelings of liking. Men will only smile after they
feel comfortable and generally to express affiliative tendencies (Blahna 5). It has also been proven that women tend to like eye contact more than men (Reiman 52). Women will spend more time gazing at their partner. They will look more at a person they like while speaking while men look at a person they like while listening (Blahna 6). However, women are more likely to break eye contact with men because they do not want to encourage communicational advances. Men often misread prolonged eye contact as a sign of attraction (Reiman 55). Emotions are another facial gesture that differs. They are easier to read on woman’s face than on a man’s partially due to cultural beliefs that males are tougher (Reiman 47). Another facial gesture that women are more likely to do is to nod. Women will nod merely to indicate they are listening, not necessarily to signal agreement. Men only nod when they agree (Franken 1).

Another area that men and women differ in body language is posture and body movements. In a social situation men tend to assume a more relaxed posture than women do regardless of the sex of the partner. Men shift their legs and seating position more than women do in a conversation. Both genders are more relaxed with same sexed partners. When it comes to space, women are more likely to have a smaller personal space due to the fact males tend to be seen as more dominating. Also men are more likely to initiate touch and contact for the same reason (Blahna 7-8). Men and women also differ when it comes to creating first impression of people which can be read about in Chapter 3. It is important to remember there is a difference between how genders communicate in terms of nonverbal communication. These differences must be taken into consideration so as to avoid miscommunications.
IMPORTANCE OF BODY LANGUAGE

When it comes to body language, one of the most important concepts to reiterate is the fact it never stops. A person might not be communicating verbally but one cannot stop nonverbal communication. Someone can control it to an extent by what they wear, how they walk, facial expressions, and posture to name a few. Other movements are completely subconscious. Generally, most people are unaware about how they are being perceived. They may believe they do but they do not and the lack of awareness hurts them (Reiman 208).

An example of an area people are unaware of is facial expressions. Human being’s faces are so complex they are impossible to control all the time. Paul Ekman and his colleagues determined in a study that there are forty three finely tuned muscles in the human face which can be combined and reorganized into 10,000 possible combinations of expressions; only 3,000 have been linked to a specific feeling in the body. We react to these specific feelings in facial expressions subconsciously too. In a 2000 study, a Swedish researcher used subliminal techniques to show pictures of happy or angry faces to subjects without their knowledge. Just 30 milliseconds or 1/100th of a second of exposure was all it took for the subjects corresponding facial muscles to imitate the emotion without knowing what they saw. His research concluded that the human body works fast than the mind.

Another facial response that people use subconsciously relates to the human eye. A person’s pupils will dilate when they see something that excites them. This is a reason
poker players wear sunglasses when playing poker; to hide their pupils from sight so others cannot detect when they have a good hand. So if one was trying to determine if a person liked them, they could look at their pupils to see if they are dilated (Fagan 1).

One last help hint involving facial expressions is blinking. On average people blink six to ten times a minute. However, when under stress that frequency can increase. This could be a sign that a person is lying or being deceitful. For example, a researcher found that when President Clinton was asked about his teenage drug use during a debate, his blink rate increased from an earlier debate of 43 blinks per minute to 117 blinks per minute (Reiman 57).

All these small details might be subconscious and seem irrelevant but if a person becomes educated and aware of them they can use them to their advantage. Most people come into contact with others every day. Some contact is with people we see often, other times it is with people we might never see again. Interaction is not just created verbally. People interact with others even when they pass by. For example, when a person walks past people on the streets they quickly raise then lower their eyebrows without realizing it. It is a person’s face saying hello without their own conscious participation. People do this forty or fifty times a day and 80% of people will say hello with their eyebrows back without realize (Reiman 61).

Subconsciously or not, interaction is always taking place between people that have never met before. This interaction could be an interview at a new job, in the checkout line at the store, or the person next to you in their car. Body language is
important because each person someone interacts with will create a judgment within one
tenth of a second about a person’s competence, likeability, trustworthiness and
attractiveness based on nonverbal communication signals. A person is creating their first
impression of that person and their next steps in their interaction will be based on it.
CHAPTER 3

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Each time a person meets someone they create a first impression. First impressions are all initial judgments based on nonverbal communication signals. A series of experiments by Princeton psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov reveal that it took a tenth of a second to form an impression of a stranger's face, and that longer exposure does not significantly alter those impressions (Wargo 1). In a blink of an eye people take a tiny sample of a person and assume it portrays 100% of their personality. People decide whether they like them, trust them or want to continue an interaction with them. Research has shown that people make relatively accurate evaluations based on rapid observations of less than half a minute (Nauert 1). A person must prove they are a decent, genuine, trustworthy person with nonverbal communication in one tenth of a second or interaction might not continue.

One example of the importance of first impressions is in job interviews. Studies have shown that job interviewers will be decided within the first few minutes if the person is right for job. Instead of basing their hiring decisions on cronyism, employers now hire based on subconscious decisions that are made very early in the hiring process (Jenson 1). First, the person is identified and judged for a job by their body language before they speak. The connection between physical appearance and nonverbal communication is important. The physical appearance as well as the decisions people
make to maintain or alter their physical appearance communicates powerful nonverbal
signals to others. The physical appearance of others impacts people’s perception of them,
how they communicate with them and how approachable they are. More employers are
searching for people who have “the look” that will build business (Ivry and Wall, 352-53). Getting the job can be based more on how much the interviewer likes the applicant than on the applicant’s professional background and their likelihood of fulfilling the requirements of the position. Good news is with proper knowledge and research steps can be taken to gain that positive first impression.

No matter the person, they will judge you. Some people consider themselves
open to many different types of people but as humans our subconscious judgments stem
from our ancestors. Before verbal communication, humans made judgments to ensure survival. Will this person steal my food or help me gather food? Will they be a good mother to my child? Accurate first impressions had to be made to stay alive.

Some questions stand out about first impressions. Why do we make first impressions? How do we make first impressions? Are first impressions accurate? Are some people better at making first impressions than others? All questions have multiple answers that can better explain the sociological, psychological and biological aspects of first impressions.

EVOLUTION OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Why do we form first impressions? There are many theoretical perspectives that can be applied to this question and one of them is the theory of evolution that has been
mentioned. Underlying most exercises in human evolutionary psychology is the assumption that the human genome evolved in response to features of the local ecology. Specific behavioral responses had specific implications for reproductive fitness which in return had consequences for cognition.

Many features of human cognition may have evolved to facilitate specific forms of fitness-enhancing social behavior. Loners and outcasts are unlikely to have access to desirable mates or receive the material benefits of kinship, therefore, specific aspects of human cognition that help promote sociality evolved. As social interaction evolved creating benefits, potential threats were also created. Some had intentions of doing harm evolving specific aspects of human cognition that detect and respond to potential harm doers. But what does that have to do with first impressions?

People form first impressions spontaneously and with minimal cognitive effort. The effortless formation of first impressions can be produced by repeated practice and over learning. People may be adaptively predisposed to form immediate impressions of others. When detecting the fitness-relevant features of others, it is often essential to act fast. If someone is untrustworthy, one would be better to detect that trait immediately. If one cannot detect it, they will probably end up injured or cheated. Accordingly, there may have been substantial adaptive advantages associated with any mechanism that promotes instant inferences about threat-related characteristics in people.

Inferential speed is essential for avoidance of social dangers but can also be relevant to attainment of social opportunities too. When mating opportunities arise, it may be necessary to make an immediate decision on whether to pursue it because that
window of opportunity can close quickly. Thus, adaptive advantages associated with mechanisms that promote immediate discrimination between fit and unfit mates may have occurred.

Not all first impressions need to be perfect and infallible. As long as immediate impressions are minimally correct, it is more of an advantage to form a first impression than to dither and deliberate. Exposure to a person for just a few seconds produces first impressions that are often remarkably accurate. This again brings up the argument that it would defy logic of evolution if people did not form immediate impressions of others.

However, some inferential errors are inevitable. Different kinds of errors have different implications for reproductive fitness. According to the “smoke detector principle”, the failure to detect a real danger can have far more costly implications than the detection of a danger that does not really exist. This is why smoke detectors are calibrated to err on the side of false alarms. Thus psychological mechanisms may have evolved to implicitly err on the side of detecting a danger that is not there when inferring the potentially dangerous intentions of others. It also suggest that these first impressions are more likely to be negative than the positive. Like the smoke-detector principle, there may be grave fitness if a person’s first impression is that a another person is nice when in reality they are mean; there are more modest cost if the person thinks they are mean but they turn out to be nice. The inferential implication is that a strong negative impression (“He is a jerk!”) may be formed on the basis of little information but a strong positive impression (“He is so nice!”) may require greater amounts of information. Positive first
impressions can also be easily reversed by additional information, but a negative first impression may persist in the face of contradictory information.

There are also gender differences when it comes to the smoke detector principle. There is a profound gender difference in the number of offspring that men and women can produce; consequently, a poor mating decision has a greater cost to a woman than it does a man. Because of this women are more likely than men to err on the side of detecting a danger that does not exist; hence the reason women have a reputation of being picky today.

These theories suggest the existence of an evolved “personality judgment instinct. According to Haselton and Funer (2006) observations, “consistent individual differences in judgmental ability have been difficult surprisingly difficult to establish…Perhaps this is because personality judgment is such an essential life skill that nearly everyone can do it well enough to get by”. However, it is extraordinarily tricky to draw conclusions about evolutionary adaptations. Still, it is within the realm of possibility that our tendency to form fast and frugal first impressions is not merely a product of practice; it may be instinctual (Ambady and Skowronski 15-20).

EMPATHY AND CREATING IMPRESSIONS

When we first form impressions of another, what happens? What social information is processed by the brain? Another theory behind first impressions is that in the typical brain an empathy system is constantly active when looking at someone else’s
face or when interpreting another’s actions. Empathy varies in terms of individual differences, especially in gender differences.

In most cases, people start to empathize as soon as they make eye contact with another person, or as they look at their posture, actions and the context. Empathizing is the drive to identify another person’s thoughts and responds to these appropriately (Davis 6). Empathizing is about calculating what someone else thinks and feels, and having an appropriate emotional reaction inside that is triggered by that emotion. People empathize to understand others, to predict their behavior and to connect with them emotionally. When a person sees another upset or crying, we automatically feel concern and have a desire to help. Imagine a person, Sarah, is on a bus and sees a girl with their head down crying. If Sarah saw this image and felt cold or happy to see a person crying, she would not be empathizing. But what if instead when Sarah sees her crying that she starts to become concerned and becomes sad herself. Now she is experiencing a desire to run over and comfort the girl to help alleviate her sadness. That is empathy. It is not only recognizing another’s emotion but being able to react to it too. However, empathy is a skill and varies across individuals. Not everyone empathizes the same way and some people cannot at all.

Empathy is a major feature of human relationships. It is the reason people stop themselves from doing things that would hurt another person’s feelings. It stops one from inflicting pain on a person or animal. It allows people to tune into someone else’s world, putting their own world on hold. Empathy allows you to care for another person even if they are unrelated to you or you stand nothing to gain in return. It allows real
communication to take place instead of talking “at” a person (Ambady and Skowronski 58).

GENDER DIFFERENCE IN EMPATHY

The study of individual differences in empathizing is important. One study is the difference between male and female abilities to display empathy. Many studies converge on the conclusion that there is a female superiority in empathizing. For example, on average girls show more concern for fairness and boys share less. In a study conducted by Charlesworth and Druz (1987) boys showed 50 times more competition, while girls were more likely to share and take turns.

One that effects first impressions is how each person responds to the distress of other people. According to Hoffman (1977), girls from 1 year and on show a greater concern for sad looks and vocals. More women than men also report frequently sharing emotional distress of their friends. They are also more likely to comfort a stranger than men do. Therefore when creating a first impression of some who is sad, women’s’ empathy will more likely urge them to help that person and continue an interaction whereas men are more likely to create a first impression to leave them alone.

Another way empathy affects first impressions in male and females is the ability to infer what people might be thinking or intending. In a study by Happe (1995), by 3 years of age girls are ahead of boys in the ability to infer what people are thinking and intending. This might be in connection with the evolution of creating first impressions. Since females had to think and protect the lives their children and themselves, it would be in their best interest to be able to infer a person’s next move. Men would generally hunt
in group, but each male was responsible for their own safety. Since they only had to worry about their own life, they did not need to have to think as quickly as a female who was protecting multiple lives.

Empathy also affects sensitivity to facial expressions. According to Hall (1978) women are better at decoding nonverbal communication, picking up subtle nuances from the tone of voice or facial expression, or judging a person’s character. They will key into subtle signals like voice change to understand how a person is really feeling; are they mad, sad, happy or jealous. Since women are able to decode these signals better, they can make more reliable first impressions quicker.

Male and females both have different language styles as well which can affect initial impressions. Girl’s speech is more cooperative, reciprocal and collaborative according to Smith (1995). They are able to keep a conversational exchange with a partner going for longer. When girls disagree, they will express their different opinion sensitively, in the form of a question rather than an assertion. For example, Tara’s friend is having problem with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend canceled plans on her last minute the other night and she is upset. So instead of saying that was wrong of him to cancel on you, Tara will put it in the form of a question; don’t you think that was wrong of him to cancel plans on you? Therefore, Tara is still expressing her opinion but not being assertive about it so as not to offend her friend. Girls’ speak in a double voiced style, spending more time negotiating with the other person, taking their wishes into account. Instead, boys’ talk to more single-voiced, presenting only his opinion. If looked at based
on a first impression, one might assume him to be more self-centered and harder to hold a conversation.

Another reason females might be better at first impression begins at birth. They have as babies to look longer at faces, and particularly at people’s eyes. Males are more likely to look at inanimate objects (Ambady and Skowronski 67). This could also explain why females are better at decoding nonverbal communication because they focus on it at a much younger age.

ACCURACY OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Forming first impressions of people is a constant part of everyday life. Humans perceive and generalize from between different behaviors, appearances and other personal qualities to predict social interaction and a sense of order. By using judgments based on generalizations as well as stereotypes and knowledge learned from society people are able to make inferences about new people they meet with very little information. By making judgments people are able to answer questions such as: Is this person telling me the truth? Is this guy really going to call me for a second date? Do my friends really like my new hair cut? Even though we all create first impressions, some people are more accurate than others.

Accuracy of first impressions, or AFI, differs from person to person. Even though everyone makes first impressions, researchers have tried to identify why some are especially correct or incorrect in drawing conclusions about strangers based on very little information. But, how do researchers test if a person has high or lower AFI?
CALCULATING AFI

Researchers generally capture excerpts of behavior in some recorded medium, such as videotape, so that the same excerpts can be shown to different perceivers. The stimuli are kept constant so that a given perceiver’s accuracy in drawing a first impression can be compared to others accuracy. Data then can be collected in a range of accuracy scores which can be attributed to the perceivers’ ability to make judgments. Once the stimuli have been decided upon, researchers can create standardized test to collect the data needed.

Standardized interpersonal sensitivity tests or widely used stimulus sets are used to monitor AFI. These tests are used in research to measure first impressions contain only nonverbal cues of the face, body or voice or accompanied by limited verbal cues. Some examples of these tests are: Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy (Nowicki and Duke, 1994), the Interpersonal Perception Test (Costanzo and Archer 1989) and the Pictures of Facial Affect (Ekman and Friesen 1976). Some tests are used multiple times, whereas others are used for a one-time specific case study (Ambady and Skowrons 88).

The cues being judged in these tests are predominately facial expressions or personality traits. Some use still photos while others use movement via videotapes. Some depict just the face, some the body and others the total person. Verbal communication is kept to a minimum or can be masked by the use of electronic filtering or standard content. The amount of time the excerpts are shown vary. They can range from less than a second to a minute or more. Each test has different variables but as long as they are kept constant, results can be analyzed.
What these tests have in common is that the perceiver must make a judgment about the stimulus person based on limited information. That information can then be scored for accuracy based on a calculated scoring criteria developed by the researcher. The scoring criteria can vary based on research and the stimuli being shown. The goal of all AFI standardized tests are to calculate how high or low a person’s accuracy is, therefore, using a variety of testing instruments to see AFI correlation strength is suggested.

But if people have high AFI in one category, will they have high AFI in every category? Let’s say Nancy is a good judge of stranger’s emotional states, will she also be a good judge of their intelligence or other qualities? Similarly, if she can judge emotions on faces will she be as equally good when only hearing voices? The answer is no. Knowing a person’s measured AFI in one domain is not a good predictor of that person’s measured AFI in other domains. Therefore, different AFI tests are not interchangeable. In order to calculate a person’s complete AFI, more than one test needs to be relied upon.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN AFI

Just as in the differences between how male and females think and speak, the accuracy of their first impressions also differs. The most widely documented group differences discovered by Hall (1978) is that women generally score higher than men on tests of AFI. Again, this can trace its roots back to evolution and the need for women to think for two when creating quick, accurate impressions to survive. Evident cross-culturally, Hall reported that females’ hold advantage in judging faces, bodies and vocals.
Women’s advantage is very evident for judging emotions, whereas men are better at judging relative status of two people (Schmid Mast and Hall 160). This might be linked to the fact women are more empathetic when it comes to emotions and talking about emotions whereas men can become fixated on status symbols.

AFI AND PERSONAL CORRELATIONS

Can high AFI accurately depict how well one gets along in the social world? Extensive research evidence indicates “yes” to this question (Ambady and Skowronska 93). In all likelihood, those individuals identified as higher in AFI will reap social benefits and are said to be more popular, according to peer reports (Nowicki and Duke 12). Higher-AFI adults report themselves to be less lonely and have a higher relationship well being according to researchers Carton, Kessler and Pape (1999). Perhaps a contributor to these effects is the high-AFI person’s heightened pro social tendencies. People with higher AFI also have more positive attachment styles (more secure and preoccupied, less dismissive and fearful) than those with lower AFI founded by the 2005 research by Cooley.

The correlation between AFI in the work place can also be measure. Those with higher AFI received higher salary raises and tended to be in higher ranks within a university. Elfenbein and Ambady (2002) found that individuals higher in AFI received higher performance ratings from senior staff and peers. Perhaps higher AFI directly influences performance, so those higher in AFI do a better job. Another possibility is that success or a higher rank in an organization place personal demands on a person that have
the effect of increasing his or her interpersonal sensitivity over time (Ambady and Skowronski 93-94).

People who have higher AFI also have fewer depressive symptoms. They have less social anxiety, shyness and communication apprehension. They also report higher social competence. Individuals with high AFI have higher internal focus of control and are more open to new experiences, which suggest a confident, mentally healthy approach to life. They report being more generally interested in and attuned to the social environment. Generally, people with higher AFI report being more expressive and having better conversations skills than people with lower AFI (Ambady and Skowronski 94).

Those with high AFI report a need for social belonging, describe themselves as warm and sociable, and are reported by friends as needing to seek reassurance from others. They are usually extroverted personalities. People with high AFI may be attuned to decoding the cues in order to be accepted and liked by others. They are also more empathetic because of their close analysis of others body language Funder and Harris 1986).

Researchers Funder and Harris (1986) gathered ratings from close friends to see what they had to say about friends with high AFI. Those subjects with high AFI were seen by their friends as being sought out for advice and reassurance. They were reported as being warm, compassionate and capable of close relationships. They were sympathetic and considerate, low on hostility and deceitfulness and low on rebelliousness
and nonconformity. The ratings from the close friends converged well with the self-report findings.

One study by Hodgins and Koestner (1993) took a longitudinal approach relating childhood and parental variables collected early in life to AFI measured at age 31. Those with high AFI were rated at age 5 by the mother as having a less difficult temperament. In each situation the fathers exercised an intermediate level of strictness and both parents agreed more with each other about childrearing practices. The author suggested an easy temperament combined with a united and structured household formed a positive environment for the development of interpersonal sensitivity.

However, self-insight into AFI is relatively weak. Individuals have some idea of how skilled they are at test-specific and general decoding nonverbal abilities but the ratings are not strong enough to justify using self-rating tests for AFI. Researchers are unsure as to why self-insight into AFI is mediocre. Perhaps people do not get enough feedback on their AFI to develop and accurate impression of their self-awareness (Ambady and Skowronski 96).

Another important thought to look at is if there is a correlation between AFI and intelligence. Is high AFI a product of being smart? Numerous studies (Davis and Kraus, 1997) have investigated this question and found that there is no correlation between intelligence and AFI. Thus, there is little evidence to suggest AFI reflects intelligence.

However, people with more knowledgeable of specific areas involving AFI tend to have higher AFI. For example those who are well-informed about nonverbal communication have higher AFI. They know what to look for and how to react better
than one who is less informed. They have a greater social intelligence than others. Therefore, it would seem that areas under the heading of social intelligence predict AFI (Davitz, 1964).

There are also individual differences that exist in a person’s attitude towards other people. Hall and Carter (1999) conducted research that suggest that those who are good at AFI use less gender stereotyping and do not endorse the belief that some groups are superior to others in social aspects. Research also shows that people who have better AFIs are less prejudice than those who do not.

CASE STUDIES ON ACCURACY OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Judgments play a powerful role in how people treat others and how others treat them. Psychologists have known that attractive people get better outcomes in practically all walks of life. But how accurate are quick snap judgments? Willis and Todorov conducted several experiments to study judgments of facial appearances and time, each focusing on a different trait: attractiveness, likeability, competence, trustworthiness and aggressiveness. Participants were shown photographs of unfamiliar faces for 100 milliseconds, 500 milliseconds (half a second), or 1,000 milliseconds (one second) and were asked to immediately judge the faces for the trait in question. For example, is this person competent? Response time was measure. Participants then had to rate their confidence in making their judgments.

Participants’ judgments were compared with preliminary study results, in which the same experiment was conducted but no time constraints were given to judge the
personality trait of the face. For all five traits studied, judgments made after 1/10 of a second were highly correlated with judgments made without time constraints. Response times also revealed that participants made their judgments as quickly after seeing a face for 1/10 of a second as they did if given a longer glimpse.

Out of all the traits, trustworthiness had the highest correlation between judgments made after 1/10-second and judgments made without time constraints. The authors suggested based on evolutionary psychology, that the accelerated and accurate ability to judge trustworthiness in others may have evolved as an important survival mechanism (Vargo 1).

Another 1993 study by Nalini Ambady and Robert Rosenthal, experimental psychologists at Harvard University, found that students can make an accurate judgment of a teacher’s end-of-semester evaluation with little information. Ambady and Rosenthal extracted 3, 10-second video clips of 13 Harvard teachers from tapes of entire class sessions. These 39 clips were randomized and presented without sound to 9 female college students, who rated them on a scale from 1 to 9 on a 15-time checklist of personality traits, including “accepting”, “attentive”, “supportive” and “enthusiastic” (Munger 1). These videos were later cut down to 2-second video clips.

The teachers were then rated by their own students at the end of the term based on the same personality checklist. The correlation between the 2-second ratings for the college teachers and the overall end-of-semester effectiveness ratings were significant. The students’ conclusions after watching the 2-second video clip of a teacher they had never met were very similar to the conclusions reached by classroom participants after an
entire semester’s exposure (Jenson 1). Without hearing the teacher’s voice, based solely on body language, accurate impressions were made. One concern is what if both male and female students were shown the video clips instead of just female? There are gender differences in first impressions just as there are in body language.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

A large amount of research shows that it is good to be able to draw accurate inferences about people based on first impressions (Ambady and Skowronski 98). AFI influences relationships and in the workplace. It also is related to an assortment of positive personality characteristics, many of which are interpersonal in nature. AFI is related to social adjustment and mental health, but is in no way an indication of general intelligence.

Having a higher AFI has many practical implications. These included enhanced ability to detect whether a date is going well, whether to carry on the relationship or let it die out. It is positive for potential employers to be able to detect whether someone would be a good fit for their company or not. It is also beneficial for everyday interaction with people. People with high AFI can discriminate friend from foe easier which can benefit their overall happiness. It can also lead to rewards such as increased raises and higher performance ratings on a job.

It is not fully understood where high and low AFI come from. Like body language it is affected by different areas in a person’s life. Development of AFI is a combination of environmental and personal factors. Certain experiences can also
influence AFI. For example according to Swenson and Casmir (1998), individuals who spent more time traveling abroad scored higher on AFI. This suggests that travel experiences expand interpersonal sensitivity because of the need to communicate despite a language barrier. It forces people to communicate with nonverbal communication. People develop first impressions of others with only nonverbal communication to decide if they can communicate with that person; will they be patient enough to try and communicate with me and will I get a friendly, nonthreatening response? It can also depend on experience in the work place. A person who is working in human relations or supervising others on the job might be required to have a higher level of AFI, whereas, a mechanic who focuses on cars might not. Since the mechanic is not working with people they are not developing their AFI.

AFI can be a complicated matter to research because it is all about cause and effects. Are some people born with higher AFI’s that then affect their social abilities and rewards or does a person’s social abilities affect their AFI? Can AFI be taught or is it an unconscious behavior. These are many of the questions still being discussed about accuracy of first impressions but either way the benefits can be seen
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY AND FIELD RESEARCH: BODY LANGUAGE

In order to further analyze body language and first impressions, a two part case study was conducted. In the first part, thirty minute presentations were analyzed by video. These videos were taken of the senior level interior design students at Kent State University and recorded at the end of the semester in Fall 2010 of their final project presentations. There were a total of 11 groups of three which presented to an array of audience members including students, professors and design, and business professionals. During the Fall semester, the students designed a sustainable hub for Forest City Development Corporation to be built in Tower City Mall in downtown Cleveland, Ohio. The presentations of the design were the final presentations before the selection of the winning design group by Forest City. It also helped determine the student’s final grade for the class. The group presentations were then used in the senior thesis for analysis.

After reviewing each thirty minute group presentations, 8 students from various groups were chosen. Each student displayed a variety of nonverbal signals, communicating in slightly different manners. Body language of individual students were analyzed and noted. Below are the results of the analysis. None of the subjects will be named in the thesis nor will the gender of the student be given. Each person was analyzed based on the following criteria: facial language, body language, proxemics or their use of the space were all analyzed when they were presenting and when they were
not presenting. Since each student displayed a variety of nonverbal communication practices, some were analyzed more closely in those areas. For example, one student would use his or her feet to communicate he or she was nervous versus another who would bite their lip.

PERSON # 1

Person #1 displayed more nonverbal communication when it came to their hands than any other form. The subject’s facial language was very controlled. When not presenting the student would smile or have a relaxed appearance. The student would give a reassuring smile every often to group members in support. Eye contact was made longer with visiting audience members showing confidence. When not speaking their eyes settled on whoever was speaking. Very few eye movements were made away from the person they were talking to, what they were talking about or who was talking. It showed the subject had been listening intently. The student’s head movements were very controlled, nodding in agreement or emphasis. Few other head movements were made. One key nonverbal cue the subject would make was to change his or her pitch in their voice when making a point. To emphasize his or her stronger points, the tone of Person 1’s voice would become higher, grabbing listeners’ attention.

The student’s body language was very controlled, presenting few self-touching habits. Rarely the student would clasp their hands together in front of their body. Self-touching is when a person will rub a hand on a part of their body for reassurance. It can be seen as a lack of confidence. For example, rubbing your hands together or rubbing
your hand along your other arm is the body’s way of self-comforting. All students displaced this in some form when talking other than Person #1. The subject used many hand gestures but never put their hands completely together. Their arm movements were very open and slower. Arm motions were kept further away from their body instead of close to their chest or waist. The lack of self-touching reinforced confidence and made the person appear more open and approachable.

Just like any person, the subject had body language comforting habits. Every person has a body language habit they use without being fully aware. He or she would put their left hand on his or her hip and continue to gesture with their right hand. The student never put the opposite hand on their left hip.

The rest of the body movements were very deliberate and slow. The subject’s feet, which often display their own body language signs, never moved from shoulder width apart and pointed at the guest which showed they were attentive. No unnecessary body movements were made and all movements reinforced their words. The subject stayed close to the guest audience and group members suggesting their attentiveness. Rarely did the student touch their face. Despite how controlled body language was, body positioning never seemed unnatural.

Another area of interested that was noted was the subject would laugh. Like most people when they laugh, laughter loosens all body movements and can relax a person. The subject’s back and head posture would become less straight, stepping out of presentation mode and becoming more relatable. The tension between “you are the
presenter and I am the audience” is lifted during those moments, suggesting how laughter can increase likeability and comfort levels between people.

PERSON # 2

In Person 2’s video, the majority of nonverbal communication cues signal a sense of hesitation. The subject made few facial movements but tension can be seen in their forehead. When not speaking, their eyebrows are furrowed and lowered in thought or a confused expression. This also creates the wrinkles on the forehead to visible to others. Direct eye contact is avoided, moving his or her eyes around often and taking longer glances at the subject matter or poster they were referencing. Eye contact was made with fellow group members for reinforcements nods only. The subject would bite their inner cheek or lower lip, another sign of thought and hesitation.

Person # 2 used a variety of self-comfort touching habits. The majority of time when speaking his or her right arm would cross their body and their right hand would latch onto their left arm. When not talking, both arms would cross the body. Few and gestures were made since their hands were not free to gesture. The subject would touch their face, hair and earrings with their right hand, another form of self-touching. Their hands would stay within their body limit. This expressed their lack of confidence because it appeared the subject was physically closing themselves off to others.

The subject’s shoulders were always slightly hunched or slouched. When talking about a specific purpose or reason the subject would shrug their shoulders contradicting
their words. When one shrugs their shoulders, it can be another way of say “I guess” with their body. It showed a lack of confidence and expressed doubt.

Hesitation could be seen in their feet. The feet were crossed and turned away from the guest. When a person’s feet are crossed or very close together, it suggests their personality is closed off. It showed Person 2 was unsure and not open to questions.

When not presenting, the subject’s movements repeated lack of confidence. Movement around the space was made often. The student was unsure of where to stand when not speaking. They would play with a paper in their hand and avoid eye contact. His or her arms would be crossed when standing. Sometimes they would rest their chin on a hand. These body language signs showed that the subject was not fully attentive in the presentation or do not want to be there.

An interesting observation while watching the video was that, Person # 2 did a quality job at speaking. Speech was confident and but all body language signs contradicted how this confidence. If the student became more aware of body language signals, they could be a good public speaker.

PERSON # 3

Person # 3 was easily the most uncomfortable to watch. The majority of the subject’s nonverbal signals were in his or her body movements. Few major facial expressions were made. The subject tended to laugh or smile when uncomfortable and would raise their eyebrows when answering and listening to questions. The student
would make eye contact rarely and when he or she did it was not for long. The majority of the time the subject’s eyes would bounce around the room from floor to ceiling to people and back to objects. The student would look down at the floor often. It created the idea that the subject was uncomfortable with the audiences’ eye contact. The student looked up and to the right when agreeing with another person’s comment or idea.

When talking, Person #3 made no pauses. They created a sound or noise when not speaking and spoke quickly. The only time the subject would slow down was when he or she had been spoken to about a topic they were confident about. The subject would lick both their lips or bite their bottom lip when not talking and when asked a question. This is a sign of hesitation and lack of confidence. All head movements were very sporadic and quick. Unnatural movements were seen in their neck when unsure. This could be because the subject had been nervous their muscles would tense in their neck making it hard for their head to move.

Hand and arm movements were used most often. The student would not keep their hands or arms still. If the subject’s hands were not clasped in front of the lower body, his or her left hand would be placed in their pocket; the right hand was then used to gesture. All hand movements were quick and stiff. The student’s hands stayed within shoulder width the majority of the time, closing their body off from the audience. None of the subject’s hand movements were elaborate or deliberate. The hand motions were because of nervous habits. It was painful to watch how stiff and unnatural every body movement was and was distracting.
Person #3’s posture and stance was uncomfortable to watch. They remained very stiff throughout the whole presentation. The subject would lean their weight on one foot and lift the other up on its toes. When weight was not on one foot, they would rock back and forth or side to side. The student was always moving. He or she would move around them room taking small steps to the side, readjusting their position. It showed nervous and hesitant.

Rarely was Person #3 completely still, therefore, when they were it was noticeable. The only time the student would remain still was when they were listening attentively to another speaker. Usually, this was when they were asked a question. If the subject was still moving when the question was being asked, the speaker did not have the student’s full attention.

PERSON #4

Person #4 has very limited nonverbal communication signals but the majority of nonverbal communication was by their eyes. The facial features are limited, including smiling. The student would bite the inside of their lip when thinking or when they were pausing. They do not make eye contact with people for long. Instead their eyes moved around the room suggesting uneasiness. The subject’s eye contact increased when they were comfortable talking about a subject matter. This student was the first one that blinked often. Rapid eye blinking movements were present throughout the presentation. Blinking can increase when someone is nervous or lying.
The subject used his or her feet to communication. The student would rock up on the tips of their toes or side to side. Often the legs would be crossed which signaled discomfort. Crossed legs are another way to comfort the body by trying to protect oneself physically. The student also used forms of self-comforting with their hands but rarely. Person # 4 would clasp their hands across their body and use the right hand to gesture. The right hand was then used to gesture

The subject had a tendency to talk very quickly and forget to breath. At the end of a long sentence they would take big breaths. The student avoided pauses but replaced them with fillers such as ums and ahs. Overall their nonverbal communication signals were limited other than their lack of eye contact.

PERSON # 5

Person # 5 used hand gestures the most when communication. The student had very subtle facial expressions, the majority of the time they were more serious. Eye contact was used longer. Few eye movements were made, keeping their eyes steady. After analysis, it was clear that when the student had been thinking they would look up and to the right. Generally, when people are lying they will look up and to the left. Very rarely did the subject look at anything other than the audience or the materials they were speaking about. When not speaking, the subject watched the speaker or the audience. He or she used head movements often in the form of nods for agreement or reinforcing their own thoughts.
The most notable form of body language the student used was their hands. Very often when they spoke there was also hand movement. The student would motion on the beat with his or her own words for emphasis. Their hand motions were slow and deliberate. Both the left hand and the right hand were used to gesture. Very rarely did they display self-touching gestures. The student would push their hair behind their ear or adjusting their glasses habitually.

When standing, the student appeared stiff at times because they would lock their knees into place and slightly slouch. The subject’s feet were always shoulder width apart and towards the audience. Very few body movements other than hand gestures were made. An interesting observation was that when they were in thought or would pause talking, the student would stop all body movements as well.

PERSON # 6

Person 6 displayed the most self-comforting habits. They smiled often and had softer facial expressions but only made eye contact quickly. When talking they would be looking down or up to avoid eye contact. Rarely would his or her eyes focus on an item for long. When not talking, the student would watch the speaker or the audience. The lack of eye contact reflected being nervous. The subject’s eye blinking rate increased, another sign of being uncomfortable. They talked very quickly and would bite the inside of their cheek when not speaking. Sounds, such as um, were used instead of taking pauses which became distracting.
Clearly noticeable was the student moved at least one arm. They would touch their face, back, hair, stomach, other arm, legs or ears. All are self-touching habits or ways to reassure oneself. This showed that the student was very nervous and tentative.

Another body language habit displaced was with by their feet. Often times the subject would cross their feet while standing. They would put weight on a back leg and lock it while flexing their hip. This can be taken as a sign of over confidence. It is a way a person can make themselves look bigger for intimidation factors. The subject would spread their legs further than shoulder width apart, another form of increasing body size to spark intimidation. However, it did not appear that that is the type of body language Person # 6 was trying to display. It appeared to be out of nervous habit.

PERSON # 7

This next student had a hard time staying still. The subject’s worst habit could be seen in their feet. They had good facial expressions, smiling often, but it was easy to tell the difference between the genuine and fake smiles. When a person is genuinely smiling, one will see the wrinkles on their face. When a person is forcing a smile, these smile wrinkles do not appear. The student created eye contact with the audience but rarely looked at his or her own group members when presenting. The subject would blink often, showing that they were nervous. A nervous habit was to bite or purse their lips. This could be a nervous habit. When a person becomes nervous, their mouth and lips dry quicker, therefore, people tend to lick their lips more often.
Some of the student’s body language gave off signs of being overconfident. This could be seen in the legs. One foot was directed away from the audience throughout the presentation. When a person directs their feet away from another, it can be a sign that they want to leave or do not want to be there. Not only was one foot pointed away but it was also more than shoulder length width apart. Again this creates the appearance one is bigger than another person to spark intimidation. The student flipped their hair back often which suggested over confidence or attitude. After watching the video, it appeared to be a nervous habit.

Many other signs pointed at them being unsure and nervous. One of their habits was to rock. The student would put weight on their left foot and stick their right foot out on the heel and rock on the heel of their right foot. They showed multiple self-comforting habits. For example, the subject would fold their arms across their body. This can be a negative sign to stay away from me. It can be the body’s way of blocking off people. Rarely did the student stop rocking or moving suggesting that they were nervous.

PERSON # 8

Person 8 did not keep the listener’s attention during presentation. The subject did not appear as if they wanted to be there. They rarely smiled and had minimal facial expressions with their mouth often appearing down-turned. Eye contact was rarely made with any audience or group members. When the student did make eye contact it was
briefly then quickly turning their head away. Most of the time the subject seemed to be in a day dream when not presenting.

Their body language also lacked enthusiasm. When not presenting he or she stood away from the group members. They intentionally created distance between themselves and one of their fellow group members. The student never watched the same group member when he or she was speaking. Often times the subject rolled their eyes suggesting that there was a conflict between the group member and themselves. They gestured often with their hands but it never seemed to follow any pattern. The student had self-comforting habits, such as rubbing their arm or clasping their hands together behind their back. This suggested they were nervous. Frantic movements such as quick head turns and no eye contact suggested that the student might not have been prepared for the presentation. They would frequently push their hair out of their face, which took attention away from what they were saying.
CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDY AND FIELD RESEARCH: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After each Kent State interior design student was analyzed for their nonverbal communication during each video presentation, the second half of the case study was conducted. This half of the case study was to determine first impressions based on a rating system and short video clips. The results were then analyzed with Part I of the research to determine how accurate the ratings were of each subject.

During this part, each presentation was cut into a clip of the student. Each clip was approximately 10 seconds long. Since first impressions are determined within 3 seconds of meeting a person, the clips were intentionally kept short. In those 10 seconds, the student presented their project to the audience. A total of 8 clips were made and sent out with an instruction sheet and rating form to reviewers. The only requirement was that reviewers could not know any of the individuals in the videos, that way it was their initial first impression of the student.

The students were rated on a scale of 1-10 on nine different characteristics. The nine different characteristics were: attentiveness, confidence, empathy, enthusiasm, honesty, likeability, professionalism, extroversion and competency. The participants were asked to rate each person on a scale of 1-10, 10 being the “most like” and 1 being
the “most unlike”, for each characteristic immediately after watching the 10 second clip of that person. For example, for a student to receive a 10 the person must be extremely confident and for the person to receive a 1 they must be extremely not confident. Each reviewer was advised to watch and rate one clip at a time before moving on. It was stressed that it was important for each to express their first instinct on the ratings and to not deliberate about what a person should receive. Once the participant finished rating the student, they were not allowed to go back and change any ratings. Reviewers were also asked to leave any additional comments if they had any. The results can be seen in the Appendix as well as the overall averages for each person in each category and totals. These tables will be referred to throughout.

In order to get a better understanding of how first impressions relate to body language the results of the analysis were compared with the results of the survey. Each characteristic was studied to understand what nonverbal communication signals determined what scores they received. The two highest and lowest scores of each person were analyzed for each characteristic. The students that scored in between displayed characteristics of both scores but were not analyzed as closely for that reason.

The scores for first impressions also closely reflected the observations about the student’s nonverbal communication, supporting the fact first impressions of people are accurate. As the reader will see, the analysis of the student’s body language in a 30 minute video was detected in a 10 second clip by reviewers. Below are the results and analysis from the Part 2 of the analysis.
ATTENTIVENESS

As seen in the Appendix, Person 1, 5, and 7 reported the highest scores but why? Eye contact was the greatest variable in attentiveness. The subject’s who made more eye contact with the audience received higher scores on attentiveness. Not only did each individual make eye contact with the audience but they held eye contact longer than every other presenter. They had control eye movements which suggested they were paying full attention to the presentation.

In each ten second clip, Person 1, 5 and 7 all engaged the listener’s into their conversation with eye contact, but Person 2 did not, receiving them the lowest score. Person 2 rarely made eye contact and when he did it was for briefly. The student’s eye contact was focused on the floor. When eye contact is not made between speaker and listener, the communication is disconnected. When a person is attentively listening and speaking to you they will hold their eye contact suggesting “I am fully engaged in this conversation and only this conversation”.

Eye contact is extremely important when trying to convey attentiveness because we tend to make eye contact more with people we like and agree with. It tells a person that you are listening. An attentive listener will hold eye contact roughly 70 percent of the time. When a person is perceived as an attentive listener they are also perceived as attentively speaking. Eye contact will engage both participants in a conversation. Studies have found that employers view prospective hires that do not make eye contact as
unattractive, detached, passive, incompetent, and lacking composure and social skills ((Reiman 53).

Another reason the following students received higher score involved their full body language. All students’ bodies were completely turned, opened and facing the speakers. When a person’s feet are pointed directly at another person, this is an unconscious sign that they are fully engaged in the conversation. Our feet will be the first to betray us when we want to leave a conversation. People will start to turn their feet away from the person, signaling they are trying to leave. However, when a person’s feet are directly pointed at the speaker, it then creates their whole body to be turned and pointed directly at the speaker and suggested that they are completely involved in the conversation. Some of the subjects would have their bodies facing the audience but their feet would be crossed in front, creating a disconnection in body language.

CONFIDENCE

Confidence is another characteristic that depends much on eye contact. When a person creates and holds eye contact, they are suggesting they are confident, trustworthy and know what they are talking about. Lack of eye contact can make a listener apprehensive about the speaker. Person 5 was rated the highest in confidence. This is a reflection on their eye contact but also another individual aspect of body language.

One nonverbal communication tool that suggested confidence in Person 5 was strong, deliberate movements. When a person becomes nervous, their body language will reflect that in frantic, unnatural movements. It is the same concept behind a person
talking when they are nervous: their voice varies and they talk faster and use more unnecessary fillers. The same applies for body language. Since each movement in the individual was natural, they appeared more confident. They made no unnecessary head movements. They controlled eye contact and movement in their hands as well as their feet. They also used their body language in the form of hand gestures to emphasize their words. This again showed movements that were deliberate suggesting confidence and that they knew what they were talking about.

Person 3 received the lowest scores for confidence. This not only had to do with their lack of eye contact but also their frantic, unnatural body movements. The subject never stopped moving when speaking. Their head swiveled from side to side, to floor and ceiling often. They also continuously moved and stepped with their feet while talking. Their hand movements were random, very short and closed in to their body. All of their body language signs suggested they were nervous which reflected their vocal communication signs.

EMPATHY

Empathy seemed to be the hardest for each person to rate. The total scores were the lowest of each category and all relatively close to each other. Person 4 received the highest score for empathy even though their scores for attentiveness and confidences were not the highest. Their body language displayed signs that they were nervous during their presentation which in turn made them appear more empathetic.
Confidence is a good thing to have when presenting but over confidence can a hurt a person when it comes to being able to relate to them. During presentations, most people are nervous. Therefore, when we see a person who is nervous when presenting we understand why and can relate. Person 4 is a good example of this concept. They knew the material they were speaking about but it was obvious they were nervous because of the lack of eye contact and unnatural hand gestures. However, their nervous habits were not overwhelming. Since their nervous habits were noticeable, it made them seem more human or more like the people in the audience listening because they know if they were in the student’s place they would be feeling the same emotions. Since Person 4 was reacting in the presentation to how most people would react when speaking in public it made them appear more human, therefore more empathetic.

Again, Person 3 was well below the average score for empathy. They did display nervous habits but they were excessive. The presentation was painful to watch to see how nervous he or she was. It was hard to tell if they were not prepared or if they were just that nervous. Since there is a disconnection between whether they were prepared for the presentation or not, it is harder to relate to their nervous habits. Questions start being asked if the person prepared for the presentation at all or are they wasting my time? This made the student to appear less empathetic because the audience can not relate to their extreme nervous habits.

ENTHUSIASM
Person 4 and 5 received the highest scores for enthusiasm. Eye contact, again, is important because it creates that connection for communication to be started. Hand gestures, which can be seen in Person 5, also display enthusiasm when they are used to reiterate the spoken word. The biggest nonverbal communication signal for enthusiasm is vocal nonverbal communication signals.

Vocal nonverbal signals include pitch, tone and rate of speech. When a person uses vocal signals to their benefit it encourages enthusiasm. Vocal pitch is a sign of enthusiasm. Just by emphasizing different word, different communication can be made. Pitch variation is what keeps people interested in what you are saying. By keeping their attention longer, it gives off enthusiasm in the speaker. For example, if a person is talking very mono tone we have a tendency to see them as boring and unenthusiastic even if that is not the case. Person 5 and 4 both change their vocal pitch to emphasize certain word of phrases which hold the audience’s attention. Vocal changes also increase energy levels for the speaker and audience. An increase in energy level, increases the audiences enthusiasm about what they speaker is saying.

Three people received the lowest score for enthusiasm: Person 2, 3, and 8. All have a disconnection in body language with lack of eye contact and their body being turned away from the audience. Their vocal pitch impacted their rating the most. Each presenter varied their pitch the least out of the 8 total presenters. This created the sense that they were unattached from their project and unenthused. Person 2 appeared to be nervous which created a lack of confidence and variety in pitch but Person 8 did display
other signs of detachment from the project and the group. The student did not listen or look at other group members when they were speaking.

HONESTY

Three subjects, 1, 4 and 5, received approximately the same score for honesty. Person 1 and 5 displayed honesty in their eye contact and opened body stances. Their hand gestures were kept opened and away from their body which opened their entire body up suggesting they had nothing to hide. For example, people who are nervous or uncomfortable might place their hand over their abdomen. Which suggest they are unapproachable. By keeping hand gestures in front and away from your body, it creates the appearance that a person is more approachable and honest.

Person 4 displayed honesty in a different approach. Much like how they were rated highest in empathy, it also displayed honesty. The signs the subjects showed of being nervous were not overwhelming but appeared natural and made them more relatable. Anyone that is easier to relate to becomes more honest and likeable.

The main idea behind honest nonverbal communication is making sure all nonverbal signals match up with verbal signals. When they do not, the listener’s brain will trigger that the speaker is lying or not completely honest. Much about determining honesty is subconscious. Until a person’s nonverbal signs do not match, we do not think much about it. With the lowest score again, the observation of Person 3 is that their verbal and nonverbal signals do not align, making it hard to trust and believe what they are saying.
LIKEABLILITY

The best presenter’s are not always the most likeable. In order to be a good presenter you must portray confidence, attentiveness, enthusiasm and professionalism but all, if over done, can be seen as negative. There is a close line between being confident and being too confident or being enthusiastic and being too enthusiastic which can create a thin line between being likeable and unlikeable. To be likeable, a person has to be able to relate to the speaker. This is why Person 4 was rated highest in this characteristic. They were not voted the most professional or confident but they received most likeable.

Person 4 was likeable because they were relatable. They had natural nervous habits that did not overpower their presentation but were obvious. Presenting in front of an audience is a fear for many so when others see a presenter is nervous they want to help and encourage them because they know what it is like to be in their shoes. So nervous habits such as leaning to the side, being afraid to make long eye contact or crossing their legs did not affect Person 4’s presentation because they continued changing their vocal pitch and controlling most of their body language. Just as it reflects empathy and honesty, being relatable can control how much a person is liked.

Another key way to become relatable is to smile and laugh. Humor is a great way to encourage likeability. But it needs to be used carefully because jokes and humor can backfire and ruin a presentation. If the audience is laughing with a person, it shows how relaxed they are. Laughter is an extremely relatable characteristic and can create a connection between people.
PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism is based on an overall body language interpretation. A big factor in professionalism is dress and appearance. As soon as a person walks through the door for an interview, the first impression of their appearance determines if they are professional. Person 1 and 5 received the highest scores in professionalism. Each had long sleeve shirts on, neither which were low cut. They each had a cover, a jacket and a vest, covering their shirt. They wore loose fitting dress pants and minimal jewelry. Each student had about the same length hair which was down. Person 5 also had glasses on which could of created the appearance of being more professional as well since glass are seen as a sign of intelligence. There overall dress appeared professional.

They were also professional in how they presented. They maintained eye contact and had controlled body movements. They varied their pitch but spoke in a respectful manner to their audience. They had very few self-encouraging habits which minimized distracting gestures and created confidence. Their full bodies were turned and centered to face their audience. They also did not have a podium between themselves and the audience which did not disconnect them from the audience. The body language they did use supported the words they spoke, and was emphasized on a beat with the words.

EXTROVERSION

Not every person is extroverted, but extroversion is easy to display. Person 1, 5 and 7 received the highest ratings in extroversion. These were the same students that received the highest score in attentiveness. Their longer eye contact and opened body
language were factors in the voting. They also had a decrease in self touching habits. Self-comforting habits suggest a person is nervous and needs their own reassurance. They also block people off from them creating a sense of introversion. Person 1 and 5 had natural body movements showing that they were comfortable presenting in front of an audience. People who are more introverted displayed nervous body habits because they did not like presenting to an audience. They also received the highest votes in confidence and honesty which reflect extroversion. Vocal pitch can reflect if a person is extroverted or not. Studies have found that extroverts tend to introduce more contrast in their pitch throughout conversation. Introverts tend to have a more monotone delivery (Reiman 191). Both students change their vocal pitch often to match emphasize certain words. This change shows confidence and knowledge about what they are saying, which creates the interpretation that they are more extroverted.

Another way Person 1 was more extroverted was in laughter and facial expressions. They natural transferred their humorous personality into the presentation. This made them seem easier going, honest and outgoing, all factors in extroverted people.

Again, Person 3 was rated lowest for extroversion. Since their body language was not congruent it showed how nervous and unprepared they were. This reflected that this person might not enjoy or like presenting in front of big groups. Therefore, this student seemed more introverted.

COMPETENCY
Person 5 had the highest overall score in competency, 5 points higher than the next person which was not seen in any other characteristic. In nonverbal communication, to be competent means all your body language signals reinforce each other. No unnecessary signals are made which can distract away from the purpose of the speech. Person 5 uses many hand gestures, but they are made on a beat. This creates purpose for each hand gesture as well as reinforcement for the words spoken. They also create long deliberate eye contact in order to connect with the audience and to also watch the audiences face to make sure they understand. Eye contact can be a very intimate and personal connection which expresses honest, likeability and confidence. All those characteristics are key in competency. If there is a misunderstanding then, the student can recommmunicate until an understanding is met. Since their body is fully directed in the audience’s direction, it creates confidence in the audience in the speaker. Competency builds off the different characteristics. Considering Person 5 received the highest if not close to the highest in every category, it is no surprise to see that they received most competent.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

After conducting the case study, it was clear that first impressions can be accurately be made in ten seconds. The video analysis of each person’s complete presentation was comparable to the results of the short video clip analysis. The body language analysis analyzed in depth why each student was perceived in Part 2 of the experiment. It identified why one person was rated higher or lower in honesty than another person. This supported why each person scored high or low during the reviewer’s first impression. In theory if body language was analyzed, an accurate first impression could be predicted without asking the observer what was there first impression.

Nonverbal communication is an unconscious habit that the majority of people take for granted even though it is over 93% of our overall communication. If people focused on nonverbal signals they would become more observant of all relationships in their life. The key to body language is that it is subconscious, but becoming conscious of it will add benefits to one’s life.
WORKS CITED


Books.


### SURVEY RESULTS 1 AND 2

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Person 1: seems in command of the demonstration  
Person 2: somewhat tentative but informed  
Person 3: seems unsure of themself  
Person 4: Straightforward and respectful, although tentative  
Person 5: Talks too much with hands but in control  
Person 6: Referred to Notes but seemed confident  
Person 7: Draws the viewer’s attention to boards and makes eye contact  
Person 8: uncomfortable and less than prepared

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