

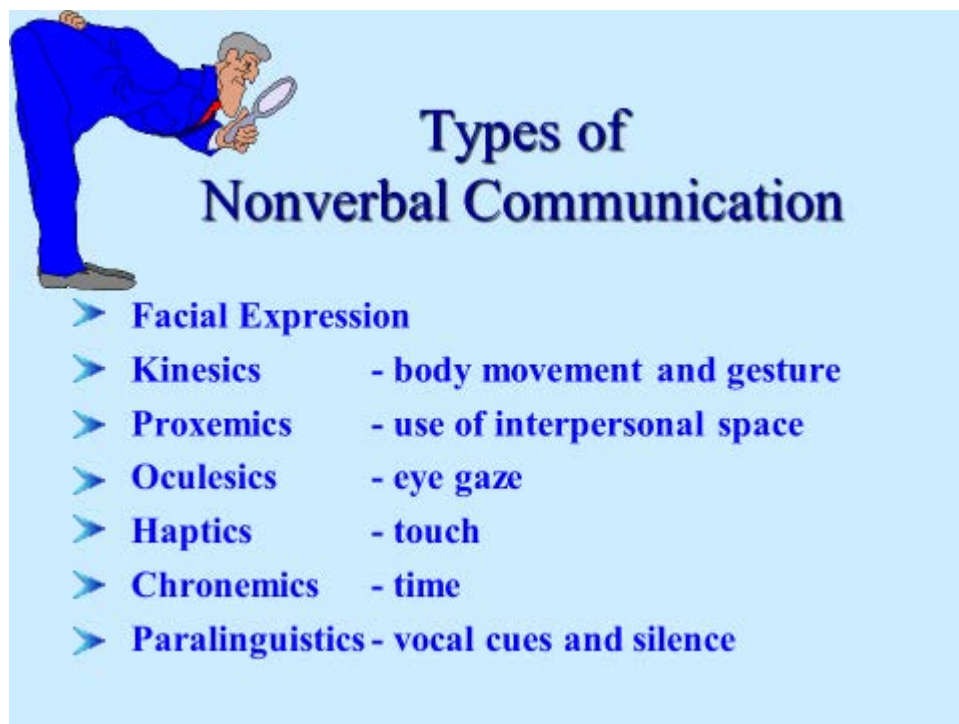
Communication Skills: Lecture No. 8

Module 3

Lecture 4

Nonverbal Communication

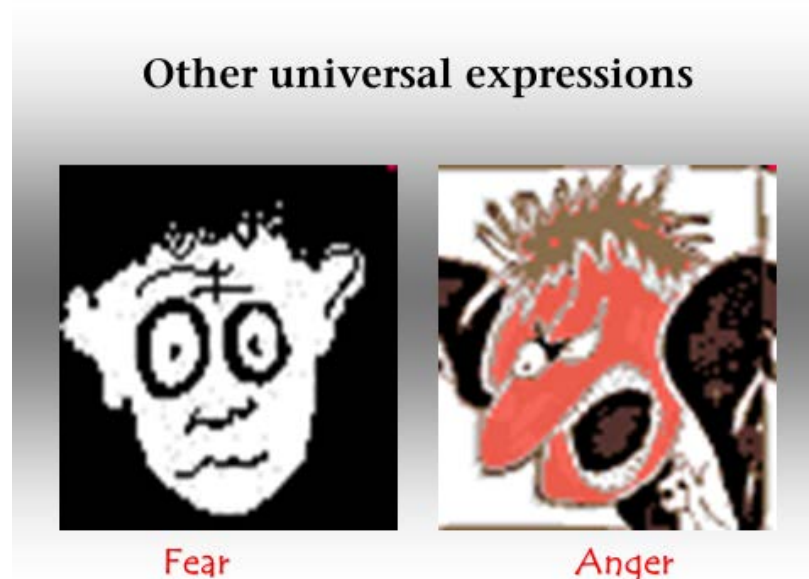
In this lecture, you will learn about the types of nonverbal communication in detail.



FACIAL EXPRESSION

The face is the most powerful channel of nonverbal communication. Whether we want it or not, we always indulge in encoding/decoding of facial expressions when we listen or talk to someone. Even in the simplest interaction, we normally focus our attention on face. By identifying the facial expressions appropriately, we can come to know of interest, attraction, identity, background, age, character (humorous, serious, dull, charming, etc.), and innuendos

involved in communication. In his book *Emotions Revealed*, Paul Ekman enumerated a set of six basic facial expressions that is innate, universal and conveys almost the same sense all over the world. They are as follows:



Surprise



Disgust



Six Basic Facial Expressions



Anger

Fear

Disgust

Happy

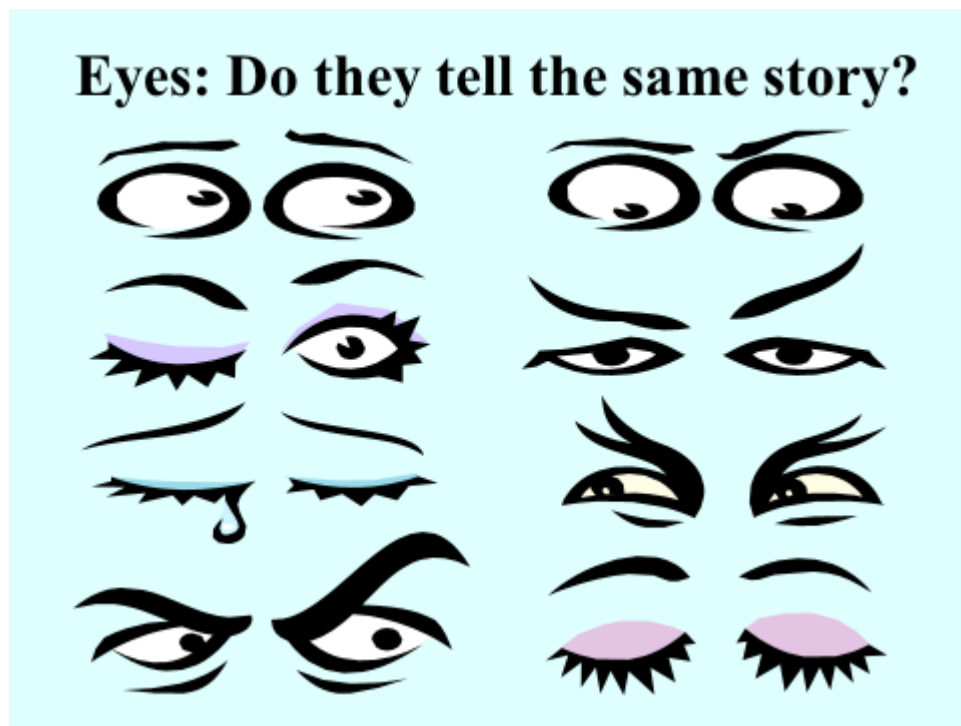
Sad

Surprise

Ekman aptly subtitled his book as *Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life* which tells us how the quality of communication can be enhanced by recognition of facial expressions.

OCULESICS

Apart from focusing on face, people in an interaction pay attention to eyes of the other person. Like face, eyes are highly expressive and send multiple messages during communication. Look at the picture below. Do each set of eyes tell you the same story?



Each of these eyes are expressing something differently. They express boredom, anger, sorrow, surprise, apprehension and so on. Oculesics involves the study of expressions and

messages conveyed by the eyes in the form of gaze, eye contact, pupil dilation, and eye movement.

GAZE AND EYE CONTACT

Gaze simply means looking at a person. Eye contact means mutual gaze, where the sender as well the receiver in communication looks at each other simultaneously. Maintaining eye contact signals genuineness. Avoiding eye contact is perceived to be deceptive, dishonest and shifty. In some cultures interacting without eye contact is considered to be rude and inattentive. Americans, for instance, prefer direct looking into the eyes of the other person to suggest straight-forwardness in communication. Whereas the Japanese, the Koreans, and most of the South Asians, including the Indians, are not taught to look directly at someone. These people are all culturally controlled in terms of their behavior to avoid direct eye contact. Direct eye contact in most of the South Asian cultures is considered a weakness, and may indicate sexual overtones. Despite cultural variations, in professional communication, maintaining eye contact always means genuineness. Having said this, we should also understand that shy and timid people, in any culture, cannot hold eye contact for more than just a few seconds without glancing away. It does not signify that the shy person is dis-honest, it only shows that the person is intimidated by who s/he is interacting with.

VOLUNTARY DIMENSION OF EYE CONTACT

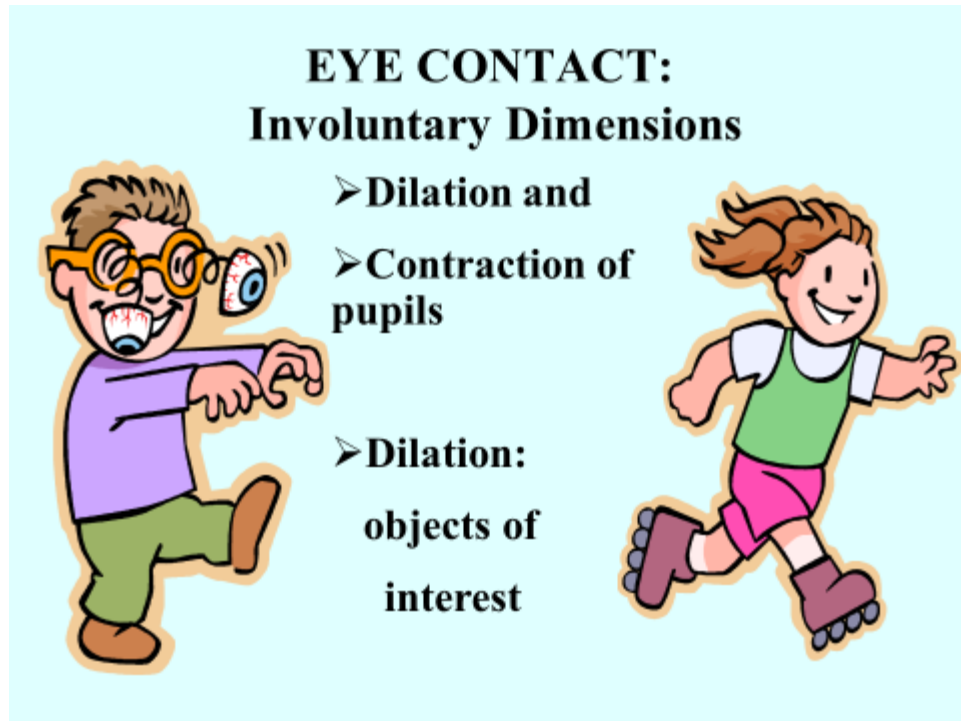
Another interesting aspect about eye contact is its voluntary and involuntary dimensions. In *voluntary* dimension, you maintain eye contact with an intention and purpose. It can have such communicative functions as to indicate friendliness, to dominate, to show respect, to evince interest, and to give comfort. The duration, that is, how much or how less time a person takes to maintain the eye contact indicates the interest or disinterest in the relationship. Similarly, the frequency, that is, the number of times the eyes meet or do not meet also indicate the level of relationship, whether formal or informal, distant or intimate. Most romantic relationships develop with longer and frequent eye contact. Nonetheless, when there is a misunderstanding, the eye contact is avoided—people literally do not see eye to eye!

Expressively, while we maintain eye contact with the one we like, we avoid eye contact with strangers. That is why, even in physically close situations as while traveling in crowded local

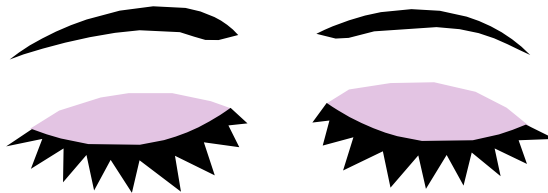
trains we look up instead of facing a stranger eye to eye. However, with a known acquaintance if we avoid eye contact, it implies lack of interest. If you observe children, you will note that they are very sensitive towards eye contact. Even a baby on the lap of her mother will not let her mother's attention deviate from her. If the baby sees that her mother is watching television or turning her face away to talk to another, then she will even go to the extent of pulling the chin of the mother and make her maintain eye contact with her. It is also interesting to note how this news readers on television create the illusion that they maintain eye contact with the viewers, while actually, they look at the news scrolled on the screen in front of them! Similarly, goods speakers, by appropriate modulation of their eye contact, manage to give the feel of looking at all the audience. Therefore, keep this in mind that whenever you deliver a speech you should voluntarily try to maintain eye contact with your audience. Only then will they develop interest in your speech. If you avoid eye contact, very soon your audience will lose interest in the subject. Moreover, avoiding eye contact, indicates to the audience that you lack in confidence or you are not thoroughly prepared for the speech!

INVOLUNTARY DIMENSION OF EYE CONTACT

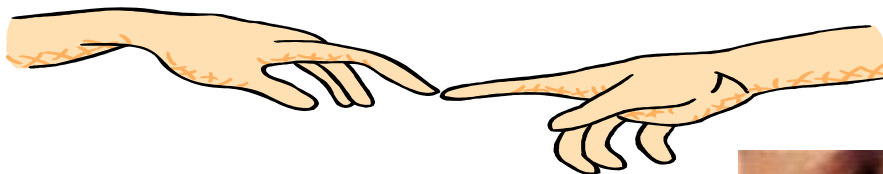
The risky part of eye contact is its involuntary dimensions, which involves pupil *dilation*. Individuals' pupil dilates when they experience attraction for something or somebody. When the pupils dilate, the eyes appear enlarged in size. Research indicates that when the pupils dilate it shows that the individual is interested in somebody and at the same time, the individual too looks attractive due to the dilation. The interest may be on a food item, dress material, or a person.



Another interesting aspect of involuntary dimension is that it also involves pupil *contraction*. When the pupil contracts, it indicates boredom or lack of interest. Manipulative sellers, note pupil dilation/contraction and interest and increase the price accordingly. Good business people use this aspect to attract and retain their clients. Nevertheless, if you develop the habit of observing the dilation and contraction of pupils of your audience and learn to modify appropriately your communication message, then you will become effective both at professional and interpersonal levels.



HAPTICS



All of us know about the amazing power of touch. Haptics refers to the use



of physical contact when communicating. In terms of proxemics, that is, the use of space in communication, it is also referred to as zero proxemics—the intimate contact point. Touch is one of the earliest means of nonverbal communication. This is evident from the fact that even a new-born baby learns from the warm touch of its mother and starts using it as a major means of communication.



Significantly, meanings about touch are imposed by culture; so, there are universals and many variations. Certain things practiced as a good symbol in one culture need not be the same in another culture. In fact, it could even mean exactly the opposite. Look at the situation of a male guest visiting the lady of the house. In Latin American culture, the touch could be quite proximate, and hugging is normal and considered to symbolize a warm welcome to the guest. In European



culture, either a firm handshake or a gentle kiss is permissible. In the traditional Indian culture, usually it amounts to saying *Namaste*. The touch is very much minimized here. In case of an Arab, the guest is not allowed even to see the female host.

Similarly, in India, it is normal to see boys walking hand in hand, or keeping one's hand over the shoulder of the other, especially when the other person is a very close friend. However, in the Western culture, this intimate gesture can be misunderstood for a homosexual act. Also, in India, touching the feet of elders is seen as an act of showing respect and seeking blessings. However, in the US, such a gesture will be treated slavish and will cause embarrassment to the receiver.

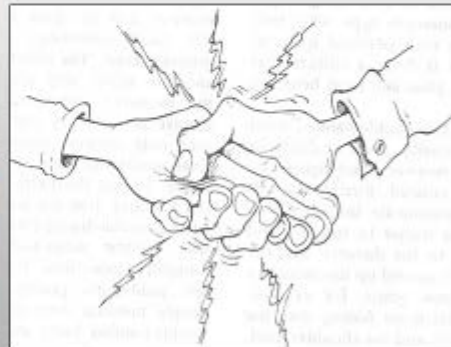


Touch has its therapeutic value. Touch is used to comfort not only a crying baby, but also an adult in distress. A gentle pat on the shoulder is given as an encouragement to an adult. In emotional situations, people give a hug, or a shoulder for the other person to cry. However, touch is so powerful that it can also be intimidating when you touch somebody without developing intimacy with the person. So, touch has to be used discretely—you can use it to make the other person feel good, comforted, as well as to feel threatened. In professional communication, it is important that you learn to develop a

Neither the deadfish nor the knuckle grinder...



Dead Fish Handshake



firm and warm handshake, though there are subtle cultural variations to it. Americans, for instance, use a very firm, solid grip. Whereas, those in the Middle East and South Asia prefer a



gentle grip. For most of them, a solid grip suggests aggressiveness. Nevertheless, in formal situations, it should neither be the dead fish nor the knuckle grinder handshake! In the dead fish hand shake, the receiver feels as if s/he is touching a cold, dead fish that slips from hand quickly. It indicates nervousness or lack of interest. Whereas, the knuckle grinder hand shake is at the other extreme. The receiver feels so uncomfortable because the giver is literally grinding the knuckles of him/her. The giver, in his/her overenthusiasm, presses the receiver's hand so tightly to express warmth ignoring obviously the discomfort it causes to the receiver. Hence, both extremes should be avoided and only a firm handshake should be given.

PROXEMICS

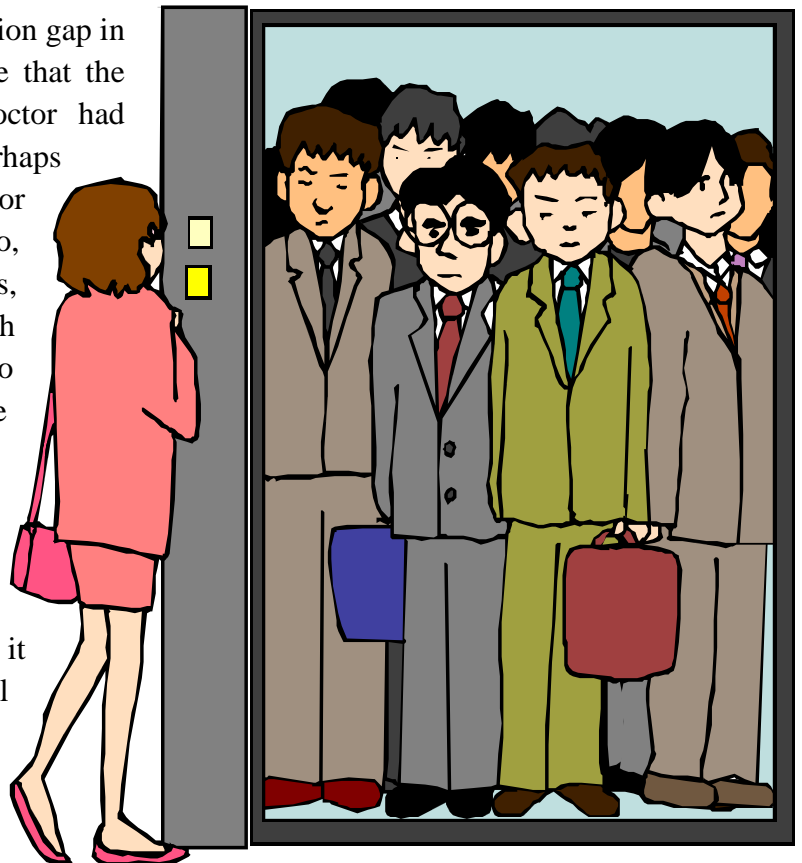
Proxemics is the study of the use of space, distance, and proximity in interpersonal communication. Reducing or widening of distance in interpersonal communication conveys powerful nonverbal message. You often feel that somebody is “close” to you, while somebody else always tries to maintain some “distance” with you. Thus you willy-nilly communicate by the

way you use your space. It will be interesting to note how people in general use space to communicate their power or lack of it. The richer and powerful a person, the greater the space s/he occupies. For example, in train and in aircraft, you will find that a larger space is given to the people who can afford to pay more. The first class ticket or the Executive class offers nothing but extra space. It gives more space for the legs and the body to stretch. To the contrary, space in the second class, the third class, and subsequent lower classes, gradually reduce until it gets too cramped and congested. You can note this feature in the palatial houses where the rich and the powerful live in contrast with the slum areas where the poor and the down-trodden live.

The frequency in which we can contact a person also determines the level of likeness in a relationship. Celebrities know that “familiarity breeds contempt,” hence, they would minimize their exposure to the public. The less they meet their fans, the more they are longed for. Successful politicians command respect by creating more space between them and the public. Yet, the popular ones try to minimize the distance between them and the people by often going close and shaking hands with them.

The importance of space can also be seen in its degree of formality. In an informal situation, when the husband drives the car, the wife is generally expected to sit next to him on the front seat. If, on a particular day, the wife is seen seated on the back, it can indicate a communication gap in the relationship. The exception could be that the wife is physically unwell and the doctor had advised her to take the backseat. Perhaps owing to her morning sickness, the doctor had asked her to avoid direct sunlight. So, when you learn some non-verbal symbols, you should also learn to use them with caution. You should not jump into conclusions without considering possible physiological or environmental factors that could also impact one’s use of proxemics.

Similarly, when we sit in a park, we leave space for the strangers and reduce it for a friend. Interestingly, when physical space is not available, we try to create



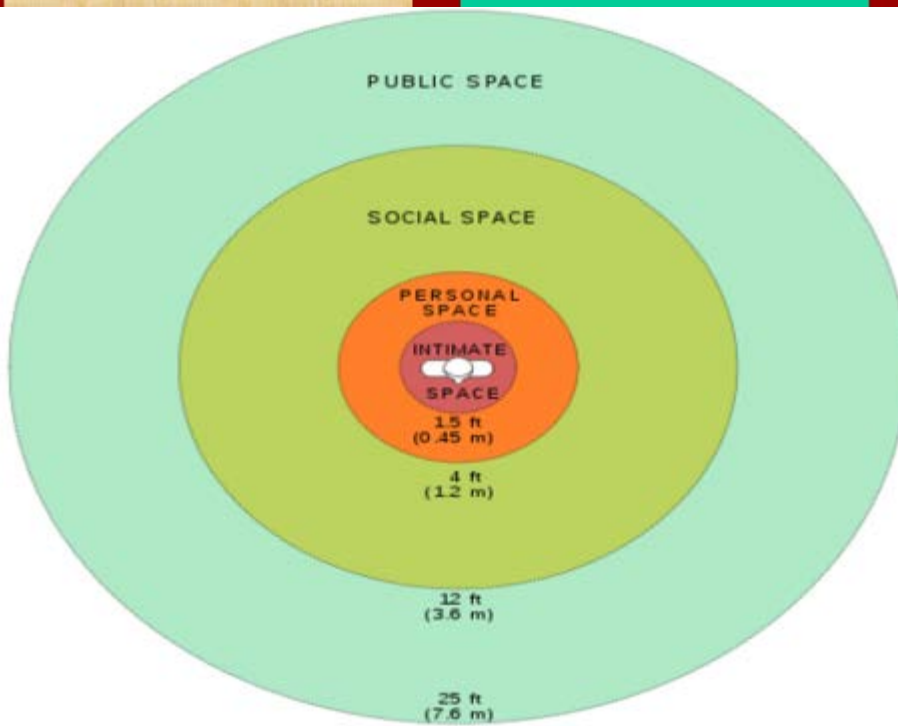
psychological space such as in an overcrowded lift. We tighten our muscles, shrink our shoulders, keep a stiff posture and avoid eye-contact.

TERRITORY

You will realize your sense of territoriality, if you find a stray dog lying on your bed, or a car parked in your designated parking space. Whether you own a particular area geographically or not, you psychologically assume that the area belongs to you. That's why you will find big truck

drivers, owing to their larger sense of territory, bullying small car drivers on highways.

Territory, in terms of types of interpersonal distance, is divided into *intimate*, *personal*, *social* and *public* spaces. In public space, when a leader communicates with the public, depending on



the power status of the leader, the space will be twenty five feet or greater. At a close level, it is about twelve to twenty five feet. In case of social space, the far level is seven to twelve feet and the close level is four to seven feet. When it comes to personal space, the far is from two and half to four and half feet, and close is one and half to two and half feet. Finally, the intimate space is just six to eighteen inches, where one can sit close to the other, and in close situations, it reaches the level of touching, holding hand, hugging, kissing, etc., where it is zero proxemics.



What do we do when somebody attacks or invades our space? We become protective and sometimes behave aggressively like animals. Initially, we indicate clearly by our facial expressions and body movement that we feel troubled. We avoid a conversation, minimize eye contact, place objects in between and focus elsewhere. However, if the person ignores these signal and continues to encroach on our territory, then we get aggressive. If the invasion continues,



we will even retaliate.

So, in this lecture, you learnt about the facial expression, oculusics, haptics, and proxemics as types of nonverbal communication. In the next and the final lecture of this module, I will discuss

in detail about chronemics and paralinguistics. I will conclude the module by giving you some tips on interpreting nonverbal cues and on ways in which you can aspire to become a competent communicator.

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