

# Nonverbal Communication in the Family

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J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department of English  
Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Pedagogy

Helena Štajdohar

**Nonverbal Communication in the Family**

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Alma Vančura, Ph.D. Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2021

Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i književnosti i  
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## Abstract

This paper tackles the issues of nonverbal communication in the nuclear and extended family. Communication as a process allows people to exchange information and messages verbally as well as nonverbally. The family as the primary social surrounding appears in various types and does not necessarily manifest in a stereotypical structure that includes two opposite-gender parents and their biological offspring. The aim of this paper is to discuss nonverbal communication between different family members and their various relationships: married couples, relationship formation, children's development of nonverbal subcodes and the possible effects on their future performance, as well the elderly's nonverbal cues. Therefore, this paper provides an overview of the literature and research regarding nonverbal communication in the family.

## Key Words

Nonverbal communication, family, marriage, infants, children, the elderly

## Sažetak

Ovaj rad tiče se pitanja neverbalne komunikacije u nuklearnoj i široj obitelji. Komunikacija kao proces omogućuje ljudima razmjenu informacija i poruka verbalno, ali i neverbalno. Obitelj kao primarna društvena zajednica pojavljuje se u različitim tipovima i ne mora se nužno manifestirati u stereotipnoj strukturi koja uključuje dva roditelja suprotnog spola i njihovo biološko potomstvo. Cilj ovoga rada jest razmotriti neverbalnu komunikaciju između različitih članova obitelji i njihovih različitih odnosa kao što su bračni parovi, formacija dugoročnih veza, razvoj neverbalne komunikacije kod djece te mogućim učincima na njihovu buduću izvedbu, kao i o neverbalnim znakovima starijih osoba. Stoga ovaj rad daje pregled literature i istraživanja o neverbalnoj komunikaciji u obitelji.

## Ključne riječi:

neverbalna komunikacija, obitelj, brak, dojenčad, djeca, ljudi treće životne dobi



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## 1. Introduction

Communication is a complex, continuous process of sharing messages by sending (encoding) and receiving and interpreting (decoding) information. During every interaction, one of the participants, the sender, sends the message while the other, the recipient, receives it. The communication process becomes a circular process when the recipient encodes the new message and sends it back to the original sender. This process includes both verbal and nonverbal signals that intertwine and complete the meaning of the other. Nonverbal communication comprises of five major subcodes: haptics - regarding touch, proxemics - regarding environment and space, physical appearance, kinesics - regarding movements, and vocalics - regarding speech (Moore et al., 2014). These nonverbal cues help with understanding other's emotions and intentions, especially in the home environment. All members of the family encode and decode various nonverbal messages on a daily basis, but this decoding is especially important for couples in long-term relationships, because males and females tend to encode and decode the messages differently (Riggio, 2014). Another crucial part of nonverbal communication is observation of affective communication in children. In infant children, the observation of facial expression is crucial for understanding the development of their other nonverbal cues. As for the elderly population, the rise in numbers indicates that older people are starting to occupy the significant part in many societies around the world. Due to the massive increase in numbers, researchers are more and more interested in investigating nonverbal communication of the elderly.

## 2. Communication and nonverbal communication

Living beings are known to communicate with each other as a form of coexistence. While sharing their environment, humans require conversing with individuals of their kind, which significantly occurs by nonverbal communication. In order to discuss nonverbal communication, it is essential to understand the meaning of communication first. According to Moore et al. (2014), communication is “an interactive process whereby people seek to induce some form of change in attitude, belief, or behavior” (p. 5). However, there are many other definitions of communication; for example, Burgoon et al. (1989, 1996, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) claim it as a “dynamic and ongoing process whereby people create shared meaning through the sending and receiving of messages via commonly understood codes” (p. 5). Similarly, the Osgood-Schramm Model of Communication (1954, as cited in Yadav & Mishra, 2020) explains communication as a circular process. As mentioned in the Introduction, the sender encodes the message, which travels through the communicational canal to the receiver, who then decodes and interprets the message. The receiver can also encode a message to give the sender feedback, who decodes and interprets it. Mehrabian (1981, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) suggests that 55% of the communicated message has an emotional meaning, which people interpret through facial expressions. 38% of the message is vocal and is influenced by the person’s voice and pronunciation, while the remaining 7% of the message is expressed verbally, and is related to the content of the message. Therefore, we can conclude that nonverbal communication is “the aspect of the communication process that deals with the transmission and reception of messages that are not a part of the natural language systems” (Moore et al., 2014, p. 6). However, it is crucial to know the difference between nonverbal communication and nonverbal behavior. Moore et al. (2014) emphasize they “use the word communication only when a receiver has interpreted a message as having some meaning . . . a receiver must be present and must interpret the transmission of symbols for communication to occur” (p. 7). The authors explain that nonverbal communication can come from inanimate objects, such as spatial areas, however, only living beings can behave, i.e. they can behave without actually wanting to communicate, or without communicating at all. In addition, the nonverbal code comprises various subcodes. Nonverbal subcodes try to account for overall communication processes in human interaction and in the following chapters we will focus on their effects in the family.

### 3. Defining Family

Humans are social beings and therefore quite often share their environment with others. They usually share their habitat with people closest to them, whom they consider family members. In his book, *The Myth of Matriarchy*, Uwe Wesel (2004) explains the family phenomenon as it is known today. The first forms of family life date back to the Old Stone Age, around fifty-five thousand years ago. The hunting societies were the dominant form of life, where people lived in hordes. At that time, there was only one division of labor, men went hunting, while women collected plant food and took care of children. Therefore, the family emerged as the smallest unit with a joint division of labor and joint consumption of products. Also, some ethnographic, historical, and statistical data imply that the family is, in fact, an institution and not a biological fact based on a relationship of kinship (Wesel, 2004). To better understand the term family, we should examine the UN's definition (United Nations, as cited in World Health Organization, 1978):

Family is defined in the narrow sense of a family nucleus, i.e. the persons within a household who are related as husband and wife or as parent and never married child by blood or adoption. So a family nucleus comprises a married couple without children or a married couple with one or more never married children of any age or one parent with one or more never married children of any age. A woman (or man) who is living in a household with her own never married child(ren) should be regarded as being in the same family nucleus as the child(ren) even if she is never married and even if she is living in the same household as her parents. (p. 14)

The UN's definition from the 1970s is still relevant and organized into three types: the already mentioned nuclear, extended, and reorganized family. According to Merriam Webster (n.d.), the extended family includes in one household near relatives (such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles) in addition to a nuclear family. The third type is a reorganized family, a community of persons of the same sex and a community with several married or unmarried couples and children (Alinčić, 1994, as cited in Tepavac, 2020). Therefore, a family can be monogamous or polygamous. In a monogamous family, a person is involved in a relationship with only one individual, while in polygamous families, one of the spouses has several spouses. Polygamous families also have subtypes: polyandrous and polygynandrous (Sinha & Bharat, 1985). Polyandrous families are characterized as "the practice of having more than one husband or permanent male sexual partner at the same time" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), while polygynandrous families denote "a form of polygamy in which two or more men share two or more wives" (Lexico.com, n.d.). However, the term family does not always coincide with its prototypical meaning, especially in a modern-day society. Numerous children are raised by

their grandparents or foster parents, whom they regard as the nuclear family. Once we have defined the different types that comprise a family, we will discuss about their nonverbal communication and behavior.

#### 4. Nonverbal Communication during Courtship, Marriage and Committed Relationships

As people age, most of them look forward to settling down with their loved ones. Some decide to get married, while others prefer committed relationships unbound by the law. According to Dictionary.com (n.d.), a marriage is:

any of the diverse forms of interpersonal union established in various parts of the world to form a familial bond that is recognized legally, religiously, or socially, granting the participating partners mutual conjugal rights and responsibilities and including, for example, opposite-sex marriage, same-sex marriage, plural marriage, and arranged marriage.

The partners in committed relationships, especially those involving opposite-sex, show their nonverbal communication differently. Riggio (2014) explains that gender differences exist due to “‘females’ superiority in the spontaneous and posed sending of emotions through facial cues and due to a corresponding sensitivity to a facial expression of emotion” (p. 9). He argues this by claiming that women tend to pay greater attention to visual cues than men do (DePaulo & Rosenthal, 1979; DePaulo et al. 1978, as cited in Riggio, 2014). However, despite having better encoding and decoding skills, Riggio argues that men appear to have an advantage with certain aspects of emotional control and regulations (Riggio, 1986, as cited in Riggio, 2014), which may be advantageous in many social encounters, especially in instances where emotional reactions are inappropriate.

##### 4.1. Nonverbal Communication during Courtship

To form a relationship, a couple has to interact with each other to familiarize themselves with interests they may be sharing, like moral and religious values, aspirations for the future, etc. When a person engages in interactions with new people, eye contact is crucial to understand the other people’s thoughts and feelings. Croes et al. (2019) researched the importance of eye contact in initial romantic interactions during speed dating. The results revealed that eye contact induces less uncertainty and more intimacy when compared with

interactions without eye contact. Therefore, it is acceptable to conclude that engaging more eye contact in communication, especially at initial interactions like the first date, gives the impression of a confident, open, and trustworthy person. In contemporary society, this initial courtship is often reduced to exchanging messages on social media platforms and dating sites, whose most common challenge is the lack of nonverbal cues. This deficiency affects the participants' perception of each other so that it becomes more positive or negative than it truly is (Kotlyar & Ariely, 2013) and sets the tone for their future commitment. In a 2013 study, Kotlyar and Ariely investigated whether the lack of nonverbal cues impedes communication and relationship formation. Their findings suggest that using avatars to restore nonverbal cues will help improve online interaction and relationship forming. Additionally, chat models with more nonverbal cues were linked to more positive attitudes, more information exchange, and a deeper desire to pursue a relationship. Therefore, the study confirms the importance of nonverbal communication for building a relationship. Besides, physical appearance is one of the factors which importance must not be neglected when talking about relationships. Some agree that attractiveness is crucial for relationship development but that its effect lessens once we familiarize ourselves with the particular person. Others, however, believe that attractiveness is negligible during the dating stage of our lives. This is because we knowingly might go out with a less attractive person since the period of random dating is of less importance and shorter duration (Moore et al., 2014). Once the relationship has been established, the following question needs to be answered: how does nonverbal communication affect relationship development?

At the beginning of most relationships, the amount of touch declares its future performance. Both sides tend to carefully plan when and where to touch the other to achieve intimacy, but simultaneously not to exceed with the act. A great example is the first date. In a scene where a couple is watching a movie in a cinema, both parties can speculate when will be the right time to make a move and touch the other. In a stereotypical situation, a guy might be gathering the courage to put his arm around a girl while she nervously awaits the move. When the event finally occurs, a girl leans towards his shoulder, accepting his nonverbal communication. Moreover, most partners tend to exhibit a high amount of touch at the beginning of their relationships, which reduces over time (Moore et al., 2014). Birchlier et al. (1975, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) suggest that as long as satisfaction with the relationship is high, the relative amount of touch, and the frequency of touch, should remain high. Likewise, as dissatisfaction with the relationship increases, touch between partners decreases, and the self-touch increases.

#### 4.2. Nonverbal Communication in Marriage and Committed Relationships

As stated earlier, men and women perceive nonverbal communication differently, thus experience the touch differently. Hanzal et al. (2008, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) found that men had more positive reactions to intimate touch in committed relationships when compared to women, while the responses to a non-intimate touch were comparable between both sexes. In relationships, the partners use touch to inform the other of their yearning for the physical encounter. In their article, Willis and Briggs (1992) found that men were more likely to initiate touch during courtship, while women were more likely to initiate it after marriage. They explained the phenomenon is due to a sex difference in reproductive strategies. Additionally, fascinating results came from Beres et al. (2004, as cited in Moore et al., 2014), who examined a group of homosexuals and learned that nonverbal behaviors are the most common ways partners indicate consent to having sexual relations with their partners. In a 2020 study, Heatley Tejada et al. researched the correlation between physical contact and the feeling of loneliness in a low-contact culture. The results showed that participants exposed to physical contact reported considerably lower levels of neglect in their intimate relationships in a short loneliness scale, implying an underlying process that continues despite enculturation. The effects were noticeably stronger among single people, partially explaining lower loneliness levels among married couples due to their physical availability. These results can lead us to conclusion that persons in committed relationships are happier in comparison to single people, taking into account loneliness as a component of happiness.

Furthermore, there are many conducted studies involving kinesics and its encoding and decoding by partners in committed relationships. Regarding marital satisfaction, Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) have found that:

nonverbal decoding plays a larger role for marital adjustment than encoding of nonverbal affect. Similarly, that spouses were much more accurate in decoding their partners than were strangers indicates that the nonverbal communication of affect is a highly idiosyncratic process. Accurate decoding depends more on knowledge of the individual who is encoding the affect than on nonverbal decoding skills in general. (p. 50)

Therefore, knowing one's partner well represents a crucial part when encoding a message. Persons in close relationships tend to mimic each other body postures, often without realizing it. We can often observe that in friends, but in married couples as well. For instance, imagine a couple is having a coffee at the local cafe bar facing each other across the table. They are having a conversation and smiling at each other while having the same body posture. One might have

a crossed leg pointed to the left, while the other person's leg is pointed to the right as if they mirror each other. This phenomenon is known as *mirroring* - and is recognized as the chameleon effect, which refers to a tendency to adopt the postures, gestures, and mannerisms of interaction partners (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999, as cited in Matsumoto et al., 2016). Mirroring can serve as one of the clues to a relationship's satisfaction. Spouses tend to synchronize their nonverbal behaviors, which helps increasing the accuracy of the communication. On the other hand, during a quarrel, a degree of synchrony tends to decrease, and the amount of mirroring reduces (Moore et al., 2014), which alludes to relationship dissatisfaction. Often, couples are prone to look alike, sometimes even being mistaken for siblings due to similar hair color, height, facial bone structure, or other physical indicators. The mentioned phenomenon is known as the matching hypothesis, which predicts that an individual will choose a date of approximately their own level of social desirability when making a realistic social choice (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, and Sears, 1944, as cited in Berscheid et al., 1971). For example, many celebrity couples appear related because of their same level of attractiveness. We can observe the singer Taylor Swift and her current boyfriend, Joe Alwyn; both are tall, blond-haired, blue-eyed, and slim. Berscheid et al. (1971) further researched this hypothesis and concluded:

the results of the present studies indicate that attempts to interact with those of opposite-sex will be more frequent among those of approximately the same level of attractiveness. That physical attractiveness acts as a “gatekeeper” for interactions with members of the opposite sex is evident not only from the matching tendencies observed in these experiments, but also from the observed relationship between physical attractiveness and dating frequency. (p. 187)

Another indicator of the relationship satisfaction regards silence. The most common reason for sharing a home with their significant other is because they enjoy their company. We can often hear that a quality relationship is when two people can sit together in silence without a constant need to engage in a conversation. When this circumstance occurs, both are comfortable enough in each other's presence and show relationship satisfaction. DeVito (1989) came to a similar conclusion “In most pleasant situations, silence might be used to express affection or love, especially when coupled with long and longing stares into each other's eyes” (p. 155). In times of turmoil, however, partners often use the “silent treatment” to indicate their feelings and unwillingness to give attention to the other person as if they are trying to block them in real life. Concerning the connection between chronemics and committed relationships, we may introduce yet another indicator of relationship satisfaction. Devoting time to others indicates we grant them permission to occupy a part of our lives. Egland et al. (1997, as cited Guerrero et al., 2013) found that the most prominent way to display relational closeness is to spend time



with a partner. Similarly, giving attention, dining together, and improving one's relationship with their partner by resolving possible issues can affect the relationship satisfaction, including an emotional bond among the partners.

Overall, nonverbal communication plays an important role when forming a relationship. It depicts the partners' compatibility in the initial stages of a relationship, and as the relationship progresses, the nonverbal communication serves as a satisfaction indicator as well as a bonding tool. Committed relationships require a large amount of hard work to stay at an optimal level but are for that reason highly appreciated and of great significance for our well-being. They are driven by strong emotions and, in most cases, result in having children.

## 5. Nonverbal Communication of Children

The arrival of a new child changes different aspects of nonverbal communication within a family. The obvious one is the living area, which the child inhabits. Extra space is given to the child, even though many parents initially have the child sleep in the same room as they do. For some time, the child's room becomes the center of attention (Moore et al., 2014). These changes are necessary and usually regard the home environment and caregivers' habits. Before the child's arrival, a couple has more privacy and time for personal needs, however, everything changes once another person is involved. Although small, a child occupies a large amount of space in a household due to additional items needed for its care, like a stroller, changing table, baby chair, crib, toys, etc. Parents make their lives revolve around their children and have less time for personal interests and hobbies. Many of them have trouble remembering what it was like before having a child. These changes are in the child's best interest but are not often positive and may lead to marital dissatisfaction (Moore et al., 2014).

### 5.1. Nonverbal Communication of Infants

Communication begins at birth, and nonverbal code is the only way of communicating because infants are still unable to speak. At birth, they have instinctive nonverbal communication potential, for example, infants recognize and prefer human faces to abstraction (Franz, 1961, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) and nonverbally respond more to humans than dolls (Legerstee, 1987, as cited in Moore et al., 2014). Moreover, infants use different nonverbal cues to familiarize themselves with the world, like smiling and gazing. Considering visual

dominance in human perception of the world (Posner et al., 1976), it is rational to conclude that eyesight contributes significantly more to a child's development than other senses. In 2002, Farroni et al. researched the ability of two- to five-day-old newborns to discriminate between direct and averted gaze. They discovered that human infants prefer to look at faces that engage in mutual gaze, and that healthy infants display enhanced neural processing of direct gaze. Therefore, engagement in communication with infants does not only help with the development of communicational skills but also exercises their social and motor abilities, which is connected with mirroring. As mentioned earlier, adapting one's postures to others', in this case, mother's gestures to child's, presents the mutual bond and encourages additional growth. Rayson et al. (2017) examined the frequency of mother's mirroring of their two-month-old infants and its effects on infants' development at nine months. Researchers concluded that "maternal mirroring strengthens mappings between visual and motor representations of facial gestures, which increases infant neural sensitivity to particularly relevant cues in the early social environment" (Rayson et al., 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, after the birth of a child, caregivers spend plenty of time feeding, cleaning, and playing with their newborns. All these activities require physical touch to be made, an indispensable part of the bonding process. To determine just how much physical interaction is significant, we can reflect on Harlow (1958). In his experiment with infant monkeys and cloth-covered surrogate mothers, Harlow demonstrated that physical contact is desired over closeness to food sources. For sixty years since the experiment, many studies applied its results on humans and concluded that the absence of physical touch in the earliest days is one of the chief causes of stagnation in infants' development. Related studies propose different ways of bonding with children, such as skin-to-skin contact. The contact is known to be used with premature children, placed on their caregiver's naked chest. It promotes beneficial physiological conditions such as increased quiet sleep state and more stable thermoregulation, heart rate, respiratory rate, and higher oxygen saturation (Chiu & Anderson, 2009). Given the importance of touch, preterm infants are denied this due to incubation. The skin-to-skin method is applicable, which does not mean it has to be the only approach to the challenge. A few years ago, crocheted octopus dolls became a trend for helping premature babies grow. As spiral tentacles resemble the umbilical cord, it calms the newborn and prevents it from pulling the threads of monitors and feeding tubes. It is also suggested to have many benefits when analyzing immediate responses of heart rate, respiratory rate, and peripheral oxygen saturation after ten minutes of placing the octopus next to the newborn (Morales Junior & Coelho, 2020). When discharged from the hospitals, infants still need constant reassurance by physical touch. In non-Western culture, it is unimaginable for an infant not to sleep with its

caregivers, while in Western societies, co-sleeping is considered harmful. Nevertheless, Raghunath et al. (2020, as cited in Bigelow and Williams, 2020) investigated infants' physiological calming and self-regulation during sleep with their mothers. They concluded that co-sleeping is beneficial for infants because they acquire enhanced regulation that allows them to adapt to different sleep contexts.

Emotions are of great significance in today's society, and knowing when and how to display them makes a well-adjusted individual. Tronick's (1989, as cited in Moore, 2014) study shows how significant they are in forming a person. His research indicates that the affect of infants is influenced by the emotional experience of dealing with the mother. Also, he concluded that emotions motivate and organize an infant's behavior rather than disrupt it. Cates et al. (2012), in longitudinal research of infants in low-income families, revealed that cognitive stimulation in early infancy is related to important differences in early infant communicative capacities, such as eye-gazing, emotion expression, and the ability to get others' attention. The researchers suggest that children of low-income families are at the greatest risk for setbacks in school readiness and encourage parent-child interactions beginning in early infancy. Similarly, Claussen et al. (1998) conducted a study on nonverbal communication development in infants at risk, i.e. to focus on attachment in infants prenatally exposed to cocaine. The results suggest that differences in infants' nonverbal social communication development skills may be associated with differences among types of parent attachment. Finally, a study on infants by Haviland (1977) showed that adults tend to perceive infants who portray negative emotions through facial expressions as boys, and the ones with more positive emotions as girls, regardless of their actual sex. The researcher points out: "Female observers are most dichotomous in perceiving male infants as having the most negative emotional expressions and female infants as having the least negative emotional expressions" (p. 83).

#### 5.1.1. Nonverbal Communication of infants with Down syndrome

According to Goupil et al. (2016), infants are capable of monitoring and communicating their own uncertainty nonverbally to gain knowledge from others. Although this is applicable for the majority, it is crucial to consider other groups of infants, like the ones with Down syndrome. "According to the World Health Organization; the predictable incidence of Down syndrome is between 1 in 1,000 to 1 in 1,100 live births all over the world" (Al-Biltagi, 2015). Thus, they make a significant percentage of the world population. Nonverbal

communication skills in infants with Down syndrome proved to be different from the majority's, displaying deficit in nonverbal requests for objects or assistance with objects. The Downs' children also displayed a deficit in expressive language, which is significant because it was associated with object-requesting skill. Therefore, a deficit in expressive language is associated with a deficit in earlier-developing nonverbal requesting skill among Down syndrome children (Mundy et al., 1988).

Considering everything, infants depend on nonverbal communication, as it is the only way of communicating with their surroundings. Physical contact represents the significant role of communicating and connecting with the caregivers, which lays the foundations for infants' personal development in the future. Therefore, caregivers should spend as much time interacting with their infants, especially with the ones at risk, to help them mature.

## 5.2. Nonverbal Communication of Older Children

### 5.2.1. Three stages of children's developmental process

As children grow older, they learn to recognize more nonverbal cues that are dominant in their culture. There are numerous studies about the formation of nonverbal cues in children, which mostly come down to children learning the majority of their nonverbal communication by the ages of six and seven (Moore et al., 2014). Moreover, as children adjust to the cultural norms, they undergo challenging periods of socialization that George H. Mead (1901) organizes in a three-part developmental process: an imitation stage, a play stage, and a game stage (Hickson, 1981, as cited in Moore et al., 2014). In the first stage, the child starts to extend their range of nonverbal behaviors. Probably the main component at this stage is obtaining kinesics, especially facial expressions. In a 1981 study, Alexander and Babad decided to further investigate the cultural differences of a smile in American and Israeli children. They found that adults assessed American children with a high probability of smiling as more socially competent, adjusted, and attractive than their colleagues with low-probability for smiling. But, such a distinction was not found among Israeli population. Therefore, different facial expression, which is acquired in the imitation stage, can sometimes have different meaning depending on a culture. Furthermore, children at this stage learn to differentiate people based on their physical appearance. Thus, they stereotypically distinct others into one of the two sex categories, males and females, and become aware of the category to which they belong (Weinraub et al., 1984). They associate more with people of the same gender and separate

themselves from the opposite (Gifford & Price 1979, as cited in Moore et al., 2014). Therefore, it is not uncommon to see children around four and five years of age playing only with children of the same gender as theirs. However, Goldberg and associates (2012) discovered that the perceived play behaviors of boys and girls in same-gender parent families were more similar than the perceived play behavior of boys and girls in heterosexual-parent families. Consequently, the children's nonverbal behavior does not only depend on their biological characteristics, as seen in Gifford and Price's (1979, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) research, but it also depends on environmental factors that surround them.

The second stage in the developmental process is the play stage, in which children learn what appropriate and inappropriate behavior is. During this stage, the most dominant subcodes are kinesics, vocalics, and physical appearance (Moore et al. 2014). Children at the age of six already understand what is physically attractive and unattractive (Cavior & Lombardi, 1973, as cited in Moore et al., 2014). Buss and Stoltz (2020) explain that standards of beauty and ugliness change with age. They emphasize that culture, alongside media, family, and school, influence children's perception of physical attractiveness.

Finally, Moore et al. (2014) explain that in the game stage, previously adopted norms are operating. "Now children begin to actively manipulate their nonverbal communication to produce certain expected effects, and at this stage, they move from being children to adults" (p. 352).

#### 5.2.2. Children and their interpretation of nonverbal cues

Children depend on others and seek a strong foundation for growth. Caregivers are the ones meeting their needs, and their actions reflect on children's outcomes. Caregivers' emotional belief systems, behaviors, and skills all predict children's recognition of emotion (Castro et al., 2014). Also, the emotional expressiveness of the family environment influences the style of expression in persons' communication (Halberstadt, 1986). Of course, not all children grow up in ideal circumstances, which can have a deteriorating consequence on their ability to encode and decode nonverbal messages. Bowen and Montepare (2007, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) point out that an inconvenient home environment has such a strong influence on children growing up in toxic surroundings, that they are less likely to interpret nonverbal cues, which means they are often more likely to break healthy emotional communication norms. Additionally, many children are abandoned at birth and spend their first

months, if not years, in child care institutions. Dries et al. (2009) assessed the insecurity of attachment relationship in adopted children and found that in comparison to institutionalized children, early adoption showed to be a successful intervention in the attachment domain. Moreover, many children grow up having siblings, in most cases living with each other. Blanck et al. (1980) found that siblings can be very similar regarding nonverbal communication. As noted, “same-sex siblings are more likely to receive the same degree of encouragement for developing or using nonverbal skills than are opposite-sex siblings” (p. 225). However, there is a possibility that same-sex siblings show more family resemblance due to their more common experiences in comparison to opposite-sex siblings (Bowerman & Dobash, 1974, as cited in Blanck et al., 1980). Regarding the spacing of siblings, Powell and Steelman (1990, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) researched its correlation with the academic score. They found calamitous effects of siblings’ close spacing on their test scores, which has a more significant impact than family income. All things considered, children are sensitive beings, and although there are some obvious patterns of behavior in all infants and, later, older children, each individual is distinct and, to some extent, shaped by their environment, as well as by their genetics and upbringing.

### 5.2.3. Nature vs. nurture approach

The nature and the nurture approach occupy many opposed types of research that try to explain how humans obtain and comprehend emotions as well as different nonverbal expressions. The nature approach comes from Charles Darwin’s Theory of Evolution (as cited in Moore et al., 2014), which debates that people inherit their affective communication; while the nurture approach advocates believe people develop emotions. Wolff (1972, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) suggests an example of the latter perspective that corresponds to Mead’s (1901) three-stage development. The three stages overlap each other, but there are also periods of stagnation. The first stage, the instinctive stage, lasts for approximately six months after the child’s birth. During this stage, the meaning is usually not associated with the behavior, which is instinctive in its nature. The second, the emotional phase, starts at the second week postpartum to about two years of age. At the beginning of this stage, the child acquires the basic emotions, and by the end of the stage, the child seems to have developed more than a hundred emotional expressions (Blurton-Jones 1972, as cited in Moore et al., 2014). The third and final stage, the objective phase, begins around six and associates with gestures related to thought. In this stage, the children incorporate the affective message in the communication system, which they can use in everyday interactions (Moore et al., 2014).

## 6. Nonverbal Communication with the Elderly

In the last couple of decades, with lifestyle improvement, people's lives have prolonged noticeably. Today, the population of many of the wealthiest countries in the world has life expectancies of over eighty years. Since 1900, the global average life expectancy has more than doubled and is expected to rise even more (Roser, 2013). Therefore, the senior population is growing in numbers and becoming a dominant part of many societies worldwide. Due to its novelty, the research of nonverbal communication with the elderly is still increasing, and major nonverbal cues are observable. The elderly tend to receive more space from others, which Smith et al. (1988, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) suggest as the reason for the loneliness in post-retirement periods. They discovered that the elderly females they studied had higher levels of loneliness; however, educational discrepancies in the participants affected the findings, where women with less education informed more loneliness. Furthermore, younger people tend to perceive the elderly as undesirable, the reason for the amount of touch decreasing with age, regardless of the person's sex, even among the family members (Moore et al., 2014). However, Axelrod and Cohen (1961, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) indicate that the elderly tend to touch less and want to be touched less because of their sensitivity to touch. In addition, Hummert et al. (2009, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) researched sensitivity to the detection of auditory, visual, and tactile stimuli, which showed significant declines with age. Therefore, Moore et al. (2014) suggest:

as we grow older, the number of touch 'spots' we have decreased, and as the number of touch spots is reduced, our sensitivity to touch decreases. It may be that the elderly touch less and expect less touch as a result of reduced haptic sensitivity. (p. 356)

Regarding speech, it is noticeable that the voice of the elderly differs from the voice of younger people. In addition, sex plays a significant role in some differences in the voice. Women tend to have tender and higher-pitched voices, while men are known for rough and deeper pitched voices. Hummert et al. (1999, as cited in Moore et al., 2014) found that women seniors are more likely to be judged unfavorably than older men are. They also noticed that people tend to evaluate elderly females more positively when their voices are younger sounding, which alludes to the elderly being segregated as the subculture by the rest of the community. In addition, in everyday interactions, it is noticeable that the elderly are different from the rest regarding physical appearance. Their skin is wrinkled, hair is brittle and greyish looking, while their weak bodies hunch over. There is also a noticeable change in clothes. The elderly replace fashionable

and sometimes uncomfortable clothes with more comfortable and simple clothing styles. Since their bodies become fragile with age, the elderly are typically not as flexible as the young people. However, generalizing may lead to uncomfortable encounters when there are undeniable examples of aged people achieving goals the younger ones could only dream of (Moore et al., 2014).



## 7. Conclusion

In everyday interactions, humans communicate verbally and nonverbally. The two parts of the communication process complement each other and send the complete message to the recipient. Regarding family communication, partners are usually the ones establishing the family. However, first, they must go through the dating stage to determine mutual compatibility, which can eventually lead to a shared life accompanied by moments of satisfaction, but times of turbulence, as well. Therefore, to form a family, a certain amount of adjustment is required from partners' first interaction to having a child. Such a step changes the family dynamics and focuses all its attention on the child. In addition, the initial interactions between parents and the infant are vital for the child's future regarding empathy and social adjustment. For these to develop, a child requires a large amount of physical contact in its first months postpartum and later as reassurance. Another crucial factor is the environment in which the child grows up, affecting the development of nonverbal skills in a child, positively or negatively. Siblings also play an important part in most children's lives. They, in most cases, grow up together and display similar forms of nonverbal communication. Lastly, nonverbal communication in the elderly differs from the nonverbal communication of younger people. This occurrence is present mainly because the elderly experience some physical changes. The elderly's bodies are more fragile and do not receive as much touch as when they were younger. Taking everything into account, nonverbal communication concerns a wide variety of research fields, and family is just one of them. Every generation brings new challenges, whether be it the difference in partner preferences and child development to more recent research of the fast-growing population of senior residents. Therefore, the knowledge about nonverbal communication in the family will always evolve.

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