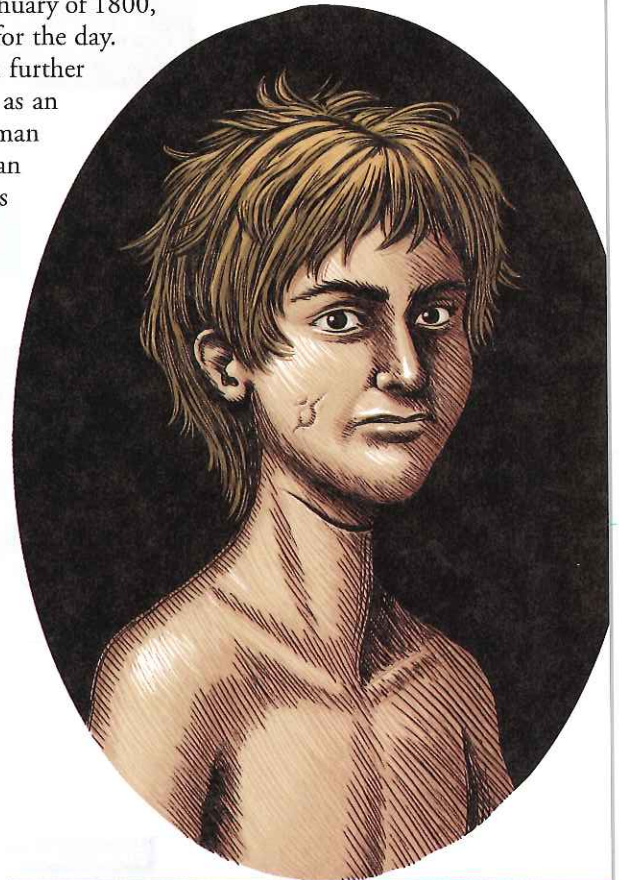


science, psychology, sociology, and communication texts over the years. In January of 1800, a gardener in Aveyron, France, went out one morning to collect vegetables for the day. To his surprise, he heard this unusual moaning and groaning sound. Upon further inspection, he found a “wild boy” squatting in the garden eating vegetables as an animal might do. This boy showed no signs or behaviors associated with human beings. He appeared to be 12–14 years old, but stood just a little more than four feet tall. He had scars and burns on his body and his face showed traces of smallpox. His teeth were brown and yellow and his gums were receding. It can only be assumed that when he was an infant, he was abandoned in the woods and left to die. It has also been suggested that someone may have tried to kill him as an infant because of the long scar across his trachea (Lane, 1976).

When he was found in 1800, he could not speak and barely stood erect. ***“He had no sense of being a human in the world. He had no sense of himself as a person related to other persons”*** (Shattuck, 1980). Because of his lack of communication and contact with other humans, he had no identity, no language, no self-concept, and no idea that he was even a human being in a world of human beings. Of course, he had no religious beliefs or relationships with other human beings. That is how **powerful** communication is in our world today—it gives us our identity. It lets us know we are *human*! It helps establish our place and purpose in the world.



How do our communication and language affect our self-image?

THE ROLE OF NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Can We Communicate Without Words?

Nonverbal communication is any and all communication other than words—and it is constant. We cannot escape our body language or the body language of others. Why is it important to study nonverbal communication? Because there can be so many interpretations of a single nonverbal clue, we must understand that not every action is equal or carries the same message. We must consider everything, from cultural traditions to unconscious acts, to fully grasp what may be intended by a look, a smile, a touch, or how close we stand to someone. We must consider that many of our nonverbal clues are accidental. Think about how many interpretations there can be from a pat on the shoulder. It could mean “congratulations,” or “welcome back,” or “way to go,” or “I’m sorry,” or “Hey, friend” (Lane, 2008).

Nonverbal clues mean different things to different people and in different cultures, and can be interpreted in vastly different ways. One’s facial expressions are among the most telling of our nonverbal clues. “One research team found that some facial expressions, such as those conveying happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, and surprise, were the same in 68 to 92 percent of all cultures examined” (Beebe et al., 2008).

Proximity is also a strong nonverbal clue. Maybe you are not overly fond of a person who has approached you and you decide to keep your distance from him or her. Conversely, when a person approaches you that you consider to be your friend and confidant, you may move closer to him or her. The rules surely vary from culture to culture, but consider the diagram in Figure 13.3, The Classification of Spatial Zones, as described by interpersonal expert Edward T. Hall (1966).



How do your physical actions influence your message?