

Mehrabian A. *Nonverbal communication*.

Chicago, IL: Aldine-Atherton, 1972. 226 p.

[Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA]

Nonverbal communication involves a large number of symbols (gestures, expressions) that are difficult to conceptualize. This volume presents a system for description and integration of findings in this field based upon a succinct conceptualization of the referents in this communication process. The three fundamental dimensions of reference are positiveness, potency or status, and responsiveness (later described as pleasure-displeasure, dominance-submissiveness, and level of arousal). [The *Science Citation Index*® (SCI®) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI®) indicate that this book has been cited in over 280 publications since 1972.]

Albert Mehrabian
Department of Psychology
University of California
Los Angeles, CA 90024

August 6, 1984

"When I began my studies on nonverbal communication, I was overwhelmed by the diversity of bodily and vocal cues, each of which could have a particular significance, and possibly a different significance in different contexts. Typical studies during the 1960s tended to focus on a very few of these cues and attempted to detail the significance of each cue in terms of arbitrarily selected concepts that suited the particular investigator. Thus, integration of the available findings within a coherent framework was extremely difficult.

"Having come into psychology with an engineering background, I tended to conceptualize psychological phenomena in terms of variables and their interrelationships. Also, I appreciated the importance of concise and systematic description as the foundation of any scientific activity. Factor analyses of some of the data from my studies in which numerous nonverbal behavioral variables had been scored and from other studies that had identified relationships between groups of cues and referents of those cues were helpful.^{1,2} I was led to the idea that nonverbal communication essentially has a limited set of referent dimensions dealing with expression and communication of

feelings and attitudes. Thus, instead of focusing on the numerous behavioral cues, I analyzed the referents of nonverbal communication to try to achieve a system of organization.

"Emotions were easily analyzed in terms of three basic and independent dimensions, pleasure-displeasure, arousal-non-arousal, and dominance-submissiveness (although these were labeled differently in earlier studies). Attitudes (e.g., like-dislike, preference, approach-avoidance) were in turn analyzed in terms of emotions—once again, though, these relationships were clarified in our studies from the mid- to late 1970s. For example, a strong positive attitude entails pleasure plus arousal; a strong negative attitude involves displeasure and arousal. Eye contact generally implies liking and preference, although there are important exceptions. When displeasure cues (e.g., words, bodily tension) accompany eye contact, they imply a strong negative attitude. So eye contact essentially implies communicator arousal and, depending on its association with pleasant and unpleasant verbal or nonverbal cues, serves to intensify the communication of positive versus negative attitudes.

"Once this framework for conceptualizing referents of nonverbal communication was in place, it was an easy matter to summarize the existing literature and to generate studies that would explore systematically important phenomena in the field (e.g., status communication, deceit, persuasion) that had been neglected or studied only minimally. *Nonverbal Communication* summarized about 10 years of my studies based on the above framework, and perhaps this emphasis on organization and concise description explains its value to other researchers and students.

"Almost 10 years later, I wrote a new (second) edition of *Silent Messages*³ that was written more informally and primarily as a text, but that nevertheless updated the framework in terms of many new findings that had become available in the meantime. The conceptual analysis of nonverbal communication in *Silent Messages* also helps clarify some puzzling and apparently inconsistent findings in the literature."

1. Mehrabian A & Ksiazky S. Categories of social behavior. *Comp. Group Stud.* 3:425-36, 1972.

2. Mehrabian A. Verbal and nonverbal interaction of strangers in a waiting situation.

J. Exp. Res. Pers. 5:127-38, 1971. (Cited 30 times.)

3., *Silent messages: implicit communication of emotions and attitudes*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1981. 196 p.