

communication is available if we scrutinize specific facets of our society: the use of nonverbal cues in psychiatry, teaching the deaf, doctor-nurse communication during operations, disturbed nonverbal communication, audience-speaker nonverbal communication, advertising, music, our use of time, art, pictures, dance, nonverbal aspects of written and printed language, nonverbal cues in deceptive communications, communicating across cultures, communicating across ethnic groups within a culture, drum and whistle languages—the list is interminable. . . .<sup>19</sup>

## Perspectives on the Origins and Universality of Nonverbal Behavior

The ontogenetic development of human speech is a well-known process; the development and origin of nonverbal behaviors is much less clear. We do know that during the first two years of a child's life, he exhibits an extensive repertoire of nonverbal signals to communicate with those around him. We also know he is learning to interpret various nonverbal signals he receives from others.

Ekman and Friesen speculate that there are three sources for our various nonverbal behaviors: (1) inherited neurological programs, (2) experiences common to all members of the species—e.g., regardless of culture the hands will be used to place food in the mouth, and (3) experience which varies with culture, class, family, or individual.<sup>20</sup> Generally, nonverbal behaviors are partly instinctive, partly taught, and partly imitative. The origins of the specific nonverbal behaviors mentioned earlier are as follows:

*Emblems* are learned in conjunction with a specific culture. They are specifically taught as verbal language is taught.

*Illustrators* are socially learned by imitation. They vary with ethnicity, and cultural and class differences will be found in type and frequency.

*Regulators* are learned, but it is not certain when.

*Affect displays* show a relationship between facial musculature, affect and some of the evokers which is neurologically pro-

<sup>19</sup>T. Stern, "Drum and Whistle Languages: An Analysis of Speech Surrogates," *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957):487-506.

<sup>20</sup>Ekman and Friesen, "Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior."

grammed. Some evokers, blends, display rules, and consequences are socially learned.

*Adaptors* are habits first learned to deal with sensation, excretion, ingestion, grooming and affect; to maintain prototypic interpersonal relationships; or to perform instrumental tasks.

The fact that Ekman and Friesen think some affect displays may not be culture-bound raises a long-standing question in nonverbal communication theory and research.<sup>21</sup> Birdwhistell, who claims his research began with a search for universal gestures, said flatly in a 1970 *New York Times* interview: "There are no universal gestures. As far as we know, there is no single facial expression, stance, or body position which conveys the same meaning in all societies." Davitz, however, presents evidence which indicates at least some expressive facial patterns are not learned—their emergence depending primarily on physical maturation.

This conclusion is further supported by studies of congenitally blind subjects, whose opportunities for learning facial expression by imitation are obviously limited.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence supporting the universality of facial expressions is found in the work of Ekman and his colleagues.<sup>23</sup> Photos of faces expressing happiness, fear, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, and interest were easily identified by observers in at least six different countries—some of which were very isolated and primitive. Ekman reasoned that previous studies which showed persons from different literate cultures associating the same emotion concepts with the same facial behaviors did not prove universality. The exposure of such persons to the mass media might have taught them to recognize unique aspects of faces in other cultures. However, in several studies with preliterate cultures (New Guinea) which did not have widespread contact with mass media, Ekman found results comparable to those found in literate Eastern and Western cultures. In these studies, stories were told to the subjects who were then asked to select one of three facial photos which reflected the emotion

<sup>21</sup>Darwin also argued that some affect states were universal to mankind, cf. C. Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1896).

<sup>22</sup>J. R. Davitz, ed., *The Communication of Emotional Meaning* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964):19-20.

<sup>23</sup>P. Ekman and W. V. Friesen, "Constants Across Cultures in the Face and Emotion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 17 (1971):124-29. Also: P. Ekman, "Universals and Cultural Differences in Facial Expressions of Emotion," in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, ed. J. Cole (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972).