

BODY AS A MEANS OF IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Nonverbal communication comprises of the totality of the nonverbal stimuli formulated by the source acted in particular settings that suggests coded messages for the receiver. As nonverbal signifiers, these messages both tacitly and explicitly represent the kind of values the subjective self intends to transmit. Similarly, such conveyance in a communication process may stem from the source's affiliation in a broader collective formation that has its own symbolic entailments. In this regard, the signified message represents a much wider community that the source identifies with. At the core of this research lies the understanding that nonverbal marks express who we are and what we identify with. Both the self-conception and how we intend to be perceived are represented in certain physical marks including our body gestures, the artifacts we carry, the pitch and tones of our voices, and the limits of space we occupy. These identity configurations in a communication process create impressions on who we are while some of these expressions are more controllable than the others. Among the social and cultural identities that this research aims to explore are gender identities, national identities, religious identities, class identities, and personal identities. As for the methodology used to examine the subject, I took part in a micro-level ethnomethodological research into the organized everyday situations through observations made at a public setting in the capital city of Hungary, Budapest. Though the emphasis isn't so much on the field work, the datum gathered through participant observations are to provide a first-hand backbone for this review article as all the observed participants performed a set of nonverbal marks that they consider to be in line with their identity as well as their public appearance. Last but not least, with the aim to reflect and analyze the everyday conditions within which the social

interactions are formed insomuch as to constitute a non-verbal order relevant to performed social identity, I contrastively study and exemplify how the self is subjectivated through communicative interactions, and how nonverbal cues are deployed in the process of identity management.

Keywords: *Non-verbal Communication, Social Identity, Identity Management, Body*

KİMLİĞİN İFADESİ OLARAK BEDEN

ÖZ

Sözsüz iletişim sözel olmayan yollarla belirli sosyal durumlara uygun oluşturmuş ve alıcı için kodlanmış mesajlar içeren ifadelerin bütünüdür. Sözel olmayan gösterenler olarak bu mesajlar hem örtük hem de açık bir şekilde öznel benliğin iletmeyi amaçladığı değer türlerini temsil eder. Benzer şekilde, bir iletişim sürecindeki bu tür bir aktarım, kaynağın kendi sembolik unsurları olan daha geniş bir kolektif oluşumdaki bağlantısından kaynaklanabilir. Bu bağlamda, gösterilen mesaj, kaynağın özdeşleştiği çok daha geniş bir topluluğu temsil eder. Bu araştırmanın temelinde, sözsüz yollarla kodlanmış işaretlerin hem kimliğimizi ifade edecek şekilde oluşturulduğu anlayışı hem de bu işaretlerin kendimizi neyle ve nasıl özdeşleştirdiğimizi anlama amacı yatmaktadır. Hem benlik anlayışı hem de nasıl temsil edilmeyi arzuladığımız, vücut jestlerimiz, taşıdığımız objeler, sesimizin perdesi ve tonu ve işgal ettiğimiz alanın sınırları dahil olmak üzere belirli fiziksel işaretler yoluyla temsil edilir. Bir iletişim sürecindeki bu kimlik yapılandırılmaları, kim olduğumuz hakkında izlenimler yaratırken, bu ifadelerden bazıları diğerlerinden daha kontrol edilebilir durumdadır. Bu araştırmanın analiz etmeyi amaçladığı sosyal ve kültürel kimlikler arasında cinsiyet kimlikleri, ulusal kimlikler, dini kimlikler, sınıf kimlikleri ve kişisel kimlikler bulunmaktadır. Konuyu incelemek için kullanılan metodolojiye gelince, Macaristan'ın başkenti Budapeşte'de halka açık bir ortamda yaptığım gözlemler aracılığıyla günlük yaşamın iletişimsel boyutlarına yönelik mikro düzeyde etnometodolojik bir araştırma gerçekleştirdim. Vurgu alan çalışmasında çok fazla olmasa da gözlemlenen tüm katılımcılar, kimlikleriyle ve toplum içindeki görünüşleriyle uyumlu olduğunu düşündükleri bir dizi sözel olmayan işaretler kullandıkları için katılımcı gözlemleri yoluyla toplanan veriler, bu makale için doğrudan bir temel sağlamaktır. Performe edilen sosyal kimlikle ilgili sözlü olmayan bir düzen oluşturacak şekilde sosyal etkileşimlerin olduğu günlük koşulları yansıtmak ve analiz etmek amacıyla, benliğin iletişimsel etkileşimler yoluyla nasıl öznelleştirildiğini ve sözsüz iletişimin hangi ölçüde kimlik yönetimi sürecinde kullanıldığını karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz etmeyi amaçlıyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sözsüz İletişim, Sosyal Kimlik, Kimlik Yönetimi, Beden

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of non-verbally conducted communication to the enactment of social identities is undoubtedly significant with its tremendous role in the maintenance and representation of subjective identities. As the main objective being the exploration of the non-verbal interactions whereby the identity performance is carried out, the non-verbal function as cues that deliver encoded messages often expressed through physical appearance, vocal behaviors, body gestures, facial behaviors, and space environment (Gyasi, 2015). In both the construction and reproduction of the social self, it is vitally important to understand the parameters of non-verbal communication which function as a reinforcing and sustaining component of social identities. Non-verbal communication defined as “oral or non-oral messages expressed by other than linguistic means” (Adler, 2009) can be categorized into messages by “sender or receiver intended as a message by the sender or interpreted by the receiver as intended” (Trenholm, Jensen, 2000). These message categories bring up the concern of perception and socially acceptable self-performance. One’s acknowledged social identity constitutes a set of non-verbal codes that foster the intended identity, and therefore the non-verbal decoding of messages remains as crucial as the non-verbally decoded information. Throughout this research paper, collective and individual identities are discussed based on the non-verbal compatibility with social group belongings, and the ways in which the discrepant identities merge are analyzed. The research hypothesizes that kinesics, proxemics, and haptics immensely depend on one’s social affiliations and identities, and therefore it is significantly important to draw attention to the fact that a smooth non-verbal interaction process can be achieved through understanding the obstacles and advantages that one’s identity marks cause.

A contrastive analysis through the components of nonverbal communication not only helps us to understand the nature of the interactional conflicts, communicational uncertainties and roadblocks for a smoother communicative process but also contributes to our conception on the highly significant impact the social and cultural construction of identities have on communication processes. Studies similar to this show us the ways in which identity is manifested hand in hand with our interactions with others. It is indeed the interactions upon which the identity is expressed, through which the public self is represented, and above all, we as individuals in our own cultural context come to exist as coherent and harmonious beings. In other words, the subtle and tacit mechanisms that constitute an interactional relation between individuals and groups are not detached from the

identities that communicate, nor can the formation and representation of identities can be perceived as a separate concept from the stages of communication.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Micro-level observations were made at a public setting in Budapest where the observer conducted several hours of observations focusing on the nonverbal tendencies occurring across the social identities studied in this research paper. These observations were carried out both distantly and inside the community observed. While the on-spot note-taking was applied, I aim to analytically interpret the observed datum with the support of certain theoretical framework. These observations were majorly made based on the nonverbal interactions through the use of haptics, proxemics, and kinesics, and the conclusions were drawn based on how class, race, religion, gender and age identities utilize from different nonverbal signs that are relevant to their social identities. Additionally, among twenty people who were observed at a public setting, though there were by-passers who interacted with those observed, every observed participant made use of space, gestures, and touch in so much that none of the nonverbal marks lacked showing sufficient amount of nonverbal marks intrinsic to both their collective and personal identities.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Speaking of identities that occur across cultures and societies, there is a need to provide a theoretical background as to how exactly social identities are formed and function. In this regard, the social identity theory refers to one's perception and expression of the self by partaking in a relevant social group, and therefore self-concept manifests itself through group affiliations and intergroup behaviors (Turner & Oakes, 1986: 237-252). This particular theory suggests that social structural elements not only impact on individual's behavior but also the ways in which behaviors occur (Tajfel, Turner, 1979: 33-47). As it explores the areas whereby individual behaviors take place in a non-verbal setting, the self-concept would be of high relevance in the sense of individual's self-perception, and group memberships determine the codes of non-verbal communication (Turner, Reynolds, 2001: 133-152). Gender identity, for instance, is immensely reflected on individual's choice on outer appearance, non-verbal signs, and the elements of proxemics, haptics, and kinesics. The socially constituted marks of femininity and masculinity, or fluid/androgynous features, formulate a set of non-verbal codes that deliver a certain message relevant to the communicator's gender expression. Age identity such as in being elderly or young suggests behavioral expressions in one's non-verbal interaction as the age would attribute divergent non-verbal signs, and the decoding of messages can be made based on one's age identity. Similarly, the behavioral expression of one's identity is vividly manifested

through class and religious identities. The social class one considers being affiliated with suggests a non-verbal stratification in communication processes meaning that the represented social stratum constructs behavioral restrictions on one's interaction. This phenomenon can also be seen in religious identities as binary gender identities (man & woman) are subject to certain behavior codes encouraged by religious affiliations. Proxemics and haptics become a significant issue in the sense of opposite-sex interactions, and therefore individual's social identity is maintained through the avoidance of unintended levels of distance and touch. Furthermore, personal identity is rather a self-concept that has the potential to suggest miscellaneous non-verbal signs (Ennaji, 2005: 19-23). Within the Foucauldian understanding of subject and subjectivation, the subversion of and resistance to identity normativities as well as its conventionalities come from the repetition of acts to the extent that repetitive acts of a particular identity carries with itself the possibility of destruction of the identity.

NON-VERBAL REPRESENTATIONS OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

It is essential to understand that the social identities explored in this research represent a larger group in which the member individuals are expected to act on collective identities. For instance, an individual with a certain gender identity manifests particular nonverbal behaviors in a communication process, and these nonverbal signs represent and reflect on the person's collective identity. Because the hierarchical structuring plays a significant role in human groups, identities across such hierarchical positioning represent the kind of non-verbal marks that align with the tacit coercive expectations of the community. Therefore, group members even within the same affiliation are encouraged to play distinguished non-verbal behaviors that reflect on the in-group symbolism. A salient instance can be drawn from religious and political communities in which the affiliated individuals perform encoded non-verbal signs insomuch as the receiver is led toward a preferred reading, similar to Stuart Hall's concept of reception. In brief, the social identity and its categorization have the potential to affect the functions of communication, the non-verbal communication is directly influenced by cognitive and motivational elements fostered by the group (Chen, Bargh, 1997: 541-560). Categories that are socially constructed lead to an often unconsciously wired associations of stereotypical expectations which eventually make an impact on individual's behavioral attributions in an interaction process. It is to say that prejudices and behavioral tendencies towards stable interpretations of non-verbal signs are predominantly caused by fostered in-group codes of non-verbal culture (Manusov, Patterson, 2006: 481-500). Within the methodological aspect of this micro-scale observational research, almost all the observed participants performed identity cues through nonverbal signs which were relatively relevant to their identity management, and among the participants observed the religious

and class identity performance through nonverbal communication showed higher levels of affiliation to a collective group. For instance, the nonverbal posture of a young priest observed at a public setting showed that the interaction process of the observed participant was immensely restricted by the expectations and definitions set by their larger group belonging.

MARKING OF CLASS IDENTITY IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

Concerns of social stratum can be a driving component in how we are represented in our interactions. While the hegemonic codes of conduct are inevitable, the social magnitude of power that an individual is driven by manifests itself in the way we communicate, and it impacts the non-verbal cues towards the individuals of supposed different social stratum. Considering the class and religious identities, for instance, the hierarchical placement of certain individuals within particular groups bring about an often subtle non-verbal communication channels that are unique to their groups, and those member individuals are non-verbally subject to act on preliminary constituted non-verbal codes (Hall, Coats, Smith, 2005: 898-924). Judith Hall suggested the idea that individuals who belong to higher social status perform much more explicit and expressive nonverbal skills such as bigger facial expressions and open body postures (Hall, Coats, Smith, 2005: 898-924). During the observations for this research, two male participants in business suits came in contact with one another; the greeting showed big expressions with them using a strong hand-shaking, and the whole interaction can be considered as confident and assertive. Such assertive expressiveness was also observed in another participant's use of kinesics when he was talking on his mobile phone with excessive gestures and paralanguage. Though exceptions may apply, it is arguably a common conception that well-off being may also bring about certain levels of confident use of non-verbal signs. Overall, whether to stem from financial and occupational affluence or not, there is relatively a higher level of independency in the use of gestures and paralanguage in particular, in the nonverbal use of high-status individuals compare to those who feel more dependent on their surroundings and considers themselves comparably more limited in their use of excessive and assertive non-verbal marks. On the other hand, another participant who was a security guard avoided hand gestures each time he allowed white collar employees to enter in but used the nodding of his head as a modest way to greet. When the same person needed to interact with someone who was a well-groomed business person who is considered to have a more reputable position in the company, both performed different set of non-verbal marks even for a simple greeting process with the security guard keeping his modest head nodding while the business person preferred to stretch one of his arms to pat on his back as a way to show his level of non-condescending greeting.

COMMUNICATING THE RACIAL AND GENDER IDENTITIES

E. T. Hall suggested that racial differences are to be carefully considered in understanding non-verbal communication, and the hypothesis was that black culture in comparison with white culture reflects a more intimate and more 'sensorially involved' orientation. As indicated in 'The Sage Handbook of Nonverbal Communication (2006),' white men in the United States have had higher status and social power than black men and women. The role of culture in understanding the non-verbal signs among racial identities is crucial, and therefore it is likely to say that different racial cultures impose diversified codes of communication arising from either oppression or sublimation of a particular race over another (Halberstadt, 1985: 227-266). In particular, spatial behavior, visual contact, and touch have been studied in their relation to racial differences, and the results suggest differences for nonverbal behaviors of minority and majority group members. Based on the oppression hypothesis (Henly, 1977), 'the chronic stigmatization' of minority groups leads them to perform systematic nonverbal signs which differ from that of the majority or dominant groups. Black groups would avoid eye-contact with white groups, and the non-verbal mechanisms of haptic and kinesics would then be eliminated through resistance and avoidance (Ashburn-Nardo, Knowles, Monteith, 2003: 61-87). The observations showed that the nonverbal use of eye-contact between different skin colors as in black and white are highly differentiated. Although this is not to reach any categorical understanding of how both groups interact with one another, during the public space observations, two of the African participants greeted each other and made a congenial eye-contact with one another as such suggesting a racial identity performance through racial similarities. Conversely, when two white-skinned participants were in an interaction process, it showed considerable differences in the use of touch and spatial behavior with less expressive gestures and more distance in between. On the other hand, there arose significant interactional dissimilarities between the nonverbal communication of male and female individuals. The observed female participants used more expressive facial gestures, and the interaction was much more intimate than the male participants. Though the African male participants still show more intimate nonverbal interactions than the white-skinned participants, the female use of nonverbal signs stands out as rather explicit, intimate and expressive. In particular, haptic played a significant role in distinguishing the sexuality-wise identity performance in a sense that two of the observed participants who presumably identify as gay (assumption made upon the local understanding of what an effeminate man is like) used much more intimate and expressive use of space, hand gestures and touch than other male participants who I assumed to be straight men, at least in public spheres.

NON-VERBAL CUES OF AGE AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

Age identity is equally essential to understanding the proxemics as Halberstadt's review (Halberstadt, 1985: 227-266) suggested that black children appear to keep more intimate interpersonal distance than white children. Some of the observed participants who were elderly men and women suggest that older individuals use kinesics more mindfully and carefully than the younger participants. The older participants show that space and touch play a remarkable role in their identity management as the violation of them are considered rather disrespectful. The religious identity, on the other hand, would assume its unique non-verbal codes as the use of space would highly differ based on the hierarchical nature of religious groups, and the power display among the member individuals. The accumulated cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) assumes certain material and symbolic means reflected and implemented through nonverbal messages. For instance, based on the observed participants, the female religious participants are less explicit in their nonverbal interactions and they avoid eye-contact and touch with the opposite-sex. One of the observed participants who was a Muslim woman suggests that her nonverbal interaction with a local vendor lacked eye-contact and expressive hand gestures. Additionally, the religious male participants refused to keep an intimate space with another woman, and their use of kinesics was rather limited to avoid social judgments.

DISTANCE AS AN IDENTITY MANAGEMENT THROUGH NONVERBAL CODES OF COMMUNICATION

In this section, each nonverbal sign as in distance, eye-contact, and body language are exemplified both theoretically and empirically. This section provides a contrastive analysis of cultural differences in performing social identities, and how different societies define nonverbal signs. Edward T. Hall in his contribution to nonverbal communication suggested intimate, personal, social, and public levels of distance that are highly correlated with one's social identity. These zones are set to define and limit individual's identity performance, for instance, Middle Eastern identities find it very natural to violate distance zones and perform close interactions with one another. This has to do with certain national and religious identities such as Islamic identities value close interactions as a symbol of fraternity and unity. On the other hand, this may oppose predominant gender roles existing in the oriental cultures as for men to perform intimate interactions, holding hands, etc., with the same sex are considered to be a homosexual behavior, and therefore it is socially condemned. However, compared to Northern Europe, the interactions among same-sex Middle Eastern individuals are much more intimate and warm. Because there exists a personal identity that cannot be categorized into any of the

classified social identities, some non-confrontative individuals tend to adapt their distance zone based on the situation. Their perception of proxemics appears to be far more flexible than that of the class and religious identities (Hall, 1988: 91).

EYE CONTACT AS AN IDENTITY MANAGEMENT THROUGH NONVERBAL CODES OF COMMUNICATION

Eye contacts suggest implications of identity in non-verbal interactions depending on whether it is to be a religious identity or a class identity which both impose certain limitations for eye contacts. High context-dependent cultures often utilize eye contacts for which Korean national identity created a unique term: *nunchi* (communication with eyes). Low context-dependent cultures such as the German culture suggest a cultural nonverbal identity by encouraging long eye contacts a symbol of honesty. This is also quite visible in Arabic identities but is challenged in Asian and African cultures as having long eye contacts with elderly people are considered to be impolite and disrespectful. In the sense of religious identities, Islamic identity would suggest outstanding nonverbal interaction codes as for both binary gender identities exist certain nonverbal behaviors that would be appreciated within the religious society. For Muslim women, for instance, staring at men would be considered immoral and excessive levels of body gestures would be a threat to their modesty. The Muslim women in hijab would often avoid intimate distance, eye contact, pompous body language, and inflated paralanguage with the opposite sex. On the other hand, haptics is much more appreciated in Southern European, Latin America, and Middle Eastern countries as in both personal and class identities (Nees, 2000: 93).

BODY LANGUAGE AS AN IDENTITY MANAGEMENT THROUGH NONVERBAL CODES OF COMMUNICATION

As discussed earlier, hierarchy plays a remarkable role in individual's identity performance in nonverbal communication. In India and Turkey, crossed legs are considered to be extremely rude to the elderly people, and not making a body gesture or slightly bending over when an elderly person enters a room is also quite disrespectful for more conservative subcultures in Turkey. Concerning gender identity, for women to use exaggerated paralanguage and kinesics are not quite appreciated in more uncivilized subcultures. Because majorly all monotheistic religions encourage women to live and behave in modesty, this very phenomenon is immensely reflected in the gender identity performance in nonverbal interactions. (Park, Streamer, Huang, Galinsky, 2013: 965-971).

KINESICS AD EXPECTANCY VIOLATIONS AS AN IDENTITY MANAGEMENT THROUGH NONVERBAL CODES OF COMMUNICATION

Ray Birdwhistell suggested assumptions concerning the functioning and structure of bodily activities in nonverbal communications. Bodily movements carry meanings and function as vessels to deliver different messages. Because the identities foster systemized bodily movements, behaviors become the encoded messages. The fact that different social groups construct different identities, the member individuals are expected to act upon the socially constructed identity roles and limitations which eventually create a divergent set of bodily gestures in nonverbal interactions. There is an in-group paralanguage as well as bodily movements created by different groups, and therefore just as some of the body gestures carry universal meanings, certain group identities suggest a particular set of gestures used and maintained by member individuals. Because the body activities are observable, the communicators can adopt and imitate certain gestures commonly used in their affiliated groups. This then collides with other groups and divergent identities when an intergroup nonverbal interaction is carried out. Idiocratical behaviors in nonverbal communication can be considered as individual's unconscious gesture of performing particular bodily activities that are a part of a larger group or society. Therefore, it is likely to assert that the shared nonverbal gestures function as the sustaining unit of identities through which individuals perform their socially imposed nonverbal behaviors (Birdwhistell, 1952). The issue, however, arises when the expected behavioral codes are transgressed and violated which leads to anxiety and undesired distractions in nonverbal communication. People hold certain expectations for what is nonverbally rightful to behave and anticipate certain nonverbal behaviors to be performed. These expectations are largely created by each communicator based on the perceived identity of one another. Consequently, identities rise to the surface as the fundamental basis through which nonverbal interactions are performed, limited, or smoothly carried out (Burgoon, Guerrero, Floyd, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The significant impact norms and values have on the constitution and expression of social identities is vital to our analysis of nonverbal interactions. Considering the limited nature of identities, nonverbal signs are utilized to maintain and transmit the social codes of identity. Group normative behaviors that affect the construction, perception and representation of nonverbal signs are undoubtedly crucial to the relationship between identity and communication. For instance, physical appearance including clothing, hairstyle, and cosmetics hint the stratum

individuals communicate through and function as indicative of self-image and identity. Thus, it is likely to say that humans communicate their identities by prescribed meanings to their bodies, and the nonverbal signs demonstrate the individual's self-concept and how the communicator desires to be perceived. Similar to how cultural values and norms that occur within groups of social identities influence the nonverbal components such as touch, space, and gestures, our bodies are limited or reduced to public and private spheres we come in contact with. In this regard, there is a bidirectional relation between the ways in which the body adapts certain nonverbal marks to constitute a communicative meaning and how certain marks are preferred over others for the constitution of the body. Body, in a sense, is subject to a process of repetitive construction. The ideology in the psyche, the knowledge in the soul of a human becomes the means through which the body is constituted, meaning that the physical becomes a vessel to the unseen that inhabits the human body. In such a process of bodily becoming, one becomes subjectivated through discursive power within which the nonverbal coding of meaning is crucial. Gender identity stands out as a salient concept in which the body is subject to a constant repetition for its composition, in which the nonverbal components are the signifiers for a signified meaning we aim to give in an interactional process with others. Considering kinesics and the way in which the parts of the body movements are significantly linked to how the body becomes imprisoned to the ideological expressions of identity. In this sense, it would be relevant to claim that our identity performance through nonverbal encoding is one of the most efficient and fastest ways to reflect our self-image and social group belongings. As racial and ethnic identities in their complex historical nature have developed in-group codes that are determiners of how group image and concept should be portrayed as well as the identities that represent gender, age, class, and religion displayed through controlling the impressions of others and attentively guiding the appearance and manner, we are led to the quest for self-identity, which is a long-standing area of inquiry within Western individualism.

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