Nonverbal Communication in Australia: 
An Ethnography

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in interactions each and every day. The use of nonverbal messages may vary among different cultures. After learning about intercultural communication and nonverbal communication codes and messages in college classrooms for four years, I applied my knowledge to real world experiences while studying abroad in Australia. Through the use of observations, field notes, and personal experiences, I have compiled an ethnography to describe what I've learned about the nonverbal communication codes that are part of the daily lives of Australians and those that visit the land down under.
Acknowledgements

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I would like to thank my family and friends for providing encouragement, love, and laughs when I was homesick for America and when I missed Australia. These people helped me get through so much. Without them, this book would not be half of what it has become.

Finally, I would like to thank Scott. He has given me strength, courage, insight, and, above all, love. From the moment I told him I was leaving the country to the moment I finished this book nearly a year later, he has been by my side. He deserves so many thanks.
Author's Statement

I decided to create this book for my Honors Thesis because I wanted to produce something that was easy to read and interesting for future students who may be considering studying abroad in Australia. I wanted my book to resemble a travel guide about the nonverbal communication I observed while in Australia. The experiences that I chose to write about were selected because of the nonverbal messages that occurred during those interactions. I also chose specific situations in order to best represent my time in Australia.
Nonverbal Communication in Australia: An Ethnography

By Courtney L. Sheets
This book was written and edited by Courtney Sheets. All photos are property of Courtney Sheets. All experiences are written from the author’s point of view as she remembers them.
The author would like to thank her loved ones for providing encouragement and support while creating this book. She would also like to thank Professor Richard Shoemaker for helping in the creation of this book.
How It All Began
In September 2010, I walked down the stairs of the Art and Journalism Building at Ball State University and walked into the study abroad fair that was put on each semester. At the time, it was my first semester of my senior year of undergraduate school. Always one to browse at these types of on-campus events, I decided to walk around the loop of tables that was set up. On the top of each table was the name of a city, country, or international student organization. Behind the tables sat enthusiastic students and professors who were eager to tell me more about the country they had already visited or were planning to visit. I smiled and nodded at the study abroad representatives as I snatched a pen or other free souvenir from each table. Some countries I actually had an interest in visiting, so I paid slightly more attention.

Nevertheless, this was supposed to be my last year of undergraduate school. I would only have fall and spring semester before I was handed my bachelor’s degree and shoved out into the real world of careers, bills, and nights of falling asleep well before midnight. Or at least the last two semesters before I elected to sit behind more desks in more university classrooms, stay up too late and wake up too early, have Pita Pit delivered every other night for dinner, and study for a couple more years until I earned another degree. I didn’t have time to study abroad. I had college student things to do.

Then I found myself standing in front of a table that had a man about my age sitting behind it and pamphlets about the Australia Centre spread out on the tabletop. He was slouching a bit and didn’t lean forward or even sit up when I showed genuine interest in the pamphlets. I actually believe he did not even notice I was standing there.

“Hi...” I said to him, hoping he would tell me more about Australia, about living there for three months, about meeting the people and swimming in the ocean and about being in a place where the people spoke English, not some foreign language I would have to learn before going there. He smiled and gave a nod.

“So, did you go there?” I asked, gesturing to a map of Australia’s east coast. “I think I’d like to go there.”

Finally, he sat up and began talking. He was a student who had been to Ball State’s Australia Centre the previous fall. He told me that the cabin he stayed in was right by the beach and a pool and some kind of lake. He said it did not cost much more than a BSU semester in Muncie, Indiana. He said it was the time of his life.

I was more than interested at this point. I was determined. I wanted to, needed to, had to go to Australia. Who cares about classes and graduating on time? Give me the beach, the sunshine, the laid back attitude, the cute Aussie accent. Give me a three-month long vacation.

After listening to the student talk, I grabbed pieces of literature about the Australia Centre off the table, smiled, and turned to walk away. My mind was made up. In a few months, I would be on my way to the legendary land down under.

My smile grew wider as I walked away from the study abroad fair and toward the doors leading out of the Art and Journalism Building. On my way out the doors, I reached inside my sweatshirt pocket and pulled out my cell phone—time to call my mother. My
mom is always the first person I call when I have big news. She's always been so supportive of me, and I was excited to hear her thoughts on my new travel plans.

“Oh good, I'm coming to visit you then," was her initial response. She asked about the cost and the details of the trip. I told her what I knew and she agreed it was a great idea. "I've always told you that this is the best time in your life to travel," she said. "You should definitely go. Plus I want to visit you. Or rather I want to see Australia and you're a good enough reason for me to go." I laughed, thanked her, and hung up.

As I thought about this wonderful opportunity, I realized that my trip to Australia could also provide me with an interesting topic for my honors thesis. Why not pay special attention to the nonverbal communication that Australians use?

I was already looking forward to communicating with the legendary people from the land down under. It made me even more excited to consider the possibility of observing and deciphering their nonverbal messages while communicating with my future Aussie friends.

I have always been interested in nonverbal communication. I think it's brilliant that we say so much without speaking. So I wanted to learn more about nonverbal messages. I wanted to pay more attention to the nonverbal communication going on around me. I wanted to expand my knowledge of nonverbal messages and the meaning behind those messages. And I wanted a reason to do all that. This thesis—and Australia—gave me a reason. So I formulated a plan.

My plan was pretty simple. Go to Australia. Talk to people. Purposely don't talk to people. Watch people. Learn about people. Learn about nonverbal communication. I would keep a journal the entire time I was in Australia. I also would read up on the subjects of nonverbal communication, intercultural communication, and communication in general.

Then I started writing. I read through my journal over and over again, read through all my research notes, looked through my pictures about a million times, and tried to remember everything I could about all that I learned about nonverbal communication in Australia. Then I wanted to just write and write and write about it all.

Keep in mind that this book does not represent anyone else's views on nonverbal communication, Australia, or anything else I've discussed. It is just a collection of my observations, thoughts, experiences, research, and ideas. Much of what is in this book is strictly my opinion. The only instances in which others' views or ideas are present are where I have cited these sources.

I am not trying to convince anyone to believe in what I think and what I learned about nonverbal communication in Australia. I am just sharing. I hope you do learn some things from reading this. I hope you enjoy it. I hope you can imagine some of these experiences. I hope you can laugh and scoff and smile as you imagine me and my American and Australian friends in some of these strange circumstances. I hope you decide to learn more about nonverbal communication. I hope you decide to go to the land down under and meet the wonderful people there. Now let me tell you more about what you are getting yourself into by reading this book.
First, there is a literature review. I've done my research and I want to share what I've learned about nonverbal communication through reading books and scholarly articles about the subject. There is information about what nonverbal communication is, what it isn't, the different types of nonverbal messages, the functions, and more. Then you can read about the methods I used to put this thesis into action and the process I've gone through to get to this final product that you are reading now. The next section includes some of my experiences while living in Australia. I've included stories about talking, watching, listening, dancing, drinking, eating, volunteering, and just living in the land down under for three months. Finally, there is an implications section. This section will sum up what I've learned from my observations, and what I want you to have gleaned from my experiences and from this book.
Literature Review:
What are Nonverbal Messages?
Smiles, dramatic hand gestures, eye rolls, hugs, harrumph noises, winks, personal appearances, how close I’m standing to someone, the time I arrive to meetings, and the squeaky pitch of my voice are all examples of nonverbal communication. These examples are only a small portion of this complex subject. My hope is that this book will help you learn more about nonverbal communication, because you use it to communicate on a daily basis.

Nonverbal communication includes all communication messages that do not involve the use of actual words when people interact. The various forms of nonverbal messages are critical in successful communication because people often interpret messages by relying more on nonverbal cues than the words spoken in interactions. In fact, nonverbal messages account for up to 70 percent of communication and are considered more believable than verbal communication (Guerrero, 1-2).

Sometimes you say something but you mean something completely different. Well, people pick up on that because of nonverbal messages. People pay attention to those eye rolls and the fact that your hand lingered on their arm for too long or that you took a step back when they approached. Think about it next time you are communicating with someone.

Nonverbal messages are not only used to communicate without speaking. This type of communication is also functional. Nonverbal communication works to create impressions and inspire judgments, send relational messages, express emotion, aid in deceiving and detecting deception, and send messages of power and persuasion (“Perspectives on Defining,” 5-11). I speak, both nonverbally and verbally, the truth about the importance of nonverbal messages.

Nonverbal communication and verbal communication are both vocal and nonvocal (Guerrero, 1-2). Although it is called “nonverbal” communication, not all aspects of this type of communication lack the use of words. Think about this, sometimes people grunt, or sigh, or scoff, or let out a high-pitched yelp when they are excited or scared. Sometimes people use different tones, pitches, and volumes when they are talking. These are nonverbal messages too.

Nonverbal communication is organized into types of messages known as codes. Most educational material shows that there are five different types of codes (Guerrero 45-47; Gudykunst, 73-75). These codes are: contact codes, physical appearance, kinesic cues, vocalic cues, and time and place codes. Each code involves a different type of nonverbal communication and presents different messages (“Perspectives on Defining,” 9-10).

Because we are looking at Australians’ nonverbal communication from one American’s point of view, we must also consider the cultural dimensions that are involved in nonverbal communication. There are four intercultural dimensions that I will examine. The four dimensions are: immediacy, individualism-collectivism, power distance, and high and low context (Gudykunst, 75-85). Each dimension considers what the nonverbal messages are communicating about that dimension. First I will elaborate on the five codes. Then I will explain the four intercultural dimensions involved in nonverbal communication.
Contact Codes

Contact codes are nonverbal messages involving haptics and proxemics. Haptics refers to the use of physical contact or touch (Guerrero, 182-185). When someone shakes your hand or gives you a big bear hug or completely avoids physical contact, they are using haptics to communicate messages. There are numerous types of touch such as professional, informal, intimate, controlling, and more. Cultures that use haptics while communicating more often are considered high-contact cultures. Cultures that use haptics less often are called low-contact cultures (Gudykunst, 74-76).

The second part of contact codes is proxemics, which is the use of space and distance. This refers to how close you stand to someone when you are talking to them or how far you try to distance yourself from your fellow communicator. Distance nonverbally says a lot. If you are so close that your arm is touching the other person's arm, then that communicates something much different than if you nonchalantly take a step back every time the other person moves closer to you. The contact codes aspect of nonverbal messages communicates much about the relationship of the people involved in the conversation (Gudykunst, 75).

Physical Appearance

This code includes physical appearance and the adornments you use to express yourself. What you wear, how you do your hair, what makeup you use, your perfume or cologne, your accessories, and even your perceived level of attractiveness all send nonverbal messages to those around you (Guerrero, 48-49).

One study examined the role physical appearances play in the likeliness that someone will be hired. The results of the study concluded that well dressed, attractive people are more likely to be hired and to earn a higher wage than someone who is less attractive and not as well dressed (Hamermesh, 69-72; Kaiser, 74-79). Studies also found that women were perceived as more business-like and successful when wearing skirted suits or suits with blouses than when they were wearing more feminine clothing such as dresses (Kaiser, 79). There have even been studies conducted on the link between perfume use and a person's level of attractiveness. These studies showed that increased use of perfume lowered the subject's level of attractiveness people of the opposite sex (Aune, 95-99).

I don't need to say this, but people do notice appearances. In my opinion, appearance is one of the most obvious, most perceived, and loudest nonverbal messages that someone can communicate.

Kinesic Cues

Kinesics includes the messages you send with your body, such as gestures, posture, and body movement. Kinesics also include the messages you send with your face, such as smiling, frowning, pouting, and oculesics (eye movements). When you roll your eyes, avert your eyes from the person you are talking to, or maintain constant eye contact, you are using nonverbal kinesics messages (Guerrero, 103-104).

Communication researchers have conducted numerous studies on the use and meaning of kinesic cues. One study showed that eye contact has functions such as expressing emotion.
and expressing a willingness to relate to what the other person is saying (Grumet, 119-126). Another study examined how the lack of kinesics was involved in civil inattention, which is when two people are in the same place but do not interact, such as in elevators (Zuckerman, 130-137). In addition, there are studies that focus on the social and emotional messages of smiling and (Kraut, 139-142).

**Vocalic Cues**

Vocalics is also referred to as paralanguage, because it includes the sounds of the voice. Vocalic cues are important aspects of nonverbal communication and include: speaking rate, volume, pitch, accents, pauses, vocalizations, hesitations, and purposeful silence (Guerrero, 151-152). When we talk it is not what we are saying but how we say it that communicates more than our actual words. Vocal cues influence the perceptions people have of others. Vocal attractiveness is based on vocal pitch, resonance, articulation, and volume and influence first impressions (Semic, 151-158). Vocal cues can also express intimacy and affection (Farinelli, 160-166). Many studies have examined how silence is used to communicate, and how silence can cause confusion during interactions. Silence can be perceived as affectionate, judgmental, thoughtful, or sincerity (Jawaorski, 175-180).

For example, I have witnessed classmates speak very quickly when nervous but talk at a much slower speed when relaxed. When I am excited, my voice gets high-pitched and louder. Even if you do not notice your own vocal changes, other people most likely will notice.

**Time and Place Codes**

Time and place codes involve the context in which an interaction occurs, so these codes are also referred to as contextual cues. Chronemics in nonverbal communication is the way people use and perceive time. These time codes include punctuality, time orientation, time preferences, and personal perception of time (Guerrero, 242-244). One study showed that individuals, organizations, and cultures all have varying perspectives of time. Age, gender, income, and occupation all play roles in a person's perception of time and time orientation. Time orientation means whether a person is more focused on the past, present, or future (Gonzalez, 245-253). Other literature examined the difference between monochronic and polychronic time. Monochronic people typically focus on one thing at a time, take commitments seriously, and are committed to their jobs. Polychronic people are more likely to multi-task, are easily distracted, and are more committed to relationships (Hall, 254-257). A person's culture has a significant impact on whether they are monochronic or polychronic.

Place codes deal with environmental cues such as the architectural design, decorations, furniture, color, and noise of the setting where the communication is taking place (Guerrero, 242-244). When someone asks to meet you at a coffee shop they are sending a much different nonverbal message than if they asked to meet at a fancy restaurant, at their office, or at a bar.

A room that is painted all white and has no decorations on the walls gives a much different message than a room that is painted a soft blue or a bright red and has pictures and paintings hanging on the walls. When walking into a person's house or an office building,
you may notice the colors of the walls. Studies show that different colors communicate different messages (Stein, 287-288).

**Intercultural Dimensions**

There are several intercultural dimensions from the various nonverbal codes that help us to better understand intercultural communication. In the next section, I will explain the four intercultural dimensions. Although there are similarities between some cultures, often there are differences in the intercultural dimensions of various cultures (Gudykunst, 37-41). In addition, in the following subsections I discuss the literature on Australian and American cultural aspects of those dimensions.

**Immediacy**

The immediacy dimension communicates the interpersonal closeness, warmth, and accessibility of people in intercultural interactions (Gudykunst, 74-76). Cultures that have high levels of immediacy, or interpersonal closeness are considered high-contact cultures. Some cultures have much lower levels of interpersonal closeness, so these cultures are considered low-contact. High-contact cultures use haptics and proxemics differently than low-contact cultures (Gudykunst, 74-76). High-contact cultures could be considered more hands-on. People in high-contact cultures use touch such as handshakes and hugs and usually stand closer to the person they are interacting with. People in low-contact cultures are less likely to use touch very often or stand very close to others when communicating. The literature I reviewed showed that the United States is a low-contact culture in comparison to the high-contact culture of Australia. This means that people in the U.S. are less likely to make physical contact when interacting with others. Australians are more likely to use haptics when communicating with others.

**Individual-Collectivism**

This dimension looks at whether a culture focuses more on collaboration and sharing (collectivism) or on personal rights and responsibilities (individualism). Studies show that the United States and Australia both have individualist cultures. In these types of societies, freedom, innovation, privacy, and self-expression are valued. Relationships with individuals are more important than membership in groups or large organizations (Gudykunst, 77-78). People living in both the U.S. and Australia value freedom, privacy, and self-expression.

**Power Distance**

The power distance dimension refers to the degree to which power, prestige, and wealth are unequally distributed within a culture and how this affects communication. Australia and the U.S. are both relatively low on the power distance scale. This means that the two countries believe that power should only be used when it is legitimate (Gudykunst, 79-81). Since both countries have elected government officials, power is somewhat in the hands of all the members of the country in the form of elections. In countries that are low on the power distance scale, people are unlikely to abuse their power or exert their control over those with less power. In countries that are high on the power distance scale, the people in charge are more likely to abuse and misuse their power over the general population. The U.S. has a system of checks and balances, which keeps those in power in check.
High and Low Context

The last intercultural dimension is directly correlated to nonverbal communication. If a culture is high context, then the culture's members rely mainly on the physical context of the interaction to determine the meaning of messages. In these cultures, there is a large emphasis on nonverbal messages during interactions. Low context cultures derive the meaning of interactions primarily from the actual words that are communicated, not from nonverbal cues. The United States and Australia are both low context cultures (Gudykunst, 83-84).
I based the majority of my research on studying a setting and group of people ("Perspectives on Nonverbal Research Methods," 27-42). While in Australia, my primary method was observation. I paid attention to the way people nonverbally communicated while they were interacting with me. I examined how Australians interacted with each other and with other Americans. I also asked my Australian and American friends what they thought of the ways that nonverbal communication occurs in Australia. My main setting was Lennox Head, which is a small town on the east coast of Australia. Lennox, as it is endearingly referred to, is in New South Wales. While the majority of my three months in Australia was spent in Lennox, the group of American students also traveled to these Australian cities: Sydney, Brisbane, Tenterfield, Bangalow, and Byron Bay. Even in these various locations, I was constantly watching and analyzing the interactions that took place around me.

My overarching research method was naturalistic observations. This means I studied nonverbal behavior in the setting in which it naturally occurred without any manipulation on my part. As a researcher, I went to Australia, the location where the subjects of my research lived ("Perspectives on Nonverbal Research Methods," 33-36). I did not tell people I was conducting research and recording my observations in a journal after most interactions. I wanted the people I interacted with to know that I was genuine and not just talking to them for the purpose of the book. I wanted to get the most out of each interaction, for both personal and academic reasons. Sure, I wanted to learn more about the nonverbal communication habits in Australia, but I also wanted to learn more about each and every person I met.

When I returned to my cabin or even when I was sitting at a restaurant in town, I would take notes, write paragraphs, and sometimes just list words that would remind me of the interactions I had observed or the conversations I had. I have to admit, my journal did not have the appearance of an important piece of an academic and scientific research project. It had a brown cover with a sunflower in the center and the words "Save the World" underneath the flower. My notes were scribbles really. Sure, I had sentences and paragraphs and even entire pages filled with writing. I also had pages of lists of the nonverbal messages or other aspects of the interaction. Some pages had drawings to help me remember what I wanted to say about that day. This aspect of the process may not have been one of my most academic moments, but it worked. Looking back, I was able to decipher those crazy drawings and lists. I was able to compile my notes into this book.

I suppose this aspect of my research method would be called field notes, although I would be embarrassed if a professional researcher looked at my journal with the sunflower on the cover. However, field notes are defined as notes about observations taken while in the setting or shortly after the interaction ("Perspectives on Nonverbal Research Methods," 40), so I suppose you could say even my lists and scribbles are field notes, too.

When it came time to write this book based on all my research and all I've learned, I found myself unsure of how to proceed. The idea from the start was that this was supposed to be an autoethnographic diary. I supposed we could still call it that. There are certainly diary-esque aspects later on in the book. An autoethnographic diary is a written representation on one or more aspects of a culture based on the researcher's perception and analysis (Maanen, 1-9).
As part of this book, I have included realist tales, confessional tales, and impressionist tales. Realist tales are part of an ethnography that describes my personal account of the observations and interactions I studied (Maanen, 45-72). Confessional tales are more personal, and usually more embarrassing, accounts of what happened (Maanen, 73-100). You will most certainly find some confessional tales in the pages of this book. I have also included impressionist tales, which try to paint a picture in the mind of the reader (Maanen, 101-124). These journal entries, as you will see, are much more descriptive and detailed than others.
Experiences: Learning the Nonverbal Language of the Land Down Under
February 2, 2011/Getting There

When I made my decision to go to Australia, I had no money of my own, no clue how it would affect graduation, and no real idea of where in the world I was going to be living for three months. I'm not very good with geography, you see. Anyway, the details got figured out. I signed up for loans, looked at a map, talked to my advisor, and packed my bags.

On the morning of Sunday, January 31, 2011, I stood in the Indianapolis airport with my parents and my boyfriend. It was then that I started to feel a little unsure about my decision to leave the country for 90 days during my last semester of my senior year of college.

At this point, there was no looking back. I had already told everyone I was going. I'd hosted two going away parties. I had already exchanged my American money for $500 worth of brightly colored, strange feeling Australian currency. So I looked ahead. The girl I was going to be rooming with in Australia, Alyssa, and I held hands and walked to the terminal. Sounds cheesy, but it's true.

Roughly 30 hours later, I stepped off the plane and breathed in the fresh, hot Australian air. Before I got off the plane that was the last leg of my journey, I learned a lot about both Americans and Australians just from the numerous plane rides it took to get me to Australia.

As soon as I boarded my first non-American flight, I realized how different Americans are than people from other cultures. In LAX, I stepped off a Delta Airline plane. We walked to the next terminal and I found myself standing in front of a huge glass window and looking at a massive Air New Zealand plane. As soon as I stepped aboard I could tell this plane ride was going to be quite a change from the last two flights.

The most obvious change was how nice everyone was, especially the flight attendants. All the stewardesses and even the pilots welcomed each person as they boarded the plane. "Kia ora," they said cheerfully to us. That means "hello" or "welcome" in Maori. It truly was a wonderful welcome to the New Zealand culture and way of life.

The pilots and stewardesses nonverbally communicated that they were happy to have us on the Air New Zealand flight. They smiled at each person who boarded the plane, shook our hands, maintained eye contact while welcoming each person, and focused on each passenger individually.

While on our Air New Zealand flight, we were given yummy food, endless drinks, and comfortable blankets and pillows. The flight attendants came around about every hour to ask if we needed more to drink or anything else. It made me feel that on Air New Zealand, the flight attendants and pilots truly cared about the comfort and well being of the passengers.

Not all the flight attendants on the New Zealand flight were model thin and gorgeous. Some were older, some heavier, but all genuinely nice, friendly, and approachable. This was my first introduction to the laid back attitude toward physical appearances that is quite popular in New Zealand and Australia. It didn't seem like these men and women were on the plane to make money. They were on board to take care of the passengers, make the flight more enjoyable, and welcome us to this different culture.
When an airline stewardess stopped by to see if I needed a beverage or anything, she only spoke to and talked to me. It was then I realized how much of a polychronic society we have in the U.S. On the Air New Zealand plane, the flight attendants were obviously monochronic and focused on one task and one passenger at a time.

All these small nonverbal messages made me aware of how different the U.S. is from other cultures in reference to communication styles. The smiles, the physical appearances of the stewardesses, the monochronic time preference, and the eye contact all communicated that they were happy to do their jobs and happy to meet us, the plane passengers.
March 4, 2011/A Place to Stay

In my events management class, we were asked to volunteer at rugby games. There was this big event, the Rugby Country Championships, which took place in a town near Lennox, so that was where we headed. Now, this was no Little League tournament. More than 600 rugby players, along with scores of vendors, game officials, coaches and fans all gathered in the town of Lismore for the weekend-long event. This made it pretty tough to find accommodations for the group of eight of us that volunteered at the championships.

Well, our group showed up bright and early Saturday morning and planned on finding a hotel for the night during our lunch break. That did not happen. We traipsed all over Lismore only to discover that every place was booked. We all began stressing over where we were going to stay or if we should pay for a cab all the way back to Lennox Head. As the day went on, we became more and more concerned that we would have no place to stay the night.

Then one of the rugby sponsors, Mick, told us that he and his wife would take us in for the night. They let eight college students come and stay in their home. This was one of the nicest things I have ever seen anyone do. Mick and his wife, Debbie, set up air mattresses and sleeping bags all over their living room and let some of us sleep in their kids' rooms because their children were all off at university. Mick even drove some of the group to the pubs in town and picked them up at 1 a.m.

I decided it would be in my best interest to not go out to the pubs that night. To be honest, I was worn out from being out in the heat most of the day and I was ready to relax. I felt like somewhat of a loser, because I was the only person in the group who did not go out on the town. Mick dropped my friends off in town then drove me back to his house in the country. Debbie was already in bed, but I stayed up talking to Mick for more than an hour. He told me all about his kids and the Australian culture and his life. Mick made me feel completely at home in his house. His calm demeanor, relaxed posture and friendly voice were comforting. I did not feel like I was intruding on his territory or his life. All his nonverbal messages communicated that he was kind and he was comfortable with letting us stay at his house.

Then in the morning, Debbie made breakfast for the group of eight hungry Americans and kindly drove us back to the championship games. Mick and Debbie were some of the kindest, most selfless and inviting people I have ever met.

I hope the story about Mick and Debbie's kindness shows you how welcoming most Australians are. Most everyone I met while in Australia was not at all territorial. They were very inclusive towards us Americans and the people I met were willing to share their space with us. Even though Mick and Debbie and so many other people there had just met us, they still felt that we could be trusted and they were willing to welcome us into their space and their lives.

If this whole scenario had taken place in the U.S., I think a lot of things would have gone differently. First off, I certainly would not have felt comfortable if a fifty-ish year old man had said seven girls (and one guy) whom he had just met could come stay at his house for the night. I would not have felt comfortable being the only one to go back to his place while everyone else went out drinking. But for some reason, this was not the case in this
different country. I did feel comfortable staying at the house of a man I barely knew. I did not feel endangered when I decided to ride alone with him back to his house. I did not feel like I was intruding by asking him about his family and his life while his wife was asleep upstairs. I could just sense that he, like most Australians, was not territorial. His kinesics cues, vocalic cues, and time and place codes communicated that he was happy to help provide us a place to stay. We were welcome in his house and I know each of the students appreciated Mick and Debbie's kindness.
March 6, 2011/Eat It Up

Another part of our weekend in Lismore was that we were invited to attend the New South Wales Regional Country Rugby Championship Dinner. This dinner, which cost $25 for all attendees except the players and the volunteers, was awesome. Everyone was extremely friendly and eager to talk to us.

A perk of the championship dinner was that we were treated to free food and drinks. It is just lovely how volunteers are treated in Australia. We were encouraged to drink up while volunteering our time. We would never want to offend the people who helped us help them, so drink we did.

After a delicious dinner and a few drinks, some of the other volunteers walked around and socialized with the rugby guys. Sure, I talked to a few of them. It didn't take long to realize most of the rugby players were a lot drunker than I was, so I took this time to do some quality people watching. After all, I did need to do research for this book, what better time than after dinner and drinks while surrounded by rowdy drunken rugby boys. Needless to say, it was quite entertaining.

At this event, I learned a lot about the use of haptics in Australian nonverbal communication. You see, Australian guys have no shame in being touchy-feely with each other. It somewhat reminded me of a bunch of American frat guys having bro time. The rugby players were giving each other high fives and bumping chests. My favorite part was that the guys traded jerseys. Players from all different teams traded shirts with each other. I saw a couple guys go up behind players from other teams and put their arms around their shoulders or pretend to wrestle with them.

The rugby guys did not seem to care at all about their disheveled physical appearance. The nonverbal messages they communicated with their messy hair and mismatched clothes showed they were there to have a good time and socialize. The guys used haptics to communicate that they were comfortable enough with themselves and with the other guys to shake hands, give high fives, share hugs, and even wrestle with each other.

These contact cues showed me that although the dinner was supposed to have a professional feel, this was an informal social setting for all the rugby players. The players were comfortable in the presence of their on-field enemies. They were friendly toward each other. Even the guys that had never met before were joking and giving high fives and hugs when communicating with each other. By the end of the night, everyone seemed to be friends and not at all competitive toward each other.
March 16, 2011/Yes Headmaster

I first met Peter while volunteering at the Bangalow Elementary School. He is the headmaster at the elementary school and he met with the American volunteers each day before the first school bell rang. In this setting, Peter had to exude professionalism and power. After all, he had more than two hundred elementary school students that must respect him and, at times, fear him.

I must first note his physical appearance while acting as headmaster at the elementary school. Peter was dressed in business professional attire. He wore a button down shirt, a tie, a suit jacket, and dress pants. Even his shiny black dress shoes nonverbally screamed, “I am in charge, hear me roar.” The only accessories he had on were an expensive looking wristwatch, a nametag announcing his role at the school, and his glasses.

My initial encounter with Peter took the form of a brisk meeting in which the headmaster firmly shook our hands, asked our names, thanked us for volunteering, and pointed us in the direction of the first grade classrooms. He seemed friendly, kind, and truly grateful to have us at this school for the day. I did not see Peter again until after lunch.

During our time at Bangalow, we spent an hour or so in a classroom with one grade level before moving to another classroom with older or younger students. In some classrooms, we led reading groups. In others, we discussed aspects of the class lesson with the students. In some classrooms, we acted as students ourselves and worked alongside the elementary school children that were years younger than us. It was in the final type of situation in which I saw the headmaster for the second time that school day.

Upon entering the fifth grade classroom in which mathematics was taught, the volunteers were instructed to grab a seat among the students and follow along in today’s lesson. I was surprised when the math teacher then took a seat behind his desk. The students were talking loudly to each other and throwing paper wads in true fifth grade fashion. Then Peter walked through the classroom door.

From that moment on, the headmaster made sure that the students knew that he was in charge. “Children, class has started,” Peter said in a loud, stern voice. “Time to quiet down, sit up straight, listen, and learn. Your teacher has asked that I provide today’s lesson.”

His use of vocalic cues sure did the trick, because the classroom was silent. I looked around to see that the students around me were facing forward, sitting straight, and all eyes were on the nicely dressed man at the front of the room. I realized that from my vantage point while sitting at a short desk in a child-sized chair that couldn’t quite contain my bum, Peter appeared quite tall. He seemed to be a whole different man than the person who smiled and shook our hands a few hours before. His presence radiated power and I immediately knew that strict obedience was expected out of every person in that classroom.

He seemed to take a moment to revel in the silence of the students before telling us that today’s lesson was about volume. Before saying anything more about this lesson, the headmaster called out a girl’s name. I looked around and realized all his attention was on a small, mousy girl fidgeting in the second row. He said her name again, this time in an
even more stern voice. "What is the equation for volume?" he asked as he stared only at her. The girl's eyes grew big as she mumbled that she did not know the answer. "You'll learn better if you sit still." With that, I knew the young girl had been reprimanded and she would sit up straight as an arrow, hands on her desk, for the remainder of class.

I paid a great deal of attention, not just to the lesson but also to the headmaster himself, during that hour of class. It was not just his attire that communicated his lead role in the school. His deliberate use of certain vocalics demanded that every other person in the school had better recognize and respect his authority and position of power. In that small classroom, Peter seemed almighty.

He spoke in a slow, punctuated manner when teaching the lesson. There were no hesitations in his lecture, only purposeful pauses meant to emphasize certain points. When he called on students to answer a question, his voice was calm and gentle. When he was scolding a student for misbehaving, his pitch and speaking volume rose. He maintained eye contact with each student he spoke directly to, whether he was asking them a question or reprimanding them for misbehaving.

Every nonverbal communication message that Peter exhibited during the lesson seemed meaningful. The messages all silently spoke the same idea, that he was headmaster and only he was in charge. I've never seen or felt the nonverbal power distance dimension more than I did when I sat among those fifth grade students and looked up at the mighty school headmaster.

Once our time at the school had come to an end, we talked to Peter. He thanked us for coming to the school. Peter was once again smiling and friendly, but I still felt the effects of his nonverbal communication during the fifth grade math lesson.
March 19, 2011/Port for the Players

My next encounter with Peter took place on a hot and sunny day at a local rugby tournament. Several Ball State students and I were volunteering. This time, ‘volunteering’ meant selling raffle tickets, socializing with the locals, drinking free champagne and eating free grilled sausages, and taking shots of port out to the rugby players at half time and the end of each game.

The tournament, called Nash Bash, was part of the Golden Oldies Rugby League. All the rugby players in this league had to be 34 years of age or older. I must say, this rugby tournament was quite different from the rugby championships I had volunteered at the weekend before. The professor of our event management class, who organized these volunteer times, had told us in class that we would see the Bangalow Elementary School headmaster in a completely different light at the Nash Bash. Oh, how right he was.

In an effort to truly immerse myself in the spirit of the day, I decided to have a few glasses of free champagne, complete with a strawberry slice at the bottom of each plastic champagne flute. After picking up a second round of the bubbly goodness, I quite literally bumped into a gray-haired man in a red and green striped long sleeve polo, above the knee green rugby shorts, and red and green striped knee high socks. “Will we be seeing you at Bangalow next week?” the man inquired. I, not recognizing the headmaster in this drastically different attire, giggled and asked him to repeat his question.

It was only after he said Bangalow, the name of the town where the school is located, again that I realized who he was. I, feeling embarrassed and awkward, lowered my champagne flute as I nodded my head in an exaggerated way and quickly sputtered, “I certainly hope so!” I could feel my cheeks turning bright red, so I smiled again and scurried off to the gaggle of my fellow American students that were a decade younger than most people there.

Once I was sitting back down, I watched Peter interact with the other attendees at the rugby tournament. Maybe it was the fact that my plastic chair was adult-sized and not built for fifth-grade children, but this time around he did not seem quite so tall and intimidating. There was no sense of power and authority in his nonverbal messages. All of his kinesics communication codes were friendly. I saw him laughing with other rugby players. At the Nash Bash, Peter communicated with joyful facial expressions and exaggerated hand gestures. Even the contact codes he used when communicating were different. Often he put a hand on the shoulders of those he was talking to and even gave hugs to some of the men and women in attendance. He even stood closer to everyone he communicated with in this setting. Seeing Peter in this setting made it obvious just how much a person’s nonverbal messages can change depending on the situation.
April 7, 2011/Barefoot and Free

Quite honestly, I feel that Australians really do not seem to care how they look, as long as they are comfortable. People walk around town and in grocery and retail stores and even restaurants without shoes on. When my family came to visit I walked around without shoes in Byron Bay. It was so freeing. I see guys in the grocery store and mall walking around without shirts on. No one even seems to notice (except us American girls, who tend to swoon a bit when warranted). To me, this suggests they have important things to do and say. They are confident and they are comfortable. There is definitely not a No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service policy in the land down under.

As I previously mentioned, physical appearance is a significant aspect of nonverbal communication. It seemed to me that Australians used their physical appearances to communicate that they were relaxed and confident and that comfort was key.
April 8, 2011/Just Dance

It seems a lot can be learned from noticing the ways in which different types of people dance. There was only one pub in the town we stayed in, Lennox Hotel (in Australia, bars are called pubs and pubs are named hotels, confusing, but you’ll catch on). The group of Ball State students that I was with spent many Friday nights dancing and drinking at Lennox Hotel. Every Friday for the first two months that we were in Lennox, the pub hosted a DJ competition. So of course we were at the pub nearly every Friday night.

Most of the music that the DJs mixed featured popular American musical acts. However, the scene inside the pub was quite different than bars in the United States. When walking into an American dance bar, I would expect to see lots of bumping and grinding, girls dancing with each other, and everyone real close together.

This was not at all the case in Lennox Hotel. To me, it seemed that there was an individual personal space bubble around each of the locals on the dance floor. Even when the dance floor was crowded, the Aussies did not dance with each other or too close to one another. To me, this communicated that Australians like to demonstrate their independence and individuality. Although Australia is considered a high-contact culture, this was not the case at the DJ competitions in Lennox Hotel.
April 12, 2011/No Dine and Dash Here

While I was in Australia of course I had to enjoy numerous restaurants, coffee shops, and cafes. The nonverbal cues I focused on while dining out were time and place codes. This includes chronemics such as time preferences, punctuality and personal perception of time and environmental cues such as architectural design, color, noise and furniture arrangement.

One major aspect of Australian culture that I learned about from eating out was the culture's perception of time. Simply put, Australians like to take their time. No hurry, no worries. In my experience, going to an Australian restaurant means you are going to be busy for at least two hours. It is truly a leisurely experience; and if you are patient and accept the fact that there is no rush to get your food and stuff your face, then it is quite enjoyable.

In America, food service workers are always rushing around, taking orders, refilling drinks, bringing out food, and constantly in motion. The restaurants in this foreign country are different. The people working at the restaurants are different. In Australia, the entire attitude surrounding eating out is different. It is wonderful.

In Australia, the waiters leisurely stroll to the different tables. They bring food to one table at a time instead of balancing three families' dinner orders on their arms. The waiters don't come back to each table every five minutes to see if the customers need anything and to nonverbally hurry them along in their meal. Everyone is given plenty of time to enjoy his or her meal before the check arrives.

From my observations, I was able to break the overall nonverbal messages up into individual chronemic cues. I learned a lot about Australians' time preferences while dining out in the restaurants in Lennox Head and other cities and towns. The whole experience communicated to me that no one is in any rush when going out to eat. The culture seems to prefer a laid back, easy-going attitude towards time. I never saw people at restaurants checking their watches or telling the waiter to hurry up with their food. Dining out is meant to be a relaxing, enjoyable experience during which you can talk with your companions, enjoy the view and indulge in some delicious food. However, it almost seemed to me that eating out at restaurants was more about spending time with family or friends and less about eating food.
I asked Tori, a 21-year old Southern Cross University (a major university in Australia) student who lives in Lennox, what she thinks about Americans. I first met Tori through her roommate, Jordan, when a group of Americans went to the pub one Tuesday night. Our group had planned to meet up with our new rugby friends. Jordan was a friend of the rugby players too, so we all ended up chatting.

The group of American students and Australian rugby players all went back to Jordan's place around 10 p.m. to hang out and keep drinking. Tori was wearing Family Guy pajama pants; a huge t-shirt, and her long, long black hair was piled in a messy bun right on top of her head. She had no makeup on, and she was laughing out loud to an episode of the Simpsons while drinking a bottle of wine alone. We were instant friends.

Back to her answer to my question about Americans' appearances, she simply replied that we try too hard. Tori said we wear too much makeup, too little clothing, too tall shoes, and dance too close. She said we look inappropriate in the Lennox Hotel when we dance with other girls and fall all over the guys. She said we should care less about how we look and more about how we behave. I learned so much from Tori while living in Lennox.

Of course she wasn't trying to offend me with her response. I was wearing gym shorts and a t-shirt with my hair a mess and no make-up on while sitting on her couch watching the Simpsons with her. But then again, I think I grasped the "No Worries" attitude a bit much because some of my American girl friends tell me I should try harder. This was one of many times when I felt perhaps I am an Aussie at heart.
April 27, 2011 / Beach Tousled

I began using the term “beach tousled” to describe how my American friends and I look when we were out and about. It basically means we are a big mess. In others words, we need to brush our hair. There are times when it is windy and we walk around all day. The salt water makes a total mess of our hair. Now, if I use this terminology to describe an Australian woman, it means something else. For some reason, Australians can get away with the “beach tousled” look. Not us Americans. My American friends began to catch on that if they ask me how they look and I told them beach tousled, that probably means they need to look in the mirror.

The lovely people living in the land down under have somehow mastered the beach tousled look. No matter how long it’s been since they have brushed their hair or how little makeup they have on, they most likely still look gorgeous.

More than anything, though, I think this has something to do with the confidence all Australians exude. To me, the carefree look most Australians maintain nonverbally screams, “I’m happy with the way I look and I don’t care what you think.” It’s brilliant.

When I see Aussie woman wearing no makeup, mismatched clothes, and messy hair, it makes me happy. It shows she is comfortable with how she looks and does not need to slather on makeup or spend hours getting ready in order to convince other people that she is pretty. I honestly wish more American women lived by this philosophy.
Implications
After reading through each of my experiences, I hope you have come to understand a little more about the nonverbal communication habits present in Australia. If not, I will offer some guidance. For each journal entry, I have outlined the nonverbal cues that occurred during the interaction the entry is about.

February 2, 2011/Getting There

- The flight attendants and pilots were always smiling and maintained eye contact when speaking to the individual passengers. They used kinesics to communicate that they were friendly and willing to help whenever possible.

- They communicated that they were monochronic people and focused on one task and one person at a time when welcoming each passenger aboard and providing food and beverages.

March 4, 2011/A Place to Stay

- The major nonverbal communication cue of this delightful experience was territoriality. Mick and Debbie were completely comfortable with opening their home to eight intoxicated American students who had nowhere else to go. Not only were they okay with doing us this enormous favor, but they went above and beyond by providing a ride to and from the pubs and the rugby fields and by making a delicious breakfast for us all.

- The couple did not mind us being in their space, and a lovely space it was. The environmental cues of their large country home were that they preferred a warm, comfortable, welcoming environment in which to live.

- This experience also taught me a lesson about the individualism aspect of the Australian culture. Mick and Debbie took it upon themselves to provide us with a place to stay. They allowed themselves to be personally responsible for the eight of us. Also, they talked with each and every one of us individually so that they could form relationships with each of us versus with the group as a whole.

March 6, 2011/Eat It Up

- The use of contact codes was very obvious during the rugby championship dinner. The rugby players used haptics when they were high-fiving, chest bumping, and hugging each other. This communicated that the players were interested in beginning and maintaining friendships with their fellow rugby players.

- The use of touch involved in interactions really solidified the theory that Australia is a high-contact culture. It emphasized the immediacy intercultural dimension because interpersonal relationships were a main aspect of the dinner.

- Proxemics were also involved in this cultural experience. No one seemed to mind how close everyone was to each other. There were hundreds of people crowded in a gymnasium and it was still comfortable.

- The contact codes at the dinner also communicated that the situation was informal and the interpersonal relationships were the main focus of the evening.
• Physical appearances also played a role in the overall experience. Us Americans took plenty of time to get ready for the dinner. We showered, dressed nice, the girls put on make up and did our hair. The Australian rugby guys, however, did not seem to care about their appearances or any of the other Australians’ appearances. The guys traded jerseys, messed up each other’s hair, and got food and drinks spilled on their clothes, yet they did not have a care in the world.

March 16, 2011/Yes Headmaster

• Almost every nonverbal code played a part in this day. First, let’s focus on haptics. Peter shook each of our hands firmly when he met us and before we left for the day. He used this form of touch to communicate that the interaction was professional.

• His personal appearance communicated that he was professional, financially well-off, and in charge.

• I most noticed Peter’s use of kinesics and vocalics when he was teaching the fifth grade math class. The volume, pitch, and deliberate use of pauses communicated that he meant business and the students had better listen up and learn. His voice was stern and he spoke loudly when he was upset with a student or group of students. His eye contact also communicated the seriousness of the math lesson. He could really stare down a student.

• Power distance played a serious role in the interaction. Peter was standing up while the students sat, so he was looking down at the students while speaking to them. He stood at the front of the room and commanded attention. He was most certainly the man in charge in that classroom.

March 19, 2011/Port for the Players

• The nonverbal messages in this experience were much, much different. Peter used contact codes to communicate that he was focused on interpersonal relationships. The interactions that took place this day also showed what a high-contact culture Australia is, in a good way.

• His physical appearance was extremely different from his headmaster attire. The clothes he wore and his lack of expensive wristwatch and no-nonsense glasses communicated that he wanted to be comfortable while having fun.

• The kinesics I witnessed on this day were quite different as well. Peter had a relaxed posture, exaggerated hand gestures, a smile on his face, and a twinkle in his eye. This all communicated that Peter was relaxed and having a good time with old and new friends.

April 7, 2011/Barefoot and Free

• My Australian experimental day without shoes was all about nonverbal messages dealing with physical appearance. The lack of shoes, makeup, and worries communicated that I had embraced the Australian lifestyle and wanted to truly walk like an Australian.
April 8, 2011/Just Dance

- This journal entry focused on contact codes. It explained how differently Americans and Australians use haptics and proxemics in nonverbal communication while dancing. Although Australia is a high-contact culture, the pub scene seems to be the exception. Australians seem to like their space while listening and dancing to the music. Americans, well, they don't mind an increased use of touch and a decreased need for space.

April 12, 2011/No Dine and Dash Here

- My experiences at restaurants in Australia taught me a lot about the time and place codes that are used in the land down under. Simply put, everyone seemed to prefer to relax and not rush through anything, especially eating. Time was a luxury meant to be enjoyed. These experiences also communicated to me that Australians are monochromic people. They like to focus on one task at hand. Take a bit, chew, swallow, talk for a while, take another bite, and repeat in a leisurely fashion. Food is much more enjoyable this way, if you ask me.

April 19, 2011/Tori

- Oh, Tori, my guiding light in the confusing world of Australian culture. She expressed, verbally, what she thinks of the nonverbal messages of Americans. She said what messages she received based on Americans' physical appearances.

- Her own appearance communicated that she was comfortable with herself and confident with the person she was, no mascara, curling iron, or short skirts necessary.

April 27, 2011/Beach Tousled

- This reoccurring experience taught me even more about the way Australians use their physical appearances to communicate nonverbal messages about themselves. As previously mentioned, the lack of effort put into their appearance communicated to me that they had more important things to do, like surf, and that they were not concerned with how they looked.

- It also taught me, however, that we Americans do care, a lot. We can't get away with the beach tousled look because we are constantly aware of our appearance. We are not quite so confident when we don't have makeup on or our clothes don't match or we haven't taken the time to do our hair. Two cultures can communicate two very different messages with the same look.
Works Cited


About the Author:

Courtney L. Sheets is a graduate student at Ball State University. She is studying public relations with a focus on communications studies. Courtney encourages every American to travel abroad and notice the differences in nonverbal communication habits that people use in other parts of the world. She hopes to return to Australia in the future.