

Development of Nonverbal Behavior in Children

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Edited by
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Preface

When I organized a symposium on the development of nonverbal behavior for the 1980 meeting of the American Psychological Association, I was faced with an embarrassment of riches. Thinking about the many people who were doing important and interesting research in this area, it was hard to narrow down the choice to just a few. Eventually, I put together a panel which at least was representative of this burgeoning area of research.

In planning this volume two years later, I was faced with much the same predicament, except to an even larger degree. For, during that short period, the area of children's nonverbal behavior came to grow even larger, with more perspectives being brought to bear on the question of the processes involved in the development of children's nonverbal behavior. The present volume attempts to capture these advances which have occurred as the field of children's nonverbal behavior has moved from its own infancy into middle childhood.

The book is organized into five major areas, representative of the most important approaches to the study of children's nonverbal behavior: 1) Psychobiological and ethological approaches, 2) social developmental approaches, 3) encoding and decoding skill approaches, 4) discrepant verbal-nonverbal communication approaches, and 5) personality and individual difference approaches. The discreteness of these categories should not be overemphasized, as there is a good deal of overlap between the various approaches. Nonetheless, they do represent the major areas of interest in the field of the development of nonverbal behavior in children.

In the section on psychobiological and ethological approaches, the three chapters provide a comprehensive review of the major issues in the area. Camras presents a broad overview of the ethological orientation and shows the utility of such an approach. Buck and Zivin each address the basic issue (which runs through a number of chapters) of tracing the development of spontaneous, voluntary, and symbolic nonverbal communication. Buck does this by referring to a fascinating literature on cerebral lateralization. Zivin shows how the results of her own research lead to the development of a clear taxonomy of nonverbal signals.

The chapters in the social development section focus on the question of how the nature of social factors affects children's use of nonverbal behavior. Shennum and Bugental discuss developmental changes in the management of affect in facial and vocal channels under conditions calling for differential norms for the appropriateness of nonverbal expressivity. Saarni integrates work on the social and affective functions of nonverbal behavior and how children learn nonverbal display rules that facilitate social interaction.

The section on encoding and decoding skill approaches presents two chapters that hold the view that nonverbal behavior should be looked at as a skill that develops with increasing age. Morency and Krauss examine the development and relationship between encoding and decoding skills. DePaulo and Jordan use children's abilities to be deceptive nonverbally and to identify the deception of others to show how nonverbal behavioral skills develop with age.

Two chapters address the issue of how children learn to resolve communications that present discrepancies between two or more channels. Blanck and Rosenthal delineate age-related changes in decoding discrepant communications, and they describe the development of a new measure of verbal and nonverbal sensitivity. In an interesting methodological innovation, Volkmar and Siegel show that children's responses to discrepant messages can be analyzed using psychometric scaling techniques.

The final section of the book presents chapters that take an individual difference approach to children's nonverbal behavior. Feldman, White, and Lobato discuss how children's social skill abilities relate to their use and control of nonverbal behavior. Finally, Field presents some fascinating research on individual differences in nonverbal behavior in a difficult population to study: neonates and young infants.

The chapters represent the best theory and research in the field of children's nonverbal behavior, and this volume should prove useful to theoreticians in the field of psychology, communication, ethology, and anthropology. In addition, practitioners in more applied areas should find the research instructive.

In editing this book, I was fortunate to have extremely good cooperation from the chapter authors and from the staff of Springer-Verlag. I am grateful for their intellectual integrity and efforts. I am also thankful to my two outstanding typists, Jean Glenowicz and Kathleen Cleary. The ever-present contribution of my parents, Leah R. Brochstein and the late Saul D. Feldman, is acknowledged with love and gratitude. Finally, Kathy Vorwerk and Jonathan and Joshua Feldman provided constant support, love, and a practical understanding of children's nonverbal behavior, and I am always grateful to them.

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