

2016

The Boy in the Grey Sweatshirt

Meghan Doyle

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/pjcr>

Recommended Citation

Doyle, Meghan (2016) "The Boy in the Grey Sweatshirt," *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research*: Vol. 4, Article 11.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/pjcr/vol4/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Communication at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact paul.stenis@pepperdine.edu.



The Boy in the Grey Sweatshirt
Meghan Doyle
Pepperdine University

Assigned in COM 220: Fundamentals of Interpersonal Communication (Dr. Lauren Amaro)

Theory/Observation

Caroline and I staked out the Caf last night and surreptitiously watched “the boy in the grey sweatshirt” interact with his peers. We didn’t even need to hear what he was saying to gather that he wasn’t too invested in the conversation and certainly wasn’t hungry after his long, rough day. His folded arms and leaning back spoke volumes, as they indicated an unwillingness to fully engage with those across the table. Despite what he might have been verbally communicating to his friends, this boy clearly did not want to be there. The occasional look of disgust, the reading of a newspaper and his leaving the meal before the rest of the boys confirmed our suspicions that he was unhappy with the current dialogue and, perhaps, the world in general. A sad but solid example, the boy in the grey sweatshirt demonstrated all five characteristics of nonverbal communication right before our eyes.

Recently, Caroline had the opportunity to hold an in-depth conversation with a junior here. She instigated the discussion by walking up to him on the DTR bench, but, to avoid any quizzical looks, they sat as far from each other as possible while still maintaining a personal distance. The boy’s guitar also took up some space and was a prime indicator of when it was Caroline’s turn to talk, as he would start playing at the conclusion of his thought. Time was a key factor, as it is in most deep conversations, because both Caroline and her interaction partner took long pauses to collect their thoughts before spewing out inner feelings. As someone who has had similar conversations, I agree that the allowance of silence is essential when trying to adequately express intimate emotions. Caroline said most of these emotions were more vocally expressed than facially expressed, especially in the use of filler words to demonstrate the existence of inner debate on what to say next. Caroline was able to promote an affiliation with her conversation partner through interactional synchrony, as he and she are similar people in both beliefs and manners of gesturing. In this 45-minute talk, Caroline said there was “a lot of truth spoken,” which I think was made possible in part by the successful use of nonverbal communication.

The interpersonal interaction that came to mind for me was an interview with a news anchor I had at the beginning of senior year. To create credibility as a potential intern candidate, I took great care to put forth my most professional appearance. I brought a portfolio to carry my resume and a notepad on which to jot down some of the anchor’s wisdom. I arrived early, introduced myself with a firm handshake and then got out of the way as he went about his show. All of these nonverbals spoke to my desire to be considered for an intern position at the studio. The anchor was a pro at left-positioning, as he would turn toward his desktop when it was my turn to answer his question. Our relationship was very much a power/dominance one, which was made even clearer by his lack of immediacy behavior. After listening to his critique of my past work, I had to work hard to conceal my true hurt feelings, in order to maintain a somewhat positive first impression. While my interaction was not quite as successful as Caroline’s, the nonverbals put to use in both situations contributed to the overall atmosphere of each interaction.

Reflection on Self

Last spring break, I participated in a language exchange program with a student from Verona, Italy. When I went to stay with her family, I did not have full control of the language, as I had only been studying since high school. Because of my communication shortcomings, we got a lot of our messages across by way of gestures. When people say the Italians talk with their hands, they’re not kidding, and I guess I fit right in! I also paid attention to the facial expressions of others, as well as employing my own to communicate what I couldn’t in words. I think my behavior abroad was completely normal and natural, as one of the coolest qualities of nonverbal communication is its universality. Italian comprehension of my nonverbal messages makes me incredibly thankful for communication’s ability to unify us across cultures and across oceans.