Decoding Impressions: Understanding Appearances A Nonverbal Training Program

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Abstract

Given the multitude of clothing options, jewelry, and adornments that exist in the modern world and the variety of colors these artifacts are available in, there is a need to understand the how appearance cues impact impressions. Saussure’s theory of Semiotics was used as the framework for this project as a means to decoding the sign structures associated with appearance cues that influence impressions. This project outlines an active training program that walks students through the semiotic theory, the elements of appearance cues and the resulting impressions that may be formed by artifact choices. The goal of this project is to empower student to make appearance choices that lead them to professional success.

*Keywords: impressions, semiotics, nonverbal communication, appearance cues*
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Introduction

A first impression is the building block of any relationship. Impressions are important as they impact success in relationships and careers; they define individuals socially and provide a sense of self. What is communicated during a first impression, and even in subsequent meetings, can define how another individual will engage in the subsequent relationship. The significance of nonverbal communication in messages, and therefore in impressions, is vital to the success of an individual in both personal and professional pursuits.

Importance of the Study

Understanding some components of impressions and the theory that explains how impressions are decoded will substantially improve the success of an individual. This project outlines the importance of nonverbal cues and their significance to effective communication as it relates to an impression. The adoption of relevant clothing, adornments and color cues will help to ensure individuals are empowered and successful in their endeavors. The supporting theories help to interpret how messages are decoded, thereby providing a clear picture of the significance of effective nonverbal communication.

Statement of Purpose

This project asserts that impressions, influenced with nonverbal communication, contribute to a successful career. When prepared with a theoretical understanding of semiotics, impressions will be translated appropriately and in the manner the message sender intends.
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Knowing how the artifacts (clothing, jewelry, hairstyles) chosen every day impact the nonverbal cues that are being decoded will help to confirm the impressions desired by the message sender. Impressions occur everywhere at anytime and, in the professional world, can be very favorable or detrimental to a career. The result of this project will enable individuals to make suitable choices in their nonverbal appearance repertoire to have successful impressions in their professional career activities.

Definitions of Terms Used

Semiotics, the defining theory of this project, studies the “production and meaning of signs; the analysis that anything can stand for something” (Griffin, 2011, p. 332). Semiotics recognizes that all signs have a structure and Saussure defined that structure as the inseparable combination of a signifier and a signified. The signifier being the physical form of the sign and the signified as the meaning we associate with the sign.

Nonverbal (NV) communication is defined as the expressive signs, signals and cues that are used to send and receive messages. A sign is the generic label for a unit of nonverbal communication. It can be a gesture, a movement or a nonverbal expression that conveys information both with and apart from verbal communication. Cues are nonverbal signs used to prompt an event, a behavior or an experience. Cues suggest what may happen and will provoke a response from the receiver. A signal informs us about what will happen next and is considered a hint or a warning (Lary, 2004).

Impressions are ideas, feelings or opinions about something or someone, especially those formed without conscious thought or on the basis of little evidence. Stereotypes are considered
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as widely held but fixed and oversimplified images or ideas of a particular type of person or thing.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The discussion of semiotics, impressions, stereotypes and appearances informs the development of a training program on nonverbal communication and impression management. The literature review in chapter two sets the stage, using semiotics to build an understanding of impressions and decodes the components that create an impression. The scope and methodology of the project is outlined in chapter 3 and chapter 4 is the design description and the curriculum for the training program. Chapter 5 designates the limitations of this training program, lists the recommendations for extending the program and additional study to enhance the training. The appendix includes the training program presentation and the references that helped to build the project.
CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Communication is a combination of both the actual words spoken and the nonverbal cues presented while speaking. While understanding of the words is more predictable, the nonverbal component of communication is, in some ways, more subjective and open to interpretation. Nonverbal cues, expressions, used during communication have a significant place in the meaning of what is said, it therefore becomes important to fully appreciate how nonverbal communication impacts a message. The focus of this thesis project is to research and develop a comprehensive nonverbal training program that supports the concept of impressions and the importance that they have on the relationships in a professional career.

Investigation of the theory of semiotics as it applies to nonverbal communication and interpretation of messages is important to understanding how a message is decoded. Developing an understanding of this theory will provide a solid base on which individuals learn to recognize and modify nonverbal cues to match verbal messages. Topics included in the nonverbal communication-training program are; decoding impressions, understanding the importance of stereotypes, basic concepts of nonverbal communication, appearance as it relates to clothing, hair and adornments and color cues. The training program encompasses theoretical study, structured learning activities, group discussion and experiential learning. An important piece of learning is the interpretation of nonverbal communication cues, identified above, and determining how cues affect and influence the viewer. Impressions are dependent upon the connection between the nonverbal cues given by the message sender and what the message receiver decodes from the cues.
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This training program is intended to ensure participants are more aware of nonverbal communication, how it helps or hinders the message delivery and to recognize their own nonverbal cues in an effort to match the verbal and visual messages.

Philosophical Review

Humans seek to create or maintain a relationship with another person for a variety of reasons. Aristotle stated, “man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual.” (Aristotle, trans. 1999). In the quest to forge relationships within a community, people will first create an impression. The forthcoming impression may impact the relationship development and ultimate success of the interaction. Consideration of both verbal and nonverbal communication must be included in the creation of the “message” that is being sent to the other person.

Buber, a theologian and philosopher stated, “the relation is the cradle of actual life” (1923/1928). He discussed two types of relationships, the I-It and the I-Thou. The I-It relationship is created only on an impression made by one individual in an encounter as a means to a goal or place. In the I-Thou relationship the partner in the encounter is valued as important to the journey.

For individuals creating a relationship within a community, it is important to go beyond the I-It relationship and created the valued partnerships of I-Thou. This success of this relationship is related to the nonverbal cues and thus the need to understand impressions and appearance cues.
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Theory

With the knowledge that communication is both verbal and nonverbal it is important to understand what nonverbal cues are and how they change or support messages to ensure effective communication. To fully appreciate the significance of an impression, an understanding of semiotics is required. The study of semiotics exists to “investigate, decipher, document and explain the what, how and why of signs. Its purpose is to flesh out recurrent patterns in the production of human meaning” (Danesi, 2007, p. 5). There are a multitude of sign systems as it relates to clothing and often groups of people will associate with others by wearing similar garments or adornments. These choices allow for the creation of stereotypes that, in situations where the pattern is recurring, enable quick decision-making and allows for an influence in the overall impression.

Semiotics

The study of semiotics originates from the linguistic work of Saussure. He described the linguistic sign as a unit with two meanings, the concept (signified) and a sound-image (signifier). This becomes the structure of a sign. The signifier and signified as the creators of the sign itself. For an individual to recognize that a sign exists, they must first recognize that the sign has structure; the signifier, “the physical form of the sign as we perceive it through our senses; an image … the signified is the meaning we associate with the signifier” (Griffin, 2011). For example, when reading the word “bird”, most people will immediately imagine a bird, of any kind. A word sign, the signifier, generates the visual image, the signified which then produces the sign or vice versa.
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The signifier and signified become a linguistic unit “formed by the association of two terms. These terms are psychological and are united in the brain by an associative bond” (De Saussure, 1959, p. 65). These elements work together in that one is then entwined to the other and the expression of either the word or image will result in the immediate recollection of the other. From the linguistic perspective Saussure states that “the signifier is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it” (De Saussure, 1959, p. 71). This means that the signifier cannot be replaced by another word once it has been defined by language.

Literature Review

Nonverbal Communication

With every message there is a message sender and a message receiver(s). There is never a guarantee that a message sent would be received the way it is intended. Many different cues, signs or symbols can and may impact how a message is decoded. Duck and McMahan identified five functions of nonverbal communication:

1. Nonverbal cues connect with verbal cues. Our words and phrases are often framed by white space, tone of voice, or facial expressions.
2. Regulate interactions – whose turn is it to talk?
3. Identify specific individuals – facial hair, body ornamentations and clothing.
5. Establish relational meaning – view of yourself in relation to the other person; younger, older, more or less competent/powerful (Duck & McMahan, 2012, pp. 127-138)

The use of nonverbal communication to identify specific individuals based on facial hair, body ornaments or adornments and clothing helps to create impressions (stereotypes) about
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individuals and groups. While it is important to understand and identify various groups, for most people the use of these nonverbal cues is more important as it relates to an individual’s personal and professional impression.

Impressions

Many studies (Druckman, J., 2003; Graber, D., 1990; Tan, S. & See, M. Y., 2009) have looked at the appearance and subsequent impression of politicians and news broadcasters. These two groups are easily viewed by the general population through television and provide great examples for studying nonverbal cues. “Television viewers have access to visual imagery and nonverbal cues that often play an important role in shaping personality evaluations of others” (Druckman, 2003, p. 569). The impressions taken away from these television interactions have significant importance in the results of both political elections and television ratings. “It is often necessary to evaluate another person in a limited encounter setting. The tendency to renew the encounter is based, on a large degree, on the impression formed during the first encounter” (Lennon, 1986, p. 15).

Stereotypes

Appearance is a significant cue to the message receiver as a means of decoding a message through stereotypes. Clothing “represents a systematic way of conscious or unconscious information transmission” (Sakic, Franc, Ivicic, & Maricic, 2007, p. 420). Stereotypes “originate primarily from wearing apparel rather than from facial characteristics” (Hamid, 1968, p. 905). Wilson states “people use a stereotype to attribute characteristics to others … it allows humans the ability to make rapid judgements” (Wilson & Eckel, 2006, p.
The use of stereotypes helps dictate specific traits or behaviours that a message receiver would expect from the message sender. Not only does clothing identify gender, but it also shows other important aspects of an individual such as ethnicity and profession. A message receiver would expect different behaviours from a law enforcement officer than a restaurant employee or a corporate lawyer than a street performer. There are very consistent stereotypes in North America, which are based on clothing. Some stereotypes that would be prevalent include occupational, cultural and standing and encompass all aspects of appearance such as hairstyles, uniforms, shoes, clothing, jewellery and body adornments. Examples of occupational stereotypes include law enforcement and military, health professionals (paramedics, nurses, doctors), corporate, and performing arts. Some cultural stereotypes specific to North America are Native American, Italian, Scottish and, African American, among others. Stereotypes around standing could include all-American, genius/nerd, gothic, head-banger, etc.

Appearance

There are many aspects that contribute to nonverbal communication, including paralinguistics and kinesics. These disciplines are useful in mastering the nonverbal communication cues and responses of the body, namely tone of voice, and the body language that is displayed when sending messages.

The appearances we provide are a significant sign used in human interaction. Kopacz studied the effectiveness of politicians in television appearances and determined that the way a candidate “looks, speaks or moves may provide quick and often reliable cues on his or her suitability for office” (Kopacz, 1999, p. 481). He goes on to suggest that judgments made during those first impressions are helpful if the viewers have limited exposure or education on politics.
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“Knowing a lot about people in general, they (research participants) use these appearance-based stereotypes to guide their choices with great accuracy” (Kopacz, 1999, p. 482). Lau and others confirm these statements and suggest that appearance offers a means of seeking information about others (Lau & Rediawsk, 2001). Wilson found that “subjects not only trust strangers, but also they choose to trust based on a strangers appearance” (Wilson & Eckel, 2006, p. 199) and Kaiser noted that “favorable judgments of appearance are more likely to contribute to other positive inferences that may not necessarily be logically related … a halo effect operates … when a person is judged to be attractive, then he or she is also evaluated as having other positive traits” (Kaiser, 1999, p. 74). With the significance of appearance clearly outlined in the research it is conceivable that manipulating the appearance of an individual can change the emotional responses of the message receivers and lead to a different impression outcome.

Clothing

Communication studies have shown the importance of clothing and accessories in understanding impressions (Givens, D., 2010; Hamid, P., 1968; Kaiser, S. B., 1999; Lennon, S. J., 1986). Clothing helps to create impressions about trust, integrity, and confidence and endorses the genuineness of the message as a whole. Wilson was able to demonstrate that individuals “who are more attractive are more likely to be trusted in an initial interaction among strangers, and so have more opportunities to be successful in acquiring social capital” (Wilson & Eckel, 2006, p. 200). Visual encounters will typically precede verbal encounters, so “it is reasonable to assume that, in most instances, our perceptions of others is influence partly by clothes” (Knapp, 1980, p. 114). Knapp goes on to state, “appearance and dress are part of the
total nonverbal stimuli that influence interpersonal responses – and under some conditions they are primary determiners of such responses” (Knapp, 1980, p. 119).

Clothing provides the message sender with a means of self-presentation, impression management and helps us to be more comfortable in social interactions. Clothing makes people feel comfortable in society, it also allows others the opportunity to interpret physical appearance and provides them with behavioral expectations of the upcoming interaction. Those expectations will change over time and in any given situation. This suggests that while first impressions are important, there is the opportunity to improve an overall impression with consistent impression management on subsequent interactions.

Clothing functions in a variety of different ways and it is important that individuals understand that clothes represent “decoration, protection (physical and psychological), sexual attraction, self-assertion, self-denial, concealment, group identification, and display of status or role” (Knapp, 1980, p. 116). Clothing forces individuals to look differently at how to communicate. For those individuals that belong to groups, their visual identity is already defined. Consider men and women in the military, police forces, fire protection and medicine. These individuals all wear clothing that symbolizes their profession. For those who work in professional roles outside of these types of groups, clothing choices may dictate their overall success.

There is an overwhelming variety of clothing appropriate for the corporate world. All of which have significant influence on impressions. Suits “have been found to be particularly relevant when people are making judgments relating to task competence, such as intellectuality and responsibility (Lennon & Miller, 1984, p. 96) and they also “create a certain level of homogeneity in terms of appearance” (Tan & See, 2009, p. 370). Everyone has the same
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functional look in a corporate setting where business suits are worn. This is the standard for many workplaces. So how then do individuals stand out in a sea of business suits?

Adornments

The video, *Interpreting Nonverbal Communication*, states that “body appearance is a snapshot of a personality, the artifacts, clothes, hairstyle and jewelry broadcast nonverbal signals that can attract or repel others” (Lary, 2004). Individuals must consider how adornments can assist in differentiating impressions. For example, two women wear a blue dress suit; one chooses a white blouse with a scarf, wears high heels and has long hair and the other chooses a light green blouse with a necklace, wears flat shoes and her hair is short. Each of these choices says something about the individual. They are providing two completely different images and therefore two completely different impressions.

Clothes are only part of the equation. The jewelry, glasses, shoes, make-up, body markings and hairstyles displayed all add to the overall message. For example, in his research, Thornton “found that people who wear eye glasses were rated higher in intelligence and industrious” (Thornton, 1944, p. 203). Hamid’s research indicated, “faces with glasses were rated consistently lower of physical attractiveness and sophisticated and consistently higher on conventional, shy and religious” (Hamid, 1968. p. 905).

A tie is an adornment that has a significant history. Ties offer “sufficient experiential meaning to communicate an acceptable level of professionalism and authority” (Tan, 2009. p. 369). They also can be attributed to specific character traits, such as respectability, politeness and ambition and have symbolized “loyalty, culture, refinement, style and elegance, social status, occupation, identity and group belonging” (Sakic, Frane, Ivicic, & Maricic, 2007, p. 421).
A study completed by Marianne LaFrance (2000) for Proctor and Gamble found that “hairstyle plays a significant role in first impressions” (centre-for-nonverbal-studies.org). For a confident and outgoing look, women should wear short hair. In contrast long hair has more sexual appeal. If intelligence and good nature is desired, then medium-length hair is the choice to make.

Color

Color also plays a role in nonverbal communication. Color is used in all cultures, is found in every language and adds a second level to the signs presented in daily interactions. These signs can be much more subtle than the actual clothing worn. “What we wear, and more importantly, the color of what we wear, has a potential for communicating messages through visual stimuli” (Litak, 2011, p. 117). Color symbolism is everywhere; it’s in the brand names we see everyday, it’s in the rooms where we work, play and visit, it’s in the clothing we wear and it’s verbally represented in our moods. Vargas suggests, “even when color isn’t physically present, we use it in language, with effect … paint the town red, blue Monday, green with jealousy” (Vargas, 1986, p. 138).

Color meaning has been studied by many different disciplines, including psychology, sociology and semiotics. Cultural learning provides color meaning through traditions, entertainment and history. Every color has an associated meaning, or personality that plays into nonverbal communication. The Centre for Nonverbal Communication website (centre-for-nonverbal-studies.org) breaks down the moods and meanings of colors; highlighting the various personalities that are associated with color in North America.
Color personalities play a huge role as they are used to facilitate emotion in
tertainment, in shopping purchases and to stand out among a crowd. The environment is ripe
with examples of color symbolism. Even just looking at daily commutes there are many signs
highlighted by an emotional color to accentuate a desired response. The red octagons signs that
designate an individual to stop at an intersection; the yellow signs that indicate danger along the
route or; the green signs that provide guidance to a destination. Vargas explains how the color of
the Black Friars Bridge in London affected the moods of individuals, “Black Friars Bridge in
London with its extensive black iron work was well known for its frequent suicides. When the
city fathers painted it bright green, they were surprised to discover that suicides declined by more
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than one third" (Vargas 1986, p. 153). Color comes into play in hospital rooms, locker rooms and offices as well. Factory employees standing around a drinking fountain changed their habits when the wall colors changed from soft green to a vivid orange (Vargas, 1986).

“On television, the color of a piece of apparel may itself fulfill a particular communicative function, especially in terms of the interpersonal response it may be designed to invoke in the viewer” (Tan & See, 2009. p. 371). Women on television use color to show their unique personality and seem to have more freedom to experiment with color than are men (Kaiser, 1999; Tan, 2009).

Rationale

Understanding that impressions have a lasting impact, it is important to ensure that the impression made is the one intended. Learning the theory behind nonverbal communication as it relates to signs, signals and cues will help to understand how clothing, adornments and color impact impressions. Given the multitude of clothing options that exist in the modern world and the variety of colors those clothes are available in, there is no doubt that clothing choices will continue to impact impression in both positive and negative ways. While clothes will help to satisfy a personal image and emotions, it is also “reasonable to assume that, in most instances, our perceptions of others is influenced partly by clothes (Knapp, 1980. p. 114)”. 
CHAPTER 3 – SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope

To engage participants in the understanding how nonverbal communication impacts first impressions, this project is designed to utilize the active training as outlined by Silberman (2006). Educating and informing participants about the affects of nonverbal cues (fashion and color) will result in confident and effective communicators and empower them to say what they mean to say in their first encounters and throughout their professional careers.

To be successful, this training program will meet the following objectives:

• Participants are able to appreciate how their existing stereotypes affect their own impressions of other people.
• Participants are able to understand how the semiotic theory defines the meaning of signs, signifiers and signified and apply that understanding to the signs around them.
• Participants will be able to recognize the functions of fashion related to their professional environment and determine the impression they wish to make.
• Participants will have an understanding of the nonverbal aspects of color and how color choices impact their own message.

This training program is for adults of any age, gender or ethnic background in a North American setting that are able to speak and understand the English language. It will be most applicable to participants looking to understand the North American corporate/professional fashion system and those individuals entering the professional world.
Methodology

The decision to utilize active training for this project stems from a desire to ensure that the participants are engaged in the process of learning the information presented. “When learning is passive, the learner comes to the encounter without curiosity, without questions and without interest in the outcome” (Silberman, 2006, p 5-6). Active participation is encouraged throughout this training program to reinforce the learning through social engagement with the other participants. This program will engage participants by utilizing a variety of learning techniques to satisfy the different learning styles. These learning styles are outlined as affective, behavioral and cognitive.

1. Affective learning – includes the fostering of attitudes, feelings and preferences. This is valuing situations, procedure or product.

2. Behavioral learning – is the development of competence in the actual performance of procedures, operations, methods and techniques. This is practice/demonstration of skills.

3. Cognitive learning – is the acquisition of information and concepts related to course content. This is comprehension and application of the information (Silberman, 2006, p. 42-43).

The design of this learning program will integrate several components of active training as outlined by Silberman. The first design element is to develop active training objectives. The “critical question is not what topics to cover but what you want participants to value, understand, or do with those topics” (Silberman, 2006, p. 41). The objectives determined for this program will focus the overall project design. The second design element is the use of immediate learning to initiate interest in the program topics. Stereotypes, appearances and nonverbal
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communication are closely connected in relation to impressions. Therefore the use of activities to stimulate initial thoughts will help to strengthen learning throughout the program. Ensuring that participants are not threatened and that the content is relevant will be crucial to the success of immediate learning. Participation in the exercises will be encouraged through open discussion, polling and subgroup discussions.

A third design element that will be utilized in this program is lectures. Although this component will be strictly limited to basic theoretical components of the topics, the lectures will feature visual components and experiential activities to support the theoretical information presented. To conclude the training program, individuals will be tasked with applying the knowledge learned during the program in a visual demonstration of their skills, which culminates in a presentation to the group with a clearly verbalized description of the choices made.

The structure of this learning program is:

1. First Impressions
   a. What do you do when you meet someone for the first time?
   b. Have your first impressions always been right?
   c. Have your impressions of someone changed over time? Why?

2. Stereotypes
   a. What are stereotypes?
   b. Why is it important to understand stereotypes?
   c. Why do we use stereotypes?
   d. What impact does a stereotype have?

3. Signs (nonverbal communication)
   a. What is nonverbal communication?
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b. Why is nonverbal communication important to understand?

c. What is the theory behind a sign?

d. Why are signs (signals/cues) important to humans?

4. Appearance

a. How does clothing influence stereotypes and impressions?

b. A breakdown of clothing, adornments and hairstyles influence nonverbal communication and impression management?

c. Why is it important to pay attention to clothing in a professional career?

5. Color

a. How does color influence impressions?

b. What does color psychology tell us about emotions?

**Ethical Considerations**

It will be important to ensure that all participants are fully aware that this training program uses the active training methodology and thus ensure full participation. The instructor will need to arrange for informed consent of any participant if there is a need to disclose information related to the groups participation in the training program. To encourage engagement in the training exercises, the need for each participant to feel safe in the learning environment is very important.
CHAPTER 4 – THE PROJECT

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to outline the importance of impressions in effective communication and the impact impressions have on relationships. The curriculum design of this program utilizes active training to empower participants in full understanding of the elements that create and influence impressions. The materials used for this program are located in the appendix. The curriculum design allows for the facilitator to designate their own activities and discussions relevant to the learning group. This program is designed for any individual that is fluent in English and wishing to understand how impressions in North America impact relationships.

Project Design

The objectives of this training program are:

1. Participants will understand the importance of impressions in creating relationship and be able to express how impressions are formed.

2. Participants will understand the components of semiotics as they relate to the nonverbal cues used in creating impressions.

3. Participants will be able to identify the nonverbal cues that contribute to an impression through their visual demonstration and verbal explanation of the choices they made during the final exercise.

4. Provide useful evaluation tools to help students integrate the learning to their everyday life.
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Introductions

1. Introduce yourself; tell us what you do and why you want to understand nonverbal communication as it relates to first impressions.

First Impressions

1. Exercise 1 – each individual receives an envelope with a photo in it. Following the order on the envelopes, the participants will open the envelope and share their first impression of the person in the photo. What do they think of the person’s personality, career, etc.
2. Discussion with the group – What creates first impressions?

Nonverbal Communication

1. Theory of Semiotics
   a. Creative Semiotic Videos
   b. Signifier + Signified = Sign
2. Application of Semiotics
   a. What areas of you life will you find semiotics?
   b. How does semiotics help or hinder everyday?
3. Exercise – each participant will leave the room and search for 10 signs. They are to come back to the group and share 3 of their signs, identify the signified and the signifier and the relevance it demonstrates in our every day.

Stereotypes

1. Discussion with the group - What are Stereotypes?
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2. Lecture - Why do we stereotype people? What do we gain by using stereotypes? What do we lose when we use stereotypes?

Appearance

1. Group discussion – What makes appearance significant to impressions?
3. Video presentation - Nixon & Kennedy Debate
2. Lecture – What are the elements that contributed to Kennedy’s success in the debate? How do clothing, adornments and haircuts impact impressions?

Color

1. What is Color Psychology?
   a. Exercise – participants are invited to find a color station in the room that “speaks to them”. Each group must define their color. Why did you choose the color “orange/blue/red/yellow/purple”?
   b. Video of color psychology
2. What do colors mean?
   a. Group Discussion
   b. Slide presentation on color meanings
3. Exercise - Using the 10 Signs from the last exercise, what do three of your signs communicate using color?

Implementation & Assessment

Using the information from this training program, each individual will dress a mannequin according to a prescribed image. Participants will have to justify their choices using the information presented in the program to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts presented. Before moving beyond the classroom, students will complete a self-assessment and
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action plan to provide the awareness of their current state and set goals to implement learning. Participants will be encouraged to share their successes with the group over the coming months through a designated website forum. Here the participants can ask follow-up questions and other students can share their knowledge, successes and challenges.
Limitations of the Project

This project is designed to assist individuals in understanding how impressions are made and ultimately empower them to make a positive choice when it comes to their nonverbal communication cues. There are several limitations of the current design of this project. The focus on the semiotics of signs and the nonverbal cues associated with impressions this project does not provide a comprehensive overview of all aspects that contribute to nonverbal communication. This project also does not attempt to uncover or understand how cultural differences of nonverbal cues impact impressions. Another limitation of this project is the general nature of the content as it is designed for any English-speaking individuals in North America and does not consider geographical differences in nonverbal communication within Canada or the United States.

In choosing to use active training to implement the design and instruction throughout the program, the amount of literature presented through lectures is limited allowing for the participants to discover through the learning activities. It is likely that some information may not be discussed at all and may affect the evaluation of the program challenging.

Further Recommendations

There are many opportunities to expand upon the learning opportunities of this training program. Including presentations and discussions of decoding nonverbal cues from different cultures would be useful for the diverse populations represented in North America. This would allow greater understanding and acceptance of the significant nonverbal cultural aspects different nationalities. A second recommendation is to expand the studies to include paralinguistics and
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proxemics as they have significant roles in nonverbal communication and the formation of impressions.

Conclusions

Using semiotics and an understanding of nonverbal cues, the objective of this project seeks to empower individuals to recognize and implement choices that reflect their desired impressions. The formation of impressions significantly impacts relationship outcomes and determines success, both personally and professionally. Although impressions can change over time, it is difficult to eliminate the “first” impression completely and will require substantial effort, especially if the impression is considerably negative. Careful focus on managing the desired appearance (clothing, hair, adornments) and in understanding the emotional meaning of colors will provide best practices for managing the impressions that others will make. Conversely, this program will enlighten participants in uncovering the stereotypes they use when forming impressions of others.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1 – Training Presentation (website link)

APPENDIX 2 – Student Handouts

APPENDIX 3 – Assessments tools
APPENDIX 1 – Training Presentation

http://msprin5.wix.com/impressions
IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT
A Nonverbal Communication Training Program
Training Program

01 Impressions
02 Nonverbal Communication
03 Stereotypes
04 Appearance
05 Color Cues
06 Implementation
Impressions

An idea, feeling or opinion about something or someone, especially one formed without conscious thought or on the basis of little evidence.
Impressions
Impressions

- Individuals will see you before they engage in verbal communication with you. “It is reasonable to assume that our perceptions of others is influenced by clothes” (Knapp, 1980, p.114).

- People not only trust strangers, but also they choose to trust based on a strangers appearance.

- Favorable appearance judgments contribute to positive impressions that are not logical. It’s called a halo effect. (Kaiser, 1999, p.74)
Nonverbal communication includes all expressive signs, signals and cues which are used to send and receive messages apart from manual sign language and speech.
The verbal and nonverbal components of the message
Five Functions of NVC

- Nonverbal communication connects with verbal cues – our words and phrases are framed by tone of voice, facial expressions and signs
- Regulate interactions – whose turn is it to talk?
- Identify individuals – facial hair, body ornamentations and clothing
- Provide emotional information – tone of voice, averted eyes, silence
- Establish relational meaning – view yourself in relation to another person
Semiotics investigates, deciphers, documents and explains the what, how and why of signs to determine recurrent patterns in the production of human meaning.

Creative Semiotics

Creative Semiotics Part 2

Semiotics of the tie
Signs

**Signifier**
The physical form of the sign as we perceive it through our senses; an image.

**Signified**
The meaning we associate with the sign.

**Sign**
The inseparable combination of the signifier and the signified.
Signs

**Signifier**
A ribbon

+ 

**Signified**
The color pink

= 

**Sign**
Breast cancer survivor
Sign – generic label for a unit of nonverbal communication. A gesture, a movement or an expression that conveys information both with and apart from verbal communication.

Cues – nonverbal signs used to prompt an event, a behavior or an experience. They suggest what may happen and will provoke a response from the receiver.

Signal – informs about what will happen next and is considered a hint or a warning.
Stereotypes

A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.
We use stereotypes to attribute characteristics to others, it allows the ability to make rapid judgments.

Stereotypes guide people in making choices about relationships.

Stereotypes originate primarily from wearing apparel and adornments.
Stereotypes

CANADIAN STEREOTYPES

We all play hockey
We live in igloos
We're all lumberjacks

We speak fluent French
We ride moose
We secretly want to be Americans
HAS YOUR BRAIN TURNED ANY HEADS LATELY?
We didn't think so. BUCK'S™ BODY SHOP.

YOUR BODY IS A PIECE OF MEAT.
MARINATE IT IN OUR COLOGNE.

I KNEW THE FREE MARKET WOULD EVENTUALLY BRING US GENDER EQUALITY.
Appearance

The way that someone or something looks.
Clothing

- With the introduction of clothing, the body’s nonverbal vocabulary grows (Givens, 2010).
- Satisfies personal images and emotions.
- Showcases specific traits or behaviors that a message receiver would expect from the message sender.
- “Body appearance is a snapshot of a personality, the artifacts, clothes, hairstyle and jewelry broadcast nonverbal signals that can attract or repel others (Lary, 20014).
Business Suit

- Relevant to judgments about task competence, intellectuality and responsibility
- Creates homogeneity of appearance
- Standard expectation of corporate professions
Ties

- Communicate an acceptable level of professionalism and authority.
- Character traits of ties include: respectability, polite, ambition
- Symbolizes: loyalty, culture, refinement, style, social status, occupation, identity and group belonging
Hairstyles

Short Hair – confident and outgoing

Medium Hair – intelligence and good nature

Long Hair – sexual attraction
Watches demonstrate commitment to meeting deadlines.

Jewelry/Watch
Glasses

- Highly intelligence
- more industrious
- Less physically attractive
- Less sophisticated
Color Cues

Transmission of information about emotions, feelings and moods
Color Exercise
Color Theory

- Color adds a second level to the signs that we present. It has the “potential for communicating messages through visual stimuli” (Litak, 2011, p.117).

- Color has an associated meaning or personality that plays into nonverbal communication. They have symbolic meaning and represent moods.

- Color accentuates desired responses and impacts impressions.
BLUE

Cool, pleasant, leisurely, distant, infinite, secure, transcendent, calm, tender

Dignity, sadness, tenderness, truth
Hot, affectionate, angry, defiant, contrary, hostile, full of vitality, excitement, love

Happiness, lust, intimacy, love, restlessness, agitation, royalty, rage, sin, blood
ORANGE

Unpleasant, exciting, disturbed, distressed, upset, defiant, contrary, hostile, stimulating

Sun, fruitfulness, harvest, thoughtfulness
GREEN

Cool, pleasant, leisurely, in control

Security, peace, jealousy, hate,
aggressiveness, calm
PURPLE

Depressed, sad, dignified, stately

Wisdom, victory, pomp, wealth, humility, tragedy
Unpleasant, exciting, hostile, cheerful, joyful, jovial

Superficial glamor, sun, light, wisdom, royalty (China), age (Greece), prostitution (Italy), famine (Egypt)
Sad, not tender, despondent, dejected, melancholy, unhappy, neutral

Melancholy, protection, autumn, decay, humility, atonement
Sad, intense, anxious, fear, despondent, dejected, melancholy, unhappy

Darkness, power, mastery, protection, decay, mystery, wisdom, death, atonement
WHITE

Joy, lightness, neutral, cold

Solemnity, purity, chastity, femininity, humility, innocent, fidelity, cowardice
Implementation
Create an Impression

- Using the theory presented, create a visual impression to match the description provided.

- Focus on the clothing, colors and adornments to set up your impression.

- Justify your choices by discussing the thoughts behind the decisions you made.

- How will you empower yourself to make similar choices?
Participant Name:

**Exercise 1 - First Impressions**

What is your impression of the people in the images shown? Why do you feel that way?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
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<td>Image 2</td>
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<td>Image 7</td>
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<td>Image 8</td>
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Class Discussion notes on Exercise 1:

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DECODING IMPRESSIONS

Nonverbal Communication

Semiotics (Signifier + Signified = Sign)

Discussion: What areas of your life will you find semiotics?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

How does semiotics help or hinder you?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Exercise – Find 10 signs; identify the signifier and the signified elements of the sign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Signifier</th>
<th>Signified</th>
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DECODING IMPRESSIONS

Stereotypes

Notes from class discussion:

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Appearance

Notes from group discussion:

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DECODING IMPRESSIONS

Discussion: How do clothing, adornments, and hairstyles impact impressions?

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Color

Exercise: choose a color from around the room. In that group discuss what it is that made you choose that color?
DECODING IMPRESSIONS

What do colors mean?

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<th>Color</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Symbolizes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Blue</td>
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<td>Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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</table>

Exercise: Using the 10 signs from the last exercise, what do three of your signs communicate using color?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Color Communication</th>
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APENDIX 3 – Assessment tools

http://msprin5.wix.com/impressions