

Dance as Communication: Messages Sent and Received Through Dance

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the nonverbal communication of dance among individuals in a social setting. The research interpreted the messages that were sent and received between individuals while socially dancing. Specifically, this research studied dance in a naturalistic setting. Nonverbal codes of proxemics, haptics, and kinesics were observed and recorded. In addition, focus groups were conducted to see how the phenomena of nonverbal messages in dance are sent and received. As a result of both observations and focus groups, it was concluded that many different messages are being sent while dancing. These nonverbal messages were subsumed into categories which included: confidence, not interested, disrespect, having a good time, flirting, attention, and attraction.

DANCE AS COMMUNICATION: MESSAGES SENT AND RECEIVED THROUGH DANCE

Social dance remains unexplored involving nonverbal messages sent and received while dancing. The majority of research done regarding dance has been studied in the contexts of dance classes, self-esteem of children, cultural and sexuality. Previously, little to no research has been done in the context of dance in a social setting. The research I will be conducting involves examining the nonverbal communication of dance among individuals in a social setting.

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of message-related behavior, to explain how dance is a communicative phenomenon, and how dance is used to send and receive messages through nonverbal behavior. Messages may be intentional or unintentional in a variety of social contexts. Dance is a unique social interaction that sends both intentional and unintentional messages. Dance has been a part of American culture for many years. Culturally, dance is important because we use it as a way to socialize, flirt, and to attract others. Dancing instigates affective transformations, changing mental structures and spatial meanings (Brabazon, 1998). In other words, dancing may change moods, serve as a force of attraction, and influence perception, all through physical movements and nonverbal communication (Brabazon, 1998; Oseroff-Varnell, 1998). Yet the study of dance as a communicative phenomenon remains unexplored.

REVIEW

Nonverbal Communication Codes

Dancing is a form of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication plays an important role in our interaction with others. Research suggests that approximately 60-65% of social meaning is derived from nonverbal behaviors (DeVito, Guerrero & Hecht, 1999). Various codes are used when researching nonverbal communication. The codes that will be explored in this study will be proxemics, haptics, and kinesics.

People communicate various messages in the act of dance, communicating with their bodies every time they dance. But what are they saying and how is it being received by dance partners? The meanings associated with messages sent by people who are dancing in a social setting are evident through the codes of space, touch, facial expressions, and eye contact. This leads us into haptics, which is a code that refers to touching and physical contact.

In the past, touch has been researched in the context of gender and culture. Most of the literature on social touch has emphasized touch as an expression of affection, caring, or sexual interest (Willis & Briggs, 1992). Men and women interpret touch differently and differ in the frequencies with which they touch and are touched (Willis & Briggs, 1992). Males are more likely to perceive interaction in more sexual terms than females (DeVito, Guerrero, & Hecht, 1999). Women generally exhibit more nonverbal behavior than men (Guerrero, 1997). Culturally,

individuals from contact cultures prefer more immediate nonverbal behaviors than do those from noncontact cultures (Remland, Martin, & Jones, 1995). Contact cultures are more comfortable with the act of touch and touch more frequently.

Touch can communicate either positive or negative messages. These messages can communicate stimulation, hostility, enjoyment, etc. A wide array of research has indicated that close proximity and touch carry such varied meanings as affiliation, warmth, involvement, rapport, and dominance (Burgoon, 1991). Different forms of touch produce different interpretations and reactions (Burgoon, 1991). Studies have shown that touch behavior is used less frequently by individuals who are anxious and lacking in self-esteem (Guerrero & Andersen, 1991). Revealing dance moves can show confidence or lack of it. Movement as a creative expression plays an important part in life, building self-image, self-awareness, and self-direction (Shue & Beck, 2001). Understanding the messages of dance is an excellent contribution to the discipline of communication. Researching casual dance in the codes of proxemics, haptics, and kinesics will reveal new messages about nonverbal communication.

In the past, space has also been studied in the context of gender and culture. Culturally, contact cultures interact at closer distances than noncontact cultures (Remland, et al., 1995). North America is labeled as a noncontact culture, but may become a contact culture in the context of dance. When it comes to gender, female dyads interact at closer distances than do male dyads (Remland, et al., 1995). Henly and Harmon (1985) found that same distance conveyed by a female was interpreted as more sexual and less dominant than when displayed by a male. Space and touch are not the only codes of nonverbal behavior, however, will be the focus of this study.

There is also another nonverbal code that is prominent with dance. This code is kinesics, which includes facial movements and eye contact/gaze. These codes can also be called immediacy cues. These cues signal psychological and/or physical closeness, indicate communication availability, and increase sensory stimulation (Andersen, 1985). Facial movements describe to the other individual if there is flirting going on or lack of interest. Eye contact/gaze happens frequently in the act of dance. Eye avoidance shows lack of interest and lack of enjoyment. Moving your body sexually on the dance floor and using intense eye contact could be a way to attract someone of the opposite or same sex. Nonverbal involvement reflects an individual's level of activity and interest in social interaction (Cegala, 1981). When studying nonverbal codes, it is appropriate to study the codes and behavior according to context.

Nonverbal and Context

Relational and situational factors are important to understand when talking about context. Relational factors can be described as the type of relationship between people interacting and the stage of the relationship, which influences how nonverbal messages are enacted and interpreted (DeVito, et al., 1999). Studies have found that people use more gaze, more touch, and closer proximity when interacting with romantic partners as opposed to friends or strangers. Relational factor differences in nonverbal communication shows that relational context affects how people send and interpret messages (DeVito, et al., 1999).

Situational factors influence the performance and evaluation of nonverbal messages (DeVito, et al., 1999). They influence how people react to various forms of nonverbal communication. These situational factors include the environment in which a person interacts, the type of situation, timing of the interaction, and the temporary states such as moods (DeVito, et al., 1999).

College bars provide a unique setting that influences behaviors between romantic partners, friends, and strangers (Afifi & Johnson, 1999). The setting in which touch occurs have been shown to affect the gender differences (Willis & Briggs, 1992). The type of situation in a bar such as drinking alcohol may influence how individuals dance together, whether they are male or female. People who do not know each other are very close to one another in a bar setting. They do not have a lot of personal space and this can result in individuals being within intimate distances, which is also a type of situation. How you react to close proximity in a bar or club would be different if it was occurring in a less intense environment. Now that nonverbal communication and codes have been looked at in a general context, we now move on to dance as a nonverbal context.

Dance as a Nonverbal Context

People use nonverbal behaviors to tell each other how they feel. Many different positive relational messages are communicated nonverbally to help define relationships (DeVito, et al., 1999). These nonverbal messages include behaviors such as smiles, close distances, touch, and gaze.

When dancing, sometimes personal space can be invaded. Social distances are usually from 4 to 12 feet (Hamilton & Parker, 2001). Social distance is what is used in social settings, but on the dance floor, this all changes. People that have just met could be within the intimate distance, from touching to 18 inches. The closer it gets, the more seductive it gets. This is not the typical use of public space in American culture, yet this space lessens while "dirty" dancing at the bar.

The medium of dance naturally invites more physical contact than many other types of nonverbal communication (Oseroff-Varnell, 1998). It becomes the norm to touch one another while dancing. This touching

could be unwanted, sexual, friendly, or passionate. Even though considerable research has been conducted on haptic affection displays, few studies have explored the use of these displays while dancing. Haptics and proxemics are prominent codes as we interpret social interaction.

When individuals start getting closer with a dance partner or multiple partners, haptics comes into play. Touch both influences and reflects the nature of social relationships between individuals (Afifi & Johnson, 1999). It is our most intimate and involving form of communication (DeVito, et al., 1999). Dance is usually a playfulness type of touch, which is a touch not to be taken seriously (DeVito, 2004). Although when touch is used, there should be a shared meaning created between the sender and receiver or else a misunderstanding could occur (DeVito, et al., 1999).

Touching on the dance floor may occur among friends, strangers, or romantic partners. Studies suggest that individuals often rely on nonverbal behaviors, specifically affection displays, to communicate relational intentions to one another (Afifi & Johnson, 1999). "Dancing offers a memory trace of past movement and sensibilities. It is a life lived by proxy, having sex without removing any clothing, looking rich while possessing nothing but credit card debt, working the body hard because there is nothing else at which to work, and grasping the ecstatic movements on a dance floor because the rational world is too painful" (Brabazon, 1998, p.112). Dancing changes the rules for body presentation, distance, and touch.

"Rhythm and dance should be taken seriously as a form of communication, a performance of particular meanings, sensibilities, epistemologies, and social relations" (Rogers, 1998, p.23). We know that students go out to the bars and dance to have a good time, what we do not know is what messages are being sent and received nonverbally between dance partners. As reviewed, nonverbal messages are often dictated by space, touch, and kinesics. Social dance remains unexplored, but it has been studied in the contexts of dance classes, self-esteem of children, and sexuality (Brabazon, 1998; Oseroff-Varnell, 1998). Understanding the message of dance is an excellent contribution to the discipline of communication. Researching casual social dance will reveal further messages about nonverbal communication.

The Theory of Sense-Making

Sense-Making offers a helpful way of thinking about, studying, analyzing, and theorizing human behavior, both at the individual and collective levels (Savolainen, 1993). The Sense-Making theory helps to explain human activity and the way in which people make "sense" of their surroundings. Sense-Making is a set of meta-theoretic assumptions about the nature of information, the nature of human use of information, and the nature of human communication (Dervin, 1989). Reality is in part ordered and is also in part disordered and the disordered part is the part in which we have to make "sense." The Sense-Making theory is appropriate for this research because the study is trying to make sense of the nonverbal behaviors that are occurring at the bar/dance club.

Sense-Making assumes that individuals are not entirely bound by culture, that they can act systematically and consciously to free themselves, to some extent, from cultural, historical, and institutional constraints (Cardillo, 1999). It is important to uncover the trends of social dance and why the traditional rules of touch and space do not apply in this context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Nonverbal messages are often dictated by space, touch, facial expressions, and eye contact. Researching casual social dance revealed messages about nonverbal communication codes. The nonverbal codes of proxemics, haptics, and kinesics were used as a lens while observing, recording field notes and filling in a chart. The way an individual uses nonverbal communication while dancing were perceived as messages sent and received about attraction, flirting, confidence, sexuality, self-esteem, etc. We know that students go to bars and dance to have a good time, what we did not know is what messages were being sent and received nonverbally between dancers. In order to examine research question one, it was addressed by observation only and field notes were taken and a chart was used for revealing the nonverbal codes of proxemics, haptics, and kinesics as a lens. In order to study research questions two and three, messages being sent and received through both observation and focus groups were examined. This research merged the nonverbal communication messages with the phenomenon of dancing. The following questions were raised.

RQ₁: How are the nonverbal codes of proxemics, haptics and kinesics reflected in bars and club dancing?

RQ₂: What kinds of nonverbal messages do individuals claim they send to their dance partners?

RQ₃: What kinds of nonverbal messages do individuals claim they receive from dance partners?

METHOD

Based on the literature review, both qualitative and quantitative descriptive research seemed like the best methods to use. This research was conducted quantitatively through naturalistic observation using a chart and field notes to quantify the amount of touch and space behaviors expressed while individuals were dancing in a public setting. The codes of proxemics, haptics, and kinesics were used to complete the chart. Qualitatively, focus groups were conducted to examine how individuals view the nonverbal behavior that takes place while socially dancing at a club/bar and also to discover the rationale behind the findings of the quantitative measure. A qualitative and quantitative descriptive approach was most appropriate because it is data-driven, meaning the results emerged through observation. Since little to no research has been conducted on messages and dance, a qualitative and quantitative study was warranted.

The method for this research was participant-observation because I took an active role in the study by observing in a naturalistic environment, meaning the bar. Instead of giving surveys, I joined in with the group that was being observed. The subjects did not know they were being observed. Since the purpose of this research was to reveal nonverbal behavior while dancing, participant-observation was most appropriate.

Data were collected in the form of field notes, charts and focus groups. The first collection of data was gathered at the bar/club setting. I observed the dancers in a naturalistic setting and recorded the types of touching, space, facial expressions, and eye contact I saw in field notes and charts. Based on past research, touch, space, and kinesics were studied using charts and field notes and this explains why I used this method.

Subjects

The sample included any dancing individual, couple, or group observed in a bar/club where dancing was known to be the main attraction. The type of sample was nonrandom. There was a general bar/dance club population, but the chosen population was individuals out on the dance floor or just casually dancing. Out of the population who was dancing, I chose certain individuals who I observed to be relaying various nonverbal messages, such as the use of haptics, proxemics, and kinesics. I used convenience sampling and purposive sampling because the chosen dancers possessed a particular characteristic under investigation and also had the characteristic of being social dancers. The sample came strictly from bars or dance clubs and the participants were not chosen in a random way.

In addition to data collection by charts and field notes, I conducted a semi-structured focus group of dancers and asked them questions about their experiences at the bars/clubs. It was semi-structured because there were structured questions, but there were also probing questions that were not decided on until the focus group took place. Specifically, they were asked about their behaviors regarding space, touch, and their interpretation of their partner or group. The focus group participants were chosen from the UW-La Crosse CST Research Pool and word-of-mouth. They were 21 years of age and older and were male and female. I recruited nine participants for the focus group. Three were males and six were females.

Measurement

When collecting the data for my research, I used observational-type research because I did not manipulate or change any variables (Reinard, 2001). I observed from a proxemic that was close to the subject, but not too close. Quantitatively, while observing, I recorded nonverbal communication that was occurring into field notes and used charts to measure what kinds of touch are taking place and how many times. I used a modified chart with a coding scheme developed on my own with the help of DeVito's (1989) Varied Embrace Chart and Krassas, Blauwkamp, and Wesselink's (2003) chart (See Appendix A).

Qualitatively, after the data was collected, I conducted two focus groups with different individuals. Upon agreement, I asked the subjects open-ended questions based on my observations and recorded their responses (See Appendix B). There was probing questions when necessary.

Procedures

I attended bars in Southwestern Wisconsin and Eastern Minnesota, which were the sites for research. The reason for the research in other areas is because of opportunity, meaning there was more diversity, more participants, and many more dance clubs and bars available. I entered the bar and sat at a table that was close to the area that dancing was taking place. I observed while taking field notes and filling in my modified chart and proceeded to observe while dancing.

The focus group was conducted after the observation data were collected. The focus group was used to get direct answers on how other people viewed nonverbal messages sent and received while dancing. I recruited participants from the CST Research Pool and word-of-mouth. The participants were offered pizza and soda at the focus group. It took about a half an hour for each focus group. The participants were given a consent form and false names for confidentiality reasons. I then began to ask the participants questions. They were asked what kind of messages they were sending and receiving while dancing (See Appendix B). I asked open-ended extensive

questions and probed when necessary. Notes were taken at this time and the participants were recorded. The observations and feedback I received were analyzed to uncover trends.

Data Analysis

Upon the completion of the data collection, the research was analyzed by determining what patterns emerged. The observational data including the field notes and chart were described according to the codes of proxemics, haptics, and kinesics. The focus group data was analyzed by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) constant comparative method. This method uses four steps to inductive analysis, which involves a process of condensing interview data to manageable categories. All responses were included by first becoming individual items, then subsumed into categories that were labeled (Dickmeyer, 2004). The messages sent and received eventually resulted in a typology, or themes, of nonverbal messages in dance.

RESULTS

The following results are separated into two different parts including both observations and focus groups. The following nonverbal cues show how males and females send and receive nonverbal messages differently and answer the three research questions presented in this project. The male and female sections represent the three nonverbal codes that were studied, which include: haptics, proxemics, and kinesics. In order to answer research question one, observations needed to take place. Table one identifies the number of times one individual used each type of touch while being observed at all four clubs using a modified combination of The Varied Embrace Chart by DeVito (1985) and Krassas, Blauwkamp, and Wesselink's (2003) chart. (See Appendix A)

Table One

Date/Location	3/4/05 Legends	3/5/05 Club Rhino	3/25/05 The Onion	3/26/05 Valentino's	Total #	Total %
Full Embrace	4			2	6	4.6%
Arm-link	2				2	1.5%
Hand in Hand	1				1	.8%
Kissing		1	1	2	4	3.1%
Hand to hip/butt/waist	5	10	4	12	31	23.8%
Hand to head/face		2	1	2	5	3.8%
Self-Touch	8	10	5	14	37	28.5%
Head/Eye Aversion	2	2	3	3	10	7.7%
Arm around shoulder	1				1	.8%
Snuggling behind	6	8	5	14	33	25.4%
Amt of Time	2 hours	1 hour	3 hours	1 hour	130	100%

Observations

Each of the above nonverbal cues were already decided upon before observation. Many of the nonverbal cues above occurred very frequently during observation; more than one pair of eyes could keep an accurate count. A description of each nonverbal cue above will be included along with the actual observations that were made. As you can see from the table, the types of touch that occurred the most were hand to hip/butt/waist, self-touch, and snuggling behind. Females are the first individuals that will be discussed in the observational research.

Females

Female subjects were observed more because there were many more females out on the dance floor than males. It was very rare to see a female dancing by herself. It seemed very important that females had at least one other individual out on the dance floor with them. There were a lot of "come here" gestures to get their friends out on the dance floor before making a move. Girlfriends tended to dance at a normal distance when there were two people with less eye contact. If there were a group of women, they tended to form a circle and dance closer without letting strangers in. Some would sway and put their arms around each others shoulders while dancing. There were girls that were dancing close doing very sexual movements without any space between their bodies. Some women would dance off to the side in a group and try not to be noticed performing very siddle dance moves.

Self-touch is very popular with women while dancing. It is also a type of touch that occurred the most in this study. When a female is dancing with a friend or friends, she tends to touch their head, thighs, and run their hands down their body. Self-touch occurs more with women when they are dancing with other women. When dancing with a male, the female self-touches in the same way, but is at a closer distance to the male. The women also like to run their hands through their hair when dancing with a male dance partner.

Sexual dancing is something that is seen very often at dance clubs. The more sexual the song is, the more sexual the dancing gets. Women tend to perform a thrusting motion on a male's leg or groin when the male is dancing behind them. This calls for very close distances. There are times when a male will want to sexually dance with a female and she will back away and there will be a lot less touching. Women will get in between two males and dance with both of them, being touched from both sides.

Facial expressions are nonverbal behaviors that females tend to use a lot more than males. A woman will make a sneering face to her friends if she does not enjoy dancing with a particular individual. She may even mouth the word "help" so that her friends will come rescue her. This is something that is seen continuously while observing. A friend will come and pull another friend away or start dancing in between two people after the female has made a scared or annoyed face. Women also use facial expressions when they are having a good time. I have seen a lot of smiling, mouths open, raised eyebrows, puckered lips, etc. when the dancers were having a good time. I have also observed heads swaying and closed eyes when a confident dancer is really feeling the music.

Males

Males are seen less on the dance floor. They are usually the ones watching from the sidelines. When males are on the dance floor, they are usually out there by themselves trying to find a female to dance with. A lot of the time, the male will approach the female from behind and start dancing with her that way. Approaching (snuggling) from behind was the second type of touch that occurred the most. Other times, they will show off their dance moves first and then approach a female.

When approaching a female, men make a lot of eye contact and then start moving forward. Males use eye contact more than females do. They stay focused on whomever they are dancing with and try to reciprocate the females dance moves. Although, some males are confident enough to stick with their own dance moves and let the females follow them, most males follow the female. Men and women tend to dance very close and more touching occurs in comparison with females dancing with females or males dancing with other males.

Men dancing with other men is not very common unless they are standing in a circle and watching each other break dance or show off their skills. Usually, men are seen dancing by themselves, with a girl, or a group of girls.

Culture

There are a variety of different cultures that attend dance clubs/bars. In American culture, we follow the "bubble" rule in everyday life, which is the transparent space around a human being that should not be entered by another human being unless asked. This space is about two to three feet. The "bubble" rule is obviously broken while dancing at a club/bar. It is normal to be in closer proximity while dancing. While observing, I noticed that different races also follow different rules.

While observing at a salsa club, there were a lot of Hispanic males present. They tended to get into personal space right away with no hesitations. They crowd and a lot of times make women feel uncomfortable, which is seen by their facial expressions. In their culture, Hispanics do not have the "bubble" rule. Hispanics communicate at a close distance both nonverbally and verbally. While observing at another bar, there was a high Asian population. The Asian women would dance a lot closer to each other than Caucasian women were and were very sexual dancers. Another observation was that African American women do not dance with each other. They either dance by themselves or with another male.

Focus Groups

The following results surfaced as categories after condensing data using the Constant Comparative analysis method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The following categories show how participants perceive the act of sending and receiving nonverbal messages while dancing. Table two identifies the nonverbal messages that are sent by dancers that participants reported. Table three identifies the nonverbal messages that are received by dancers that participants reported.

Table Two. Nonverbal Messages Sent by Dancers

1.	Dancers send flirtation messages
2.	Dancers send messages to receive attention
3.	Dancers send "having fun" messages
4.	Dancers send "not interested" messages
5.	Dancers send messages of confidence

Each of the above categories emerged after data analysis and is described separately. Each category was mutually exclusive and offered insight into what kinds of nonverbal messages are being sent on the dance floor. Many of the participants' direct quotes are included, but they have been given fictional names for confidentiality. When I started asking the focus group participants questions, they were a little hesitant at first and then could not stop talking about all of their dance encounters. The first category described in these results summarizes how **dancers send flirtation messages**.

Flirtation was a very common message that was sent by the participants. They reported that when they flirt, they dance very close the other individual and make intense eye contact. Rachel states, "When I am flirting with someone, I will touch them a lot more and we will have a lot less space between us." The women in the focus group said that while flirting, they will toss and run their hands through their hair. They also reported that the dancing gets a lot more sexual. There is more touching and their bodies become at a very close and intimate distance. While flirting, some dancers will **send messages to receive attention**.

Rachel agreed while saying, "Yeah, I try to get attention while dancing. If I like a guy, I will go and dance with another guy really close to get his attention and make eye contact and then look away." Other participants commented on how girls will dance sexually with other girls to get men's attention. They also said that they see a lot of people on the stage, tables, and chairs, which is another big way to catch people's eyes and make them notice you. Stacy said, "I don't dance on the stage to get attention, I just do it because I am having fun at the moment." This quote leads us into the next category, which is **dancers send "having fun" messages**.

"When I go dancing, I just dance to have a good time and be goofy," says Harry. Many times people do not care what they look like while they are dancing, as long as they are having fun. "I always look like I don't know what I am doing, but I am having fun anyways," laughs Jerry. There was a consensus by the participants that the majority of the time when they go dancing it is to have fun with their friends and not to impress anyone. "A lot of the times I get excited about the song and dance to that and then leave the dance floor when it is over," says Sheila. When having fun with friends, dancers may get annoyed with other individuals and **send "not interested" messages**.

The women participants confessed that there are many times that a male will come and try to dance with them and they will not be at all interested in dancing with them. "I just try to back away or maybe exit the floor as soon as the song is done," says Helga. "I am not afraid to walk away from a guy when I don't want to dance with him. If he is not a good dancer, I don't want anything to do with him," explains Rachel. The participants explained that they usually try to avoid eye contact when they do not want to dance with someone. "Sometimes when I feel uncomfortable when dancing with someone, I make a certain facial expression and my friend will intervene and help me," says Marla. "Yeah, one time a guy was looking at me up and down while dancing and my friend came and took me away from him," states Bertha. A dancer may be uninterested in another dancer, but that may be an example of a **dancer sending a message of confidence**.

The focus group informed me that they can tell when a person is confident on the dance floor or not. When an individual is less confident Harry says, "They look really hesitant, stiff, and sway from side to side. They don't really get into the rhythm." A lot of the time people danced in big groups and did not have the confidence to dance by themselves. Rachel assures me that she is confident enough to go out there and dance by herself. She is not afraid of what other people think, but many people are. "You can tell when a person is less confident because they will tend to reciprocate their partner's dance moves instead of having their own moves," explains Rachel. The participants said that you can pick out confident dancers because they are really into the song, do not look around, and move with the rhythm. Table three identifies the nonverbal messages that are received by dancers that participants reported.

Table Three. Nonverbal Messages Received by Dancers

1.	Dancers receive flirting and attraction messages
2.	Dancers receive "not interested" messages
3.	Dancers receive messages of confidence
4.	Dancers receive "love of dance"/ "having a good time" messages
5.	Dancers receive messages of disrespect

Each of the above categories emerged after data analysis and is described separately. Each category was mutually exclusive and offered insight into what kinds of nonverbal messages are being received on the dance floor. Many of the participants' direct quotes are included, but they have been given fictional names for confidentiality. The first category described in these results summarizes how **dancers receive flirtation and attraction messages**.

There were many comments about how it is apparent when a guy is interested in dancing with a certain person. "When a guy is eyeing me up and down on the dance floor, I know that he is about to head over my way any minute," says Wendy. Many of times a male or female will be led onto the floor if the other person is interested in dancing with them. They may also give the "come here" finger if attraction or flirtation occurs. "I have noticed that a guy who is flirting with me through dance will act like I am his territory and will not let other guys get close to me," said Bridget. "When a guy is trying to flirt with me, he will try to get closer to me and make more sexual dance moves or try to tell me something in my ear," expresses Wendy. There is a lot of flirting happening on the dance floor, but not all of it is wanted. The next category that will be discussed is **dancers receive "not interested" messages.**

There are many instances where you see females that are not interested in the male they are dancing with and the males receive messages of disinterest. The focus group explained that they see males receiving these messages when the female will slowly back away or look at the male in disgust. "I can tell when someone does not want to dance when they are not reciprocating dance moves or they look bored," said Pat. When people receive messages of disinterest, they will slowly dance away and may look a little embarrassed explained the participants. The next category to be discussed is **dancers receive confidence messages.**

Confidence is something that many people do not have on the dance floor. They may have confidence in other aspects in their life, just not on the dance floor explains a participant. "I receive a confident message when my partner can work off of his own dance moves and not depend on me to lead the moves," stated Rachel. The group agreed that they receive messages of confidence when they see someone dancing by themselves. Less confident people will refuse to dance with someone if asked. Both confident and not confident **dancers receive messages of the "love of dance" or "having a good time"** from other dancers.

Having a good time while on the dance floor is something that is very evident to everyone involved. "When I am dancing with my friends, I can tell that they are having a good time because they are feeling the music and mouthing the words to the song," said Bertha. "When the person I am dancing with is smiling and laughing, I can tell they are having a good time," Helga stated. Many people will be on the dance floor all night and dance no matter what the song is and by this, you can tell that they love to dance. Molly said, "I see friends doing dances that they have made up to a certain song and perform it together on the dance floor." Dancing is an activity that is almost impossible not to have fun while doing it. It is obvious that most people are out on the dance floor to have a good time. The fun may be ruined when a **dancer receives a message of disrespect.**

Disrespect happens frequently while dancing. Just because the proximity is so close, does not mean that you can touch anybody you want. Butt grabbing is a sign of disrespect that occurs a lot. "Sometimes I will hold the guy's hands while they are on my back just so they won't go any further. I don't trust them," explained Amy. Harry tells us about a time when a female grabbed his butt while he was dancing and having fun. He turned around and did not know where it came from. Getting too close can also be disrespectful. There should be a nonverbal understanding between two dancers as to how close to get the participants explained.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that men and women have shown various types of nonverbal behavior while dancing. Some of the same messages were being sent and received when identifying trends while observing and conducting focus groups. The observation and focus groups clearly identified messages sent and received on the dance floor while answering the three research questions. These messages demonstrated that there are clearly other things besides dancing taking place on the dance floor. The trends for messages sent and received included: flirtation, attraction, attention, having fun, not interested, confidence, and disrespect. The nonverbal messages sent and received on the dance floor, as noted earlier, can be examined using the Sense-Making theory. Making sense out of these messages will reveal what is really happening on the dance floor.

All dancers are making sense of their nonverbal messages. Dancers know what the other is trying to say without saying it because they are taught to make sense out of the messages that are sent and received. Males and females both use dance as a flirtation, attraction, and attention device. Males and females dance in closer proximity with more touch because they are attracted to each other and the way the other dances. This also calls for more intense eye contact because they want each other to know that they are interested enough to focus on one another. Females usually dance close to other females to attract a male's attention. They know that men are usually attracted to two females touching each other. Females also tend to gain attention by sexually dancing on stage, chairs, or tables to make themselves very visible to everyone in the club. Sexual dancing is a great indicator of flirtation and wanting attention. Naturally, sexual movements arouse people. Self-touch is something that occurs while sexual dancing. If individuals are touching themselves while dancing, they will more likely touch a partner while dancing.

Sometimes it is just a place to put hands while dancing. Males usually gain attention by showing off their dance moves because it is rare to find a good male dancer and females are more attracted to males that can dance.

Making eye contact is another way to flirt. Making eye contact is another way to get into someone's space because looking at someone this intensely is very intimate. Eye contact displays interest because there is enough attraction to keep looking. Sometimes it may look like someone is trying to gain attention, but they are really just confident in their dancing.

Confidence on the dance floor is very evident. As said before, it is very rare to see people dancing by themselves. It is a comfort to have at least one partner, so you do not feel so self-conscious with your dance moves. Self-conscious dancers dance in the corner, moving very stiffly because they are afraid of what people are going to say or think. Confident dancers are more likely to dance by themselves and freely move to the rhythm without looking around to make sure nobody is staring at them. Confident dancers are usually dancing to have fun and do not mind acting goofy. It does not matter what song is playing, if anyone is dancing with them, or who is looking. They just have a love for dance.

Males are usually more self-conscious and it is noticeable by the way they reciprocate a female's dance moves and will not make their own. Males usually will approach a female from behind because they may be afraid that the female will not like what she sees. This way, the male can dance behind without being seen at first and just follow her dance moves. You do not see males dancing with other males. They are afraid to be viewed as homosexual if this happens. Males are also less likely to make facial expressions when dancing.

Facial expressions are something that let other people know what you are thinking without having to say it. It is very apparent when a dancer is having a great time or really annoyed by the look on their face. Female dancers use these more because they are more animated and emotional than males are in every day life. This is the same when dancing.

The "not interested" expression is one of the more interesting facial expressions. Females usually make a face, back away, walk away, or alert a friend when they are not interested in dancing with someone. This happens because there may not be an attraction, inappropriate touching is happening, space is being invaded, or their partner is just plainly a bad dancer. When a dancer is mouthing "help me," it is a good indication that she/he does not want to be in any proximity of the person she/he is dancing with. Dancers make sense out of nonverbals such as "not interested" messages because they act on those messages according to how they interpret them.

When on the dance floor, the spacing is so tight because the floor is usually too small for how many people are occupying it. It always exceeds its limit. Because this is common, people have different expectations for dance floor behavior and normal behavior. Dancers try to make sense of the situation by realizing that it is normal to have this sort of proximity on the dance floor. This is when people can start becoming disrespectful by really crossing the line. This inappropriate behavior occurs because some people think that just because the rules of proximity and haptics have changed, they can go overboard with touching, which would not usually happen off of the floor. Individuals will touch others private areas because they are either already dancing intimately or they can touch and run off into the crowd without being seen. Inappropriate touch can occur between two dancers because one partner will assume just because they are at such an intimate distance, they have the authority to touch anywhere they want.

This research had some limitations as with any research. The first limitation was the alcohol factor. Of course, at any bar or club, there is going to be alcohol involved. Many times dancing behavior results from alcohol consumption. It is almost impossible to recognize who is sober or intoxicated without asking them. To help this limitation, I tried to arrive at the bar/club earlier in the evening to avoid drunk dancers as much as possible. The second limitation occurred during observation. There is so much movement on the dance floor and it was really hard to catch every touch, facial expression, or proximity factor. The chart I created may not be as accurate as it should be because I was trying to watch so many other things besides the number of times those types of touches occurred. The third and final limitation was the fact that my focus groups were non-random. There was not much luck on getting participants by posting a sign, so I had to recruit many of the participants from class.

Further research could include randomly interviewing a large number of both male and female dancers who are from different locations to uncover nonverbal messages while dancing. It would be beneficial to study the differences between cultures and nonverbal messages while dancing and nonverbal communication among other types of dancing besides club/bar dancing. These other findings would create a deeper meaning behind nonverbal communication and dancing.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the significance of the nonverbal messages sent and received through social dance at bars/clubs. Little to no research had been done revealing what kinds of nonverbal behavior was happening through dance. By observing and conducting two focus groups using the constant comparative analysis, categories emerged for both messages sent and received. Even though messages sent and received are perceived differently, the categories within each were very similar. The results from this research can provide others with information not highly recognized or interpreted. It can be a base to help others research dance in different contexts, especially as an interpersonal study on attraction, flirting, and using dance for these goals. This research provides a springboard for future studies in communication, especially in the areas of interpersonal, nonverbal, and socialization. Discovering that nonverbal messages are exchanged while dancing allows for further research to be done on this topic and other related topics.

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APPENDIX A

The Varied Embrace by DeVito (1985)/Krassas, Blauwkamp, Wesselink's (2003) chart (Modified)

	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Full Embrace						
Arm-Link						
Hand in Hand						
Kissing						
Hand to Waist						
Hand to Chest						
Hand to Hip/Buttocks						
Hand to Head/Face						
Self-Touch						
Head/Eye Aversion						
Arm Around Shoulder						
Snuggling Behind						
Location						
Amt of Time	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions

1. What kinds of nonverbal messages do you send while dancing?
2. What kinds of nonverbal messages do you receive while dancing?
3. Do you dance as a way to flirt or for attraction?
4. How do you view public touch at the clubs/bars while people are dancing?
5. Do you receive unwanted touch at while dancing?
6. How much space is between you and others while dancing?
7. Do you notice more touching while people are dancing?
8. Do you purposely keep a certain distance while dancing?
9. Are there any other thoughts or opinions on touch and space among dancers?

There will also be other unknown probing questions asked following the above questions.