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Non verbal communication in law enforcement

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to give a larger view on the theme of non verbal communication in the context of law enforcement.

The first chapter concerns initially about the difference between verbal and non verbal communication. Then, it explores what verbal communication consists of, and the systems of non verbal communication, like the proxemics, the visual, the kinetics and the vocal ones.

Finally four are the examples of area application of non verbal communication: health, politics, courtrooms and police.

The second chapter tells how the different cues concerning non verbal communication can be applied to police and to police officers; how they behave concretely to convey messages and emotions to others, how their physical aspect, their voice and body language in general can influence their attitude and impression to civilians.

The third chapter consists of two anonymous interviews made to two police officers who work at the Questura of Treviso.

I retained necessary and extremely interesting the formulation of these interviews because they are a personal report about what non verbal communication means to police officers, in the reality of the facts. It can be a curious prompt to understand how police apply non verbal gestures and if they consider necessary the study, through a course during the school to become officers for example, of non verbal communication.

1. What is Communication?

Communication is first of all an act of sharing and exchanging information between people. Secondly, communication can convey also emotional meaning, and intention, belonging to the speaker, not directly inferable from literal meaning.

Communication can be verbal and non verbal. Verbal communication is given by words pronounced within a certain context. Non verbal communication is more complex and occurs through different factors: voice, intonation, gestures, eyes, body posture, choice of clothes, and more.

1.1 Verbal communication

1.1.1 The most efficacious communication is given from common roots

Communication occurs on the basis of common cultural background of the interlocutors, a similar vocabulary and the context in which a conversation happens. The more two, or more, people are similar as regards all these factors, the more the conversation can be successful.

For example, a conversation between two students attending the same class, who speak the same language and come from the same geographical region can be defined as more direct and successful than a conversation between two students, attending the same class, but coming one from Kirghizistan and the other from Romania.

These last two students have different mother-language, and even if they can communicate in a commonly known language, such as English, they cannot know idioms, verbal expressions, non verbal traits and actions of each other's country and habits. They are different in their own way of speaking and behaving.

It follows that language's functions and the way in which a specific language develops, are interiorized within an individual, where at the same time

language's habits are formed¹, creating a communication protocol shared and employed by other individuals who live in a similar context.

1.1.2 The Shannon-Weaver model

The Shannon-Weaver communication model was theorized in 1949, and it takes different factors as actors in the communication.

First of all, there are a sender, an addressee and the message, which is the object of communication.

When the sender sends the message, it can be subjected to some interferences, like noise sources, difficulties of comprehension due to the medium, delay of message arrival, or incomprehension caused by a different mother-language of the speakers.

The speaker, before sending the message, encodes it, and then it has to be decoded by the recipient. The addressee's capability of decoding the message depends on their cultural background and their cognitive system.

The more the code of communication is shared by the participants, the better and clearer the comprehension will be.

However, the Shannon-Weaver communication model has been criticized for two reasons. It considers neither the intentionality of communication nor the context in which communication occurs. Moreover, it implies the unidirectionality of communication, which is almost never possible; communication, indeed, is made up of different social actors².

1.1.3 To say something is to do something

Differently from the Shannon-Weaver model, Austin's speech acts theory takes in consideration how important intentionality is. We are able to communicate in effective ways because we encode messages under the shape of words. Some inferences can be deduced even from the easiest of speeches.

¹ Millbank, G. A. (1974) *Community and common sense. The roots of communication*, Simon Fraser University, pp. 30

² Al-Fedaghi, S. (2012) *A Conceptual Foundation for the Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication*, Kuwait University, Kuwait, pp. 1-3

Austin distinguishes three kinds of speech acts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts.

Locutionary acts correspond to what the speaker says, the literal meaning of a verbal expression.

Illocutionary acts are the more or less concealed intentions of the speaker, what they want really say through the words they employ³.

Perlocutionary acts, instead, correspond to the effects carried out on the listener, and depend on their abilities to understand what the real message object is and their beliefs.

An expression like "*Close the window!*" can be read in its literal meaning, but a diversity of other meanings can be inferred. For example, the person asking this could be cold; or maybe they are asking this because it's raining outside and the rain risks to come into the room; or perhaps there's a cat into the room and they do not want to risk that they could go out. Even voice's intonation can suggest a particular meaning⁴.

It is quite observable how there can be implicit meanings within an easy expression like this. It is for this reason that saying something is equal to doing something. The speaker is inviting someone to operate somehow, by using words or voice's tone.

1.2 Non verbal communication

Only 7% of information comes from verbal communication in affective messages. The other 93% comes from non verbal communication, in particular 55% is composed by non verbal cues and the 38% is tone and intonation⁵.

It is possible to communicate verbally and nonverbally at the same time, because while words express something, other body's behaviors say something else. It is more difficult to interpret a non verbal cue rather than a spoken word,

³ Lotto, L., Rumiati, R. (2007) *Introduzione alla Psicologia della Comunicazione*, Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 19

⁴ Korta, K., Perry, J. (2007) *How to Say Things with Words*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-10

⁵ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 10

because the first one can lead to misunderstandings, lacks of information. However, at the same time, it can be more effective because it communicates rapidly a message, and it doesn't need a particular linguistic or cultural knowledge. It is quite immediate.

1.2.1 Which systems intervene in the complexity of NVC⁶?

Verbal communication is conscious, because a person chooses to speak or tell something, whereas non verbal communication is not always conscious.

It is true that sometimes people use intentionally NV gestures and expressions to convey a particular emotion or to reinforce and emphasize concepts, but the most of the times they gesticulate, put lips in some ways, use their hands to reassure themselves or touch their hair unconsciously.

It is for this reason, since the characteristics of NVC are not controllable at all, that it is the privileged channel to transmit and understand feelings and emotions. Because of the fact that the person is not aware of what they're doing with their body, one could "read it" and try to understand what their really emotions and thoughts are.

However, it is not correct to say that non verbal gestures and attitudes reveal always exactly a person's feeling, because sometimes it can happen that some gestures can be misinterpreted. For instance, if a person was sitting at a bus terminal during a cold winter way, with their arms and legs crossed and their chin down, probably it doesn't mean that they are introverted, but they are simply very cold⁷. It is a pose that the body acquires when it is exposed to a situation of hypothermia, to warm up itself. It is a protection mechanism.

Non verbal communication is the first information that a person can observe from another person. It involves a complexity of factors.

⁶ Non Verbal Communication

⁷ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 23-24

Systems which intervene in NV communication are: vocal, kinetic, proxemics, visual⁸.

1.2.1.1 The vocal system

The vocal system includes pauses, silence, tone and voice pitch.

It conveys social characteristics like geographical area provenience; physiological characteristics, such as gender and age; paralinguistic characteristics due to tone and intensity, which can underline a stress or anxiety condition, but also joy or authority, according to the modulation of voice and intonation.

Also silence is an important indicator which can convey more meaning than spoken words.

Silences can be identified as a non verbal expression of disapproval or approval, respect for what the other is saying, judgment. But, most of the times, silence corresponds to pauses while talking, to take breath or to articulate words which contribute to form the entire discourse, or to facilitate turn-taking.

Moreover, silences are seen differently in the Asian culture and Western culture. While in western countries, silence is a reason of embarrassment or perceived as disinterest, in the Asian countries people take intentionally moments of silence, to think about what it has been said, as a form of respect and reflection⁹.

1.2.1.2 The Kinetic system

The Kinetic system includes: gazes, facial mimicry, body and posture movements, gestures.

Gaze is used to regulate turn-taking, to express important emotions, to give attention or as a reference to greetings.

⁸ Lotto, L., Rumiati, R. (2007) *Introduzione alla Psicologia della Comunicazione*, Bologna: Il Mulino, cap. 2

⁹ Lotto, L., Rumiati, R. (2007) *Introduzione alla Psicologia della Comunicazione*, Bologna: Il Mulino, cap. 2

There are differences in using gaze between introverts and extroverts, but also between men and women.

Facial mimicry denotes emotions too. But it is also related to the personality of the individual. Besides, according to a phylo-genetic theory¹⁰, it has evolved in relation to the context in which certain primates lived (if they lived in groups or as alone individual).

Instead, according to the evolution theory¹¹, when a baby recognizes at first their mother's face, this is necessary to establish a bond. The baby tries to replicate their parents', and above all their mother's, facial mimicry and voice tone, but also the mother imitates, by mirroring, her baby's facial traits. It is a binary relationship.

According to the evolution theory, human beings are very different in communicating and displaying emotions on their face, but their typical traits, which vary according to the character, are conveyed to their children since when they are very young; reciprocally, parents and children learn facial expressions from each other.

In this case facial mimicry helps to construct familiarity with a certain person or situation.

Gestures are used in very different ways, according to the context.

They are useful to illustrate an action, or an object of which name is unknown (representational gestures).

They indicate a direction or a way to take, for example in the case when route indications are given (deictics gestures).

They express an abstract thought, by creating an imaginary path in the air when speaking about not concrete thematics (metaphorical gestures) .

¹⁰ Ross M. D., Palagi E. (2022) *Laughter, play faces and mimicry in animals: evolution and social functions*, London: The Royal Society Publishing

¹¹ Salvadori E. A., Colonnese C., Vonk H. S., Oort F. J., Aktar E. (2021) *Infant Emotional Mimicry of Strangers: Associations with Parent Emotional Mimicry, Parent-Infant Mutual Attention, and Parent Dispositional Affective Empathy*

They help to emphasize a speech, for example they are often used by politicians when they want to highlight what they say, during they electoral campaign, to gain approval (beating gestures).

They can accompany and support discourses. But, they are strongly culturally dependent (emblems). For example, North Europeans gesture less than South-American people, and American people have their own typical way of gesturing, which is different from other nationalities¹².

1.2.1.3 The Proxemics system

The Proxemics system refers to how the body is managed within the interpersonal space.

There are 4 zones of interpersonal space¹³, which vary according to the kind of relationship occurring between interlocutors: intimate, personal, social and public.

The intimate zone is reserved to those who have a strong emotional bond with us, like partner, close friends and pets. Its extension is about 15 cm - 45 cm.

The personal zone is the distance we maintain during social events, like parties and friendly reunions. Its extension covers between 46 cm - 1,22 m.

The social zone is the distance we maintain from strangers and people we don't know, like the respectful distance between us and people we bump into in the supermarket wards or the new employee at work. It is about 1,22 m - 3,6 m.

The public zone, instead, is over 3,6 m, and is usually visible during public manifestations, political meetings or public speeches.

Even in the field, cultural factors and differences intervene, as differences between extroverted and introverted people do.

In particular, people from north regions tend to maintain a longer distance between each others, while Latin America or Arabian people have a shorter distance.

¹² Matsumoto, D., Frank, M. G., Hwang, H. S. (2013) *Non Verbal Communication: Science and Applications*, Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, pp. 77

¹³ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 194-195

1.2.1.4 The Visual system

It refers to photographs, images, drawings and illustrations like street signs.

A white right-arrow on a blue circle is indicating that there is the obligation to go to the right.

A photograph, instead, can suggest a typical character trait of a person. From the facial features it is possible to form an idea about one's personality, if they are solar and positive or more close and negative.

In addition, photographs can tell a multitude of factors. From the background, it is possible to foresee where the photo has been taken or which moment of the day it was, if it was taken in the open air or indoor. Or more, the age of the protagonist.

1.2.2 It is impossible not to communicate

Even if an individual does not say anything through words, they communicate anyway. Several are the ways to convey information or thoughts.

Silence can tell more than words. It could be an indicator of disapproval, disinterest or submission.

The tone of voice can manifest irony, leadership, impatience or insecurity, according to the six tools linked to the voice: pitch, frequency, tone, timbre, pace, volume¹⁴.

The choice of clothes is related to the context. Using an elegant suit to go to the gym immediately catches one's eye because it is definitely not appropriate to the context. At the same time, wearing a jumper, a windbreaker and snow boots while walking along a town centre during a 33° hot summer day can be seen as ridiculous. In both these cases people tend to consider these outfits as strange

¹⁴ Anderson, C. (2016) *TED Talks. The official TED guide to public speaking*, New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, pp. 178

and embarrassing. More, they could convey information about the strangeness of who wears it.

The outfit choice tells much about the wearer and their identity. It can provide an infinite quantity of meanings and ideas about one's style, how much the person is interested in exhibiting himself/herself, how much they spend for their clothes, which colors they loves the most, if they are a sporty, casual or elegant person¹⁵. So, even the easiest choice of clothes can transmit very different messages.

1.2.3 Non verbal communication can be misinterpreted

Non verbal communication is the preferred channel to show feelings, because it is more involuntary than verbal communication. Most of gestures that the body does are not totally conscious to an individual, and they can be gestures of reassurance, protection, self-esteem or courage.

Because of its involuntariness, non verbal communication is more frequently subjected to be misinterpreted. Many non verbal cues have not a real meaning or a particular connection to an emotion. They have to be read in relation to the context or to the peculiarities of someone's character.

If a person has a tic (meant as nervous contraction) and they always tend to move a specific part of their body, or if they have a disease like Parkinson disease¹⁶, it doesn't mean that they are nervous or anxious. There is a particular reason for which they behave in a certain way.

Similarly, *scratching the head can indicate uncertainty but also dandruff*¹⁷.

Hence, gestures have not to be read in isolation, but they always have to be compared to the entire context and the personality of who acts.

It is good practice to look for congruence. When words say something but the language of body tells something else, non verbal cues emerge, because they

¹⁵ Dorrance, E. A. (2011) *The language of clothes: nonverbal communication intention and misinterpretation*, Miami, USA: UMI Dissertation Publishing, pp. 5-9

¹⁶ Parkinson's disease, Wikipedia

¹⁷ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 21

are immediate and they are instantaneously identified as receptors of brain thoughts and feelings.

If, during a conversation between a daughter and her mother, the mother asks her if she has dropped the painting and the daughter answers her negatively, but at the same time her eyes look down or she touches her nose, it could be that she is guilty, in reality.

Looking down while lying means that the guilty part does not have the courage to look at the other person in the eyes, because she knows that she's telling a lie. At the same way, it has been demonstrated that during lying, blood pressure increases its flux especially in the nose area. This is why we feel the necessity to satisfy the itch through one gentle rub or several quick rubs¹⁸.

However, even in this case, it is always necessary to consider that not all the commonly retained lying gestures can be applied in every context, to each individual. A person could touch frequently her nose not just because she's lying; instead, she could be cold, for instance.

Encoding non verbal cues is very important, for instance, in a relationship between a mother and her baby. A baby cannot speak, when she is very young. She can only express herself through gestures, and most of the times they are tears, screams, hands, eyes and mouth. It is fundamental that her mother knows the necessities of her baby, she has to learn how to decode her non verbal cues, in order to satisfy what she is missing.

The same method is applied to old patients who cannot speak. Nurses and doctors have to do the possible to provide at their necessities; because they cannot express them through words. It is like they were babies.

Medical staff has great responsibility and ability in understanding them through non verbal cues.

1.2.4 Detecting lies

¹⁸ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 50

Detecting a lie could be more difficult than expected, because, as said, not all the non verbal cues can conduct to a unique direction.

It could be said that the most general rule is looking at the incongruences between verbal and non verbal behaviors.

Sometimes, it is the verbal communication that lends to a more correct answer when it is the moment to detect a liar, because some factors like stammering, long pauses between words, indifference and repeated questions can convey to a more precise evidence.

Instead, in non verbal communication, there are some gestures that can be taken in consideration when it is the moment to look for a liar, but the most important procedure is always comparing verbal and non verbal behaviors¹⁹.

Looking down or eye-rubbing can be read as if body didn't want to look in the eyes of the person to whom it is lying. It doesn't have the courage to maintain eye-contact.

Similarly, ear-grabbing is likely to mean that the liar does not want to ear at what he's saying, because he, or better, their brain, knows it is false.

Also lip pursing, mouth covering or fingers near to the mouth have the meaning of unconsciously blocking the words just pronounced, because the brain knows they are not true.

Mouth covering remembers a child when they have been discovered after doing something prohibited by their parents. Involuntary, they will cover their mouth as to block their deceitful words.

Finger-in-the-mouth represents childhood, in the moment when a little boy or girl needs reassurance and comfort. Indeed, it reminds of sucking milk from the mother's breast.

Scratching the neck is synonym of uncertainty, because it is equal to expressing doubt for what the individual is saying through their own words.

¹⁹ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 48-54

Rubbing the collar is a similar cue. Even in this case, lies cause a discomfort sensation, an itch, and the body needs to remediate in some way.

1.3 Applications of Non Verbal communication studies

Several are the fields where non verbal communication is applied, in order to facilitate the relationship and the understanding of real meaning of words and thoughts.

Some of these fields are analyzed below: health care, politics, courtrooms and law enforcement.

1.3.1 Health care

In the doctor-patient relationship, it is fundamental to have a well-extended knowledge of non verbal behavior. For a doctor, a nurse or medical staff in general, the ability to understand pain from face cues has to be trained and practiced, because it could be the weapon to save someone's life, above all in the case they aren't able to speak. Through experience a doctor acquires the ability in reading non verbal cues. It is not immediate.

When a patient is questioned about their feelings, how the pain is going after a painkiller has been administered or before they are brought to the operating room, because they absolutely need to be operated urgently, it is indispensable that the head physician, surgeon and medical personnel all are able to read the patient's face, in order to understand how serious the situation is.

Even if the patient is unable to speak or tells a lie about the intensity of their pain, their face cannot lie. It is almost always possible to have an answer from facial mimicry. A mouth edge could tilt or the nose could furrow; they are involuntary signals emitted by the body.

However, many people have learnt how to pretend and they don't reveal any emotions from their face. Thus, in this case, a doctor can observe how their body moves, how their arms gesture, or their arms and fingers tend to cover their body's parts. Even feet and their position can convey feelings, together with submissive gaze, the arms unsymmetrical behavior and the crossed legs. It

can happen that a patient develops the ability in pretending through their face, but they cannot totally control the rest of their body.

Or, a patient could reassure their doctor by saying that their pain is going better, but an instant later some behavior of their face or their body betrays the contrary of what they have affirmed. An acute observer knows how to read these discrepancies²⁰.

However, in most of cases it is sufficient observing the face, where weakness, pallor, tenderness, eyes closing or difficulties in breathing and reduction of reactivity are quite observable.

1.3.2 Political leadership

Verbal and non verbal behavior both have great importance in politics, and politicians know how to use them, in order to gain approval from their followers.

A good politician knows how to speak and which gestures to use. But non verbal behavior is not made up only of physical gestures. It consists also in posture, walking and self-esteem.

Alexander The Great²¹ had a theatrical way of acting, his entries were magnificent and "[...] *His appearances in the field of battle [were] dramatic stage entries, tellingly timed and significantly costumed*²²". He used the power of rhetorics to persuade his soldiers to follow him in order to win the battle. He had a great presence and a great oratory ability.

George Washington²³, too, had an incredible figure and appearance. His physique was well placed, he trained a lot and he wore adornments and accessories to appear more sparkling and luxurious. Contrarily to Alexander The Great, Washington's ability was not properly rhetoric, but when he spoke,

²⁰ Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 3-6

²¹ Alexander The Great, Wikipedia

²² Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 100

²³ George Washington, Wikipedia

his gestures and the way in which he emphasized words through non verbal behavior and his presence, made him appear an excellent leader and people listened to him pleasantly.

Ronald Reagan²⁴, instead, said of himself that he was aware not to be a great communicator, but, on the other hand, to have a great power in how to communicate. It is not only in the words, but in using the right emphasis to highlight the discourses, the warmth of voice tones, in articulating the words letting spaces for reflections in-between, decisive but gentle at the same time. Many of his followers talked about his "*honeyed voice*"²⁵ and even those who disagreed with his opinions and political programs, estimated and were fascinated by his way of acting.

What are the characteristics that a politician has to have, in order to raise consent and positive opinions by his followers?

Rhetoric ability is important, but the same value belongs to posture, attitude, gaze direction, coherency in moving arms and physical appearance.

Physical appearance is traduced not only in clothing and accessories, but also in how a person presents himself, his body physique, his beauty and his pose.

During the presidential campaign of J. F. Kennedy and R. Nixon in 1960, Nixon was often said to be the one who had more political experience in managing a nation like USA, but the preferred one was Kennedy, and the reason has been attributed to Kennedy's great image, self-assured pose and his more beautiful aspect than Nixon's.

The moment of the first 1960 debate between Nixon and Kennedy was shown to a students' group of Williams College²⁶.

Before the respective speeches of the two candidate presidents, they were introduced to public, so that it could form an idea just by looking at them.

²⁴ Ronald Reagan, Wikipedia

²⁵ Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 100-101

²⁶ Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 102

When they alternatively spoke in turn, they assumed two different behaviors. The videotapes were shown to the students who could observe that Kennedy took notes, listened and put attention to what Nixon talked about, but his attitude stayed always self-assured and the way in which he wrote was self-confident, rapid and resolute.

On the other hand, Richard Nixon was more undecided, and from him it filtered a little anxiety. In substance, his non verbal behavior suggested that his attitude was more nervous than winning.

In body movements too, Kennedy looked more confident. He walked consciously, crossed and uncrossed his legs wittingly, looked proud but not egocentric. On the contrary, sometimes Nixon demonstrated insecurity while walking, and confusion while talking or staying on his chair.

People were more oriented in voting for Kennedy, above all because of his way of reacting during unknown situations.

Indeed, as fundamental characteristic of a politician, they have to be a leader, and one way to demonstrate their leadership is undoubtedly knowing how to self-control in moments of nervousness. If they were prone to lose control, even people around them would lose hope and calmness, and this would bring to catastrophic outcomes.

In conclusion, after having watched the videotapes, the majority of students said to prefer Kennedy.

1.3.3 Courtrooms

The starting point in courtrooms is the expectancy to respect verbal and non verbal communication. In general, social behavior adopted into an informal social context outside is not appropriate at all in this kind of environments.

Two parts are distinguished: those who follow obsequiously proper behaviors requested in courtrooms, such as lawyers, judges, court officers, and those who tend to violate this behavior norm's expectancy, called *irregulars*, such as defendants and lay witnesses.

Violations of the so called appropriate communicative performances bring to consider the person in question as a suspect or the guilty part. This is why

lawyers know exactly how to behave, to be respectful and distinguished, because they have to obey to the courtroom rules.

According to the expectancy violation theory²⁷, non verbal behavior must be appropriate to the context. There are some ranges for creativity, self-expression and emotions, but they are limited according to a series of factors, such as age, context, social status.

Violating the expectations brings negative opinions about the person, but with some exceptions. An high-status individual has habitually a larger range of transgression of the expectancy theory, and still they will be perceived as an high status individual. Instead, low-status people have a shorter range, because their personality is already compromised for the negative opinions about them. If this individual broke their range of correct and suitable NV behavior, the opinions about them would get worse.

In a courtroom, professional figures obey to prescribed verbal and non verbal social expectations, exactly in the same way of a football team playing by respecting the game rules.

Witnesses's non verbal and verbal agitation leads the juror to discomfort while judging the credibility of their words. The more the witness demonstrates anxious, the more the juror is inclined to judge them as a liar.

A juror, in order to discover and understand the real emotions felt by the witness, will scrutiny their face meticulously. They will conform to the six basic face expressions by P. Ekman²⁸: anger, happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, disgust.

In front of a series of questions, the witness can react differently, according to their feelings which, by nature, tend to depict on their face.

However, it could be difficult when the person is question has great capability of staying neutral and not to show any kind of emotion on their face. In this case,

²⁷ Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 45-46

²⁸ *Six Basic Emotions by Paul Ekman | List and Facial Expressions*

trying to decode their feelings requests greater efforts. The juror will use videotapes filmed before and after different depositions, they will compare what the witness has said before and after and how they have reacted. If their behaviors are different, if their way of reacting presents incoherences and there are some doubts, it could mean that they are not totally true.

The way to discover the truth becomes a sort of catching the divergences between their previous and actual non verbal communication²⁹.

1.3.4 Police departments

According to police officers, it is common to think that, in lies detecting, consistency is related to veracity and inconsistency is related to untruthfulness. However it can be surprising knowing that not all the times this is the way to detect a liar.

It has been demonstrated³⁰ that, because a liar knows that they have a difficult task, that is to hide what they have really done, they are more inclined to assume a correct behavior. They will tend to gesture as little as possible, or to control their hand gestures, to show no emotions and to sit up. But the possibility of speeches errors increases considerably.

Because a professional liar knows well what it is necessary to say and how to say it, they will tend to be more prepared on the speeches they will do, and they will be careful of the words they will use, to pronounce phrases which are grammatically correct and well-formed. All of this, while speaking calmly and using right pauses.

If a police officer would ask a liar to report the words they used during a previous interrogatory, they would probably be able to answer. But, if they would ask them to report their non verbal behavior or the way in which they gestured or the tone they used, they wouldn't be able to say exactly what they did. This is because we, as human beings, are more inclined to remember the words we use, rather than to report a non verbal attitude we had a couple of days ago.

²⁹ Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 52-54

³⁰ Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 65

Being aware of both verbal and non verbal behavior is essential when trying to control behavior.

As said previously, the six basic face emotions are the basis on which it is possible to detect a liar, in most of the cases. However, it could not be so easy all the times. Police officers know it; indeed, during an interrogatory, they will look at all the visible clues. From the hands disposition to the pauses between discourses and how they are managed, from the gaze direction to eventual anxiety signs.

There tend to be fewer illustrators, using fewer hand and fingers movements in comparison to a truth teller. Moreover, the lack of these kinds of signs, which are normally visible in someone who speaks in a spontaneous and genuine way, could suggest emotions lacking or flattening, in relation to their criminal actions³¹.

Also discourse complexity could be a source of evidence; sure enough an impostor feels the need to construct a well-spoken discourse, maybe with refined adjectives and verbs, purposely to impress their listener and avoid to appear unprepared and disorganized. This is the reason why consistency is not always the key revealing a veracious behavior.

Also voice's high-pitch could be a sign of culpability³².

Despite all these modalities to lies detecting and lies telling, it is appropriate to add that not always do the general rules help distinguish a lies teller from a truth teller.

Normally gaze direction, pitch uncertainty and frequency modulation, uncertainty in words, too long pauses, too many or too few hand gestures can all be all indicators of lies.

But, some further factors deserve consideration, too.

³¹ Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 68

³² Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 67

In observing non verbal gestures, the difference between introverts and extroverts has not been considered, between more or less anxious individuals, or between northern and southern cultures.

Introverts or anxious people appear less credible to police officers if compared to extrovert people, because they always manifest uncertainty or insecurity in exposing their reasons and stories.

But the truth is that they are less inclined to tell lies, and they are even less so when they have been already unmasked before. They have not the courage to attempt again, because they have fear to be caught in the act again, and this fear makes them still more unable to tell lies³³.

Considering the cultural difference across world regions, eye contact and gaze maintaining are not perceived at the same way everywhere.

There are cultures, such as Latin America, Arabs, Mediterranean and Southern European countries, where it is normal to have both a shorter distance and a frequent contact between people, and to look directly at the interlocutor in the eyes while speaking. It is not perceived bad or inappropriate; on the contrary, it is interpreted as a sign of attention and confidence.

But Northern Europe, USA, eastern countries such as China, Korea and Japan have a different interpretation of these attitudes. They lack eye contact and body contact, because they associate these behaviors to disrespect, insecurity, untruthfulness, and even to inappropriate sexual connotations³⁴.

In conclusion, there are numerous ways to detect lies, and the most traditional ones adhere to the typical and the more visible non verbal and verbal cues. But when considering a police interview with a potential criminal, it is appropriate to consider all the possible factors which can deviate or influence in lies detecting.

³³ Feldman, R. S., Riggio, R. E. (2005) *Applications of Non Verbal Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 74

³⁴ Gardner, P. (September - March 1987) "Cultural differences in non verbal communication: practical activities for the ESL/EFL classroom", *CROSS CURRENTS. Language teaching and cross cultural communication*, Volume XIV, n. 1, pp. 26

Cultural and personal characteristics have to be considered, in order to make the analysis as accurate as possible.

2. Assertiveness in police forces: how can Non Verbal communication intervene

In police forces, it is fundamental to use gestures to convey power and authority. But these are not the only factors to show assertiveness; appearance and physical aspect, together with non verbal communication in general, can influence a lot.

2.1 The power of uniform and physical appearance

2.1.1 Uniform and equipment

Uniforms symbolize belonging to a group of people, who are joined together because of a certain principle or common ideology.

The police uniform is a symbol of authority and sternness, and the mere presence of it captures public attention. A police officer who wears a professional uniform is respected, listened to, paid attention to; in general civilians respect and trust police officers, and the uniform has a great role in this.

High visibility "Police" sign vests don't produce a real positive impact; on the contrary, they are rated less favorably for what concerns trust, sympathy and threat level. But, paradoxically, the greater is the number of equipments that a police officer wears, the greater is the connection and form of "sympathy" and respect that civilians feel towards this professional figure³⁵.

A citizen will perceive the quantity of equipments, weapons and control devices as synonym of protection, professionalism and seriousness. This is why the

³⁵ Staller, M. S., Koerner, S., Zaiser, B. (2023) *Police Conflict, Management, Volume I. Challenges and Opportunities in the 21th century*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 261

most of citizens have a positive thought towards law enforcement, and at the same time also law enforcements know that their uniforms play a great role.

However, the power of uniforms can generate dissent too, for the same reason for which it generates consensus. Indeed, uniform is a tool that conveys assertiveness to whoever wears it, and this could generate a sort of antipathy and refusal from the side of who is subjected to all this authority.

2.1.1.1 Prejudices towards police forces: where do they originate from? May uniforms have a role?

It has been studied³⁶ that, in general, people who feel a sentiment of agreement in police officers and don't feel hate for uniforms, they are also more collaborative, approachable, kind, trustworthy and correct people. On the other side, people who despise police forces have basically a less reliable, less friendly and have an untrustworthy character.

This could be because they have already prejudices or biases on police forces. It could be connected to episodes³⁷ occurred between the 19th and the 20th centuries in the United States, when the brutality of police against Africans and minority groups, such as some ethnic groups, homosexuals or Italian immigrants was so diffused.

African Americans were subjected to police brutality, racism was widespread enormously especially among white police officers, who conducted racist and violent operations against marginalized people like them.

A more recent episode dates back to George Floyd murder, occurred in 2020, at the hands of a white man police officer³⁸, Derek Chauvin.

With regard to Italy, instead, the police is probably still seen as enforcement of actions and application of prejudices against immigrants. In other words, the

³⁶ Staller, M. S., Koerner, S., Zaiser, B. (2023) *Police Conflict, Management, Volume I. Challenges and Opportunities in the 21th century*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 260

³⁷ Moore, L. (2024) *Police brutality in the United States*, The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

³⁸ *Murder of George Floyd*, Wikipedia

work of police would be more oriented on punishment, removal or bias against illegal migration and criminality in general, rather than on defense of citizens and safeguard of the nation³⁹.

In this sense, police is still far from an evolution oriented to acceptance of ethnic minorities, which are already visible and asking for justice and equality.

According to NGOs and Police Against Prejudice (NAPAP project), the objective is that of renewing the modalities and ideologies of police work, so that even the citizens could have a different thought about Italian police.

Among the guidelines established by the European Council, it is possible to highlight the will of making the police officers aware of existing discriminations, and of the development of an educative model which should be empathetic towards people, in particular towards discriminated people⁴⁰.

Despite the fact that *a percentage or statistics on the number of abuse of power and murders by the police on civilians and protesters does not exist*⁴¹, it is still true that this lack of statistics does not prevent the observation of some data and episodes that have happened in the Italian history.

The murders of Stefano Cucchi⁴² and Federico Aldrovandi⁴³ are examples of how Italian law enforcements, including Carabinieri and Police, have abused, in different ways, of their power and authority to carry out violence on the victims, causing their death.

In both cases, the guilty parties have been condemned for involuntary homicide, and still today people remember such episodes of Italian chronicle to demonstrate how law enforcement can be not only protectors of the nation, but sometimes also the real executors of the death of civilians.

³⁹ Pirazzi, M. (1999) *La formazione della Polizia per la società multiculturale*

⁴⁰ Pirazzi, M. (1999) *La formazione della Polizia per la società multiculturale*

⁴¹ Toniolo, A. (2024) *Gli abusi delle forze dell'ordine non sono monitorati ufficialmente in Italia*

⁴² *Omicidio di Stefano Cucchi*, Wikipedia

⁴³ *Omicidio di Federico Aldrovandi*, Wikipedia

However, according to some kind of prejudice towards police, it is necessary to make a reference to how often people think that police is more interested in the face-to-face relation with the criminal than with the victim and their familiars.

But, this is not correct. Highway patrols, and all police departments in general, have to manage the moment when they communicate to the victim's family the brutality of what has occurred. This moment can be really discouraging, and for this reason police officers are expected to have a great relational and empathetic abilities, too⁴⁴.

Abuse of power, racial discriminations and differential treatment have had a role in shaping nowadays' prejudices against police.

Moreover, the more a police officer is equipped with gloves, weapons, helmets, the more they are perceived aggressive by people who already have prejudices against them.

Vice versa, people who feel sympathy for police forces will perceive very-equipped officers as very professional, serious and assertive workers, but at the same time they will perceive them as less approachable, more militaristic and more intimidating⁴⁵.

2.1.2 Physical appearance

Based on physical appearance, a police officer should always convey the idea of a smart and neat person. For a man, hair should be short; while for a woman it should be tied back, if long. More, men should keep their beard not too long, as for the mustache.

Because the first impression of a male police officer is given by both their physical aspect and their uniform, from these factors it can be inferred their personality, but also their assertiveness and their strictness can be inferred.

⁴⁴ Polizia di Stato, ANIA Fondazione, *Linee guida per l'operatore di polizia nel rapporto con le vittime di incidenti stradali*, Roma, pp. 4

⁴⁵ Staller, M. S., Koerner, S., Zaiser, B. (2023) *Police Conflict, Management, Volume I. Challenges and Opportunities in the 21th century*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 260-261

Police officers' aspect does not represent only the single officer, but the police in general. Because of these reasons, intransigence is not admitted. The officers have to keep always a formal appearance.

Tattoos and piercings could be perceived as a symbol of vulgarity, non-professionalism, carelessness, but from civilians and not from colleagues. If the tattoo depicts a symbol of "violence" and aggressiveness, such as the draw of a lion, a tiger, or the symbol of hard rock hand gesture, the prejudice from civilians increases and the police officer is automatically seen as less competent, more aggressive or extremist.

Whereas, if the tattoo depicts something neutral, the prejudice sentiment abates⁴⁶.

2.2 Posture and feet direction

Another important aspect is the posture. Posture suggests if the person is willing and interested to communicate, how they feel about themselves, if they are extrovert or introvert.

A police officer has to maintain a done up and formal posture, in order to convey the idea of a professional and serious worker.

It is not common to see a police officer who adopts a timid posture, slouching, with closed legs and crossed arms. Police officers have been taught not to have fear, to show that they are dominant, in the sense that they have to be assertive, to know how to self-control, especially in the situations of stress and danger. They have to protect people, to regulate conflicts, and for this they are trained to manage different kinds of situations.

An open posture, with arms and legs which occupy more space, indicates lack of fear and self-confidence. At the same way, distributing equal weight on feet is synonym of self-security and activeness, differently from shifting weight from a foot to another, which is more associated to laziness and tiredness. See *Figure 1*.

⁴⁶ Staller, M. S., Koerner, S., Zaiser, B. (2023) *Police Conflict, Management, Volume I. Challenges and Opportunities in the 21th century*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 264



Figure 1. Open posture: open legs and body occupying more space

An example can be provided by a typical police interrogatory between a police officer and the interrogatee. The police officer can adopt an involuntary or voluntary a posture of proximity to the person who is interrogated, and it could mean that they are really interested to what they are saying; their attention level is high. Vice versa, they could take a little distance through their body while the other is talking, and this posture could mean that the officer is not totally interested or they are skeptic⁴⁷, maybe because they know that the other is lying. They could have noticed some incongruences and since they are not believing in the interrogatee's words, their body attitude suggests distance, by taking it concretely. See *Figure 2*.

⁴⁷ Otu, N. (2015) *Analytical study. Decoding nonverbal communication in law enforcement*, Charles Sturt University, Australia: Salus Journal, pp. 8



Figure 2. The officers are probably skeptic about what the civilian is saying, or they could have taken the distance as safety barrier

Police men and women must be aware of their posture and the idea they give to the outside world. Every time they adopt a particular pose or feet direction or hand gesture, they have to know its meaning and they should not to be afraid of using it. They have to appear spontaneous in the way of posing, but confident at the same time.

Feet direction helps in determining posture and, of consequence, attitude. They are a reflexion of where the brain wants the body to go. The direction which they point at is an indicator of attention towards the subject; furthermore, it can both reveal a particular mental state towards the interlocutor, and also an emotional state.

If both feet stand apart with equal weight on and they both point to the interlocutor, it means awareness and conscious presence on the current situation, and lack of fear. The person is listening carefully and they are open to what the other part is saying or how they are behaving.

Example of disinterest, suggested by feet directions, can be provided by the *Foot-Forward Position*⁴⁸: if one foot aims to the interlocutor, but the other forms with the first one an acute angle, probably the officer doesn't trust the other part very much or they are not interested, or they want to leave.

A more formal and rigid posture is associated with the situations in which the relationship between the interlocutors is not properly friendly or when people don't know each other, and this behavior is valid also for police officers towards strangers.

2.3 Proximity and touching

With reference to the four zone distances, as mentioned in the paragraph 1.2.1.3, the *intimate zone*, which has an extension of 15 - 45 cm, is that one reserved to intimate affects, like partners, intimate friends, pets and familiars.

Allowing a stranger to get close or to enter into this zone can be dangerous, and a police officer knows it.

Because of it, police have the tendency to maintain a larger distance from the civilian or the suspected person, and it occurs for a defense mechanism.

A criminal could take advantage of the reduced distance in order to hit the police officer with a weapon. But, from a larger distance, the officer has a more complete overview of the situation on the suspect. It is possible to have a wider visual field and, consequently, to observe hands and arms behavior or feet posture, even if the gaze doesn't stare directly on those body parts.

A larger distance highlights the way in which the police chooses to maintain a formal interaction with the possibly guilty party, and this is perceived from the last one too. This kind of distance is necessary, purposely to preserve the safety of the police man/woman, and to avoid the guilty party to enter in the so-called *killing zone*⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 213-214

⁴⁹ Otu, N. (2015) *Analytical study. Decoding nonverbal communication in law enforcement*, Charles Sturt University, Australia: Salus Journal, pp. 8

A task of police officers is also to evaluate with discretion if the distance between themselves and the civilian is too short or too long. Fundamental is to maintain always the safety area extension. If the other gets too near, the distance can be increased; if the other gets too far, it can be reduced. But variations have to be evaluated and accomplished by the police officer, without suspect from the other side. For a personal safety reason, it is essential to use non verbal communication wittingly.

This safety barrier can be abruptly broken whenever the situation needs intervention. Police are called to emergency, and touching becomes a sign of dominance.

Basically, touching symbolizes love, friendship, sexual connotation or warmth. Thus, it indicates a very informal relationship between people who know each other very well.

But, there is another kind of touching, which is not related to friendly emotions, but at the contrary it describes authority, power, social hierarchy and dominance.

Thinking about the doctor-patient relationship, it is the doctor who touches the patient to verify their health status and their body. The contrary never happens, it would be strange and inappropriate, because the doctor has a dominance role, while the patient has to be visited and has to be entrusted to doctor's treatments. This kind of touch is called *social-polite*⁵⁰.

The same principle is at the basis of the relationship between a company manager and an employee. If the employee has done a good job, it is the manager who congratulates them, maybe with a pat on the back or by giving their hand first. It never happens that the employee thanks their superior for having been a good company director⁵¹. This kind of touch, instead, is defined *functional-professional*⁵² touch.

⁵⁰ *Types of Nonverbal communication*, Libraries

⁵¹ Calero, H. H. (2005) *The power of non verbal communication. How you act is more important than what you say*, Aberdeen, Washington: Silver Lake Publishing, pp. 18-19

⁵² *Types of Nonverbal communication*, Libraries

When a police officer touches a person because they have to stop them, this follows the same principle of the hierarchical relationships. The dominant part is that one who touches first. A police officer has the power and the duty to stop, using hands, or grasping the criminal, if this last one is surprised to beat up someone else, for instance. See *Figure 3*.



Figure 3. Touch as sign of dominance

The police can touch and halt a person who is committing a crime, because they are the authorities in charge to defend society from law violations.

The hierarchical relationship that touching can establish is not intended only in the "master-servant" sense. Touching can mean reassurance, even from a superior. A pat on the back or a handshake can occur also to congratulate a subordinate. This kind of touching approach happens in police too. It is the case of when a police officer puts their hand on the shoulder of a person who is worried because one of their familiars is involved into an accident, for instance. The touch from an authority like a police officer can be reassuring and mean protection. In this case there is not the intention of showing dominance and power, rather sympathetic proximity to the weaker part.

2.4 Facial expressions and eye signals

2.4.1 Facial cues and the distinction between *surface acting* and *deep acting*

Because there are six facial expressions that are universally recognized and because they have a connotative meaning despite the culture of provenience, people perceive others' behavior based on these expressions.

People can understand which kind of emotional state someone is feeling, or what their behavior is, just by looking at their facial and eye cues.

Facial cues can be transmitted also involuntarily, due to micro-expressions, which convey a deeper level of real feelings. Indeed, while macro expressions can be controlled and denote an awareness of emotions, micro expressions cannot be controlled because they are involuntary and occur in 1/25th second⁵³.

If one is disgusted from another's behavior but they do not want to show it, it is very likely that it will appear a wrinkle at the bottom of their nose or their mouth will close rigidly, as it is suggested from the Paul Ekman's macro expression of disgust. Micro signs like these tell our real emotions.

Police are aware that micro-expressions are an optimal method to read truly other people's emotions, but at the same time they have to pay attention not to reveal what their true feelings are.

According to a study⁵⁴, a smiling police officer conveys the idea of competence, kind, trust and responsiveness; differently from an officer whose face transmits an expression of neutrality (without smiling).

During a police interrogatory, an angry expression depicted on the police officer's face or gaze signals conveying rigidity change the approach of the guilty party. The latter will understand that they are not believed by the first one, and even their attitude will become rigid and aggressive. This is the reason why

⁵³ *What are micro expressions?*, PaulEkmanGroup

⁵⁴ Staller, M. S., Koerner, S., Zaiser, B. (2023) *Police Conflict, Management, Volume I. Challenges and Opportunities in the 21th century*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 265

police has to know how to deal with emotional work. To this proposal, important strategies include *surface acting* and *deep acting*⁵⁵.

Both the two are used mainly in workplaces, and have the purpose to work and produce goods, adapting to emotional control standards typically required by a company, an organization. These strategies are used to conform the employee to some parameters, oriented to show positive feelings and to hide negative emotions. They consist of socio-emotional efforts demanded by any kind of jobs. But one of the strategies requires much more effort.

Deep acting⁵⁶ consists of displaying an emotion, by appealing to a similar emotion associated to a particular moment lived in the past or in a previous moment. The emotion that has to be displayed does not have to be faked, because the person remembers and brings to recent memory an episode of the past, and consequently it is like they were living it at the moment.

Surface acting⁵⁷, instead, occurs when the worker fakes an emotion since the beginning. Despite their real emotion, that one who is living at the present moment, they change and correct it, simply because they must adhere to the job display rules.

This kind of acting needs more effort and stress by the nervous system, because it is not about some type of real feeling or a way to fake it; on the contrary it consists in changing expressions, by covering the real emotional state, because it is part of duty. Hence, the risk is that of individual's depersonalization.

⁵⁵ Staller, M. S., Koerner, S., Zaiser, B. (2023) *Police Conflict, Management, Volume I. Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st century*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 266

⁵⁶ Lu, Y., Wu, W., Mei, G., Zao, S., Zhou, H., Li, D., Pan, D. (2019) *Surface Acting or Deep Acting, Who Need More Effortful? A Study on Emotional Labor Using Functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy*

⁵⁷ Lu, Y., Wu, W., Mei, G., Zao, S., Zhou, H., Li, D., Pan, D. (2019) *Surface Acting or Deep Acting, Who Need More Effortful? A Study on Emotional Labor Using Functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy*

In Italy, research conducted by Acquandro Maran, Zedda e Varetto in 2015⁵⁸ put in evidence how important the prevention of stressful situations is.

Two kinds of stress sources have been highlighted; these are respectively related to operational reasons and organizational reasons. It has been demonstrated how police women and who work primarily on the streets are those who suffer the most, because they have to demonstrate in some way to be equal to their male colleagues.

Operational stress includes motivations connected to complaints and critiques by civilians and people which critique the police work.

Organizational stress is instead tied to roles regulation, hierarchical relationships with colleagues and the adherence to some organizational rules, but also the lack of self-esteem.

Men and women adopt different strategies to escape from these stressful situations. In particular, men tend to adopt the coping strategy, which includes: planning, instrumental support, positive reformulation and good humour. Women, on the other side, concentrate on the use of active outburst or some techniques to distract themselves.

In general, it has been demonstrated how programs including self-exploitation, cognitive-behavioral therapy focused on trauma, and peer support⁵⁹, indicated as fundamental aspects to face more easily the preoccupation and stressful situations that can be found in such this job, could be a powerful resource to correct burnout symptoms⁶⁰.

These therapeutical strategies may not have the names of deep acting and surface acting, but they are similar in some way because they both have as objective the stress and burnout prevention, and they both involve a large amount of emotional labor.

Why are deep acting and surface acting important?

⁵⁸ Zedda, M. (2018) *Lo stress in polizia: le strategie di coping e le differenze di ruolo e di genere*

⁵⁹ Lori, G. (2019) *Lo stress del lavoro in polizia e gli strumenti per affrontarlo. Un'esperienza italiana*, Institute Suisse de Police, pp. 21-22

⁶⁰ Zedda, M. (2018) *Lo stress in polizia: le strategie di coping e le differenze di ruolo e di genere*

They are important for both sides, from the criminal side and from the police side.

Hypothetically, if the guilty party is a real expert liar, they could use it not to show their real feelings concerning the actions they did. If they have committed a crime, deep acting would help them bring to memory a cheerful and relaxed moment, so that even their micro-expressions would be guided by that piece of memory. In this case, the police officer would be more in difficulty in decoding their facial expressions.

By faking their real emotions not to be discovered by the police, the criminal would be advantaged. Moreover, it could be possible that the criminal does not know the names of techniques like these and the theory related to them; however, if they are experts of this psychological process, it would be easier for them to apply this technique. It is the reason why expert liars and criminals exist.

On the other side, police emotional labor is very exigent, due to the daily confrontations with victims and offenders, peers and supervisors. Police work is among the jobs where performing emotional labour risks to create burnout and psycho-physical stress (other work fields which provide similar consequences are health care, tourism, finance, hospitality, clergy and flight attendance)⁶¹.

Deep acting can be, in police work, a kind of solution.

Since police work is very demanding, a police officer who is confronted everyday with human sorrow, crimes of any kind, rapists and horrible deaths, is requested to have a great ability in order to shift from an emotion to another, to conform to the specific situation which they are into⁶². The purpose is not to be suppressed from the situation or, in other words, to take it with a certain emotional distance, that they have to face with, to show professionalism and not to be involved by sorrow or displacement.

⁶¹ Lennie, S. J., Sutton, A., Crozier, S. (2021) *Psychodrama and emotional labour in the police: A mutually beneficial methodology for researchers and participants*, Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier, pp. 2-3

⁶² Van Gelderen, B. (2013) *At the heart of policing. Emotional labor among police officers*, Ridderkerk, The Netherlands: Ridderprint BV, pp. 24

For instance, they could be forced to manifest an angry expression, and consequently an anger emotion, during a discussion with an offender, in order to correct them and to appear authoritative and assertive, because they represent justice. But they could be forced even to manifest positive emotions even when they are facing with a criminal, maybe with the purpose to extrapolate some useful information about their victims.

The faking of emotions or manifesting them even if they are not felt can generate emotive dissonance⁶³, which causes a feeling of displacement given by the fact that the performed emotion is different from the one that is really felt. In this sense, the appeal to personal memories, typical of deep acting, can help in faking emotions, translated in facial expressions and eye signals in order to avoid depersonalization symptoms.

2.4.2 Gaze signals

Gaze signals in police enforcement is a characteristic that can be proper of the natural abilities of a police officer, or it can be trained.

Gaze is a very important variable of non verbal communication. The way in which gaze is addressed conveys information and emotions even when words are not pronounced.

There are three kinds of gaze: *social gaze*, *intimate gaze* and *power gaze*.

Whereas social and intimate gaze are used mainly in informal contexts, the power gaze is a technique applied in police, too, which means authority and marks the dominant position of police officers in front of a suspected person.

It consists in imagining that the interlocutor has a third eye above their eyes, exactly in the middle between their eyebrows. It creates a very serious atmosphere, and it is used when dominance position is required⁶⁴. Police know that keeping the gaze is intimidatory, so they use it as a strategy to see how much the other one is honest; if they are, indeed, they would not have problems

⁶³ Van Gelderen, B. (2013) *At the heart of policing. Emotional labor among police officers*, Ridderkerk, The Netherlands: Ridderprint BV, pp. 39

⁶⁴ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 182-183

to be fixated in the eyes by an authority, because their words are, supposedly, true and they are innocent.

In order to perform power stare, police officers are trained to maintain the gaze, through a series of techniques whose purpose is ameliorating gaze control patterns in general, to survive in stressful situations with a criminal and also to mark an assertive role during a conversation with a person of interest.

The assertive model of communication, and consequently, the assertive gaze was born in the United States approximately 60 years ago⁶⁵, and it has become a fundamental part of non verbal communication.

It has been demonstrated that, in comparison to a traditional modality of communication, or an aggressive modality, assertive communication is better because it allows to solve the problems and the difficult situations, by maintaining calm and not being involved emotionally in the difficulties of the other person.

Gaze is a powerful resource to apply assertive communication. If the police officer's eye contact towards the civilian part is direct, but non-invasive⁶⁶, it will demonstrate that the officer, confident and self-controlled, is requiring some kinds of answers from the other part. But, at the same time, they do not demonstrate rage or aggressiveness, which could be completely counterproductive.

Gaze control is part of police firearms training; it has to be trained because it could not always be a genetic ability. It allows to activate defense mechanisms, because it keeps tracks of the other one's movements of hands and hips.

A police officer has necessarily to start from the hypothesis that the person in front of him could be ill-intentioned and they could have a weapon hidden somewhere on their body. So, they have to keep attentive gaze even if their

⁶⁵ Bedessi, S. *L'utilizzo della comunicazione assertiva nel lavoro della polizia municipale*, pp. 5

⁶⁶ Bedessi, S. *L'utilizzo della comunicazione assertiva nel lavoro della polizia municipale*, pp. 8

eyes are not directly addressed on the object of their attention. In this sense, the training consists in developing an agile visual field⁶⁷.

Police inspectors and interrogators ask a lot of questions to people they interrogate, even one after another, very quickly. The purpose to this modality of interrogation is looking for a change in their blink or a direction in their gaze while they are answering a particular question⁶⁸. Police's task is to look for incongruences between gaze and facial expressions (non verbal communication in general) and pronounced words.

An avoidance of gaze, by the person of interest, could generate some suspicion in the police officer. Looking away or *darting eyes* are considered, most of the times, synonyms of deceit, even when the person in question is introverted.

Keeping the gaze less than 30% could mean lying, untrustworthiness. Looking away occurs when the brain is looking for escape routes.

However, most professional liars know that eye contact lack is synonym of deceit, and thus they train to control gaze. In this case, police too know that gaze maintenance is a technique implemented not to be discovered in telling lies, hence they use it too purposely to avoid to be attacked or teased from the suspected.

Within a relationship, almost always there is a superior-dominant part and a more submissive part. In the case of a police officer-criminal relationship, it is up to the first one to establish an authoritative role and to manage the conversation, because they represent justice and their task is that of finding out who is the guilty part and what crimes they have committed.

Finally, a police officer has to control and maintain gaze. A brief shift in eye contact, such as avoiding to look the suspected, can invert the relationship between the dominant and the submissive parts. Congruence between words, voice tone and non verbal cues is seriously important, otherwise ambiguous signs can be perceived from the other side, and the potential criminal could take

⁶⁷ Olma, J. *Gaze Control and Visual Attention in Police Firearms Training*, Münster, Germany: Institute of Traffic & Engineering Psychology, German Police University

⁶⁸ Calero, H. H. (2005) *The power of non verbal communication. How you act is more important than what you say*, Aberdeen, Washington: Silver Lake Publishing, pp. 70

advantage of a moment of weakness generated by a single incongruence of police part's non verbal behavior.

For instance, if a police officer who is interrogating a criminal nods continuously while the latter is speaking, as a sign of understanding and comprehension, it is not definitely an appropriate attitude that is expected from a professional police officer as they are. Indeed, the supposed criminal would think that the police believes them. On the contrary, the right behavior is that of listening impassively, with impassive but attentive eyes and neutral but convincing facial expression, so that the other could never feel in a "comfort position"⁶⁹.

Between verbal and non verbal cues, what it is unconsciously remembered and paid attention to is always the non verbal attitude, even if the oral words are convincing.

2.5 Vocal cues

Vocal characteristics that emphasize sound are called paralinguistics and include different aspects: tempo, loudness, pitch, frequency, variation, articulation, sounds range⁷⁰. Voice modulation varies because all these factors intervene in the same moment, creating a univocal timbre, which is extremely personal and depends on the person.

In police, vocal cues give an idea to the civilian of the police officer in question. Normally, a melodious and low-pitch voice is associated to a self-confident, trustworthy, competent and intelligent personality.

A police officer who knows how to do their work doesn't need to scream and to speak loudly; on the contrary they are able to be assertive enough, to show authority by speaking with normal voice pitch. Also from the outside, they will be perceived commanding and decisive.

According to a study⁷¹ of the University of Michigan, it has been observed that American police officers adopt a kinder and more comprehensive tone of voice

⁶⁹ Freeman, J. (2014) *5 things police officers should know about their body language*

⁷⁰ *Paralanguage*, StudySmarter

⁷¹ Arbor, A. (2021) *Racial disparities in police officers' tone of voice can undermine trust*

when they stop white car drivers, in comparison to black drivers, to whom they seem to be ruder and less comprehensive. This increases the negative impressions and the stereotypes that people have of police in general, because racial discriminations seem to happen commonly.

This study led the researchers to ask themselves if it could be relevant not only what police officers say, but the way in which they speak and which kind of voice tone they use.

This is one of the reasons why it is a duty and a professional behavior by police to adopt a voice tone which should not be loud just to be heard better or to show dominance and power just because police wear a uniform.

A low voice tone is synonym of self-confidence and dominance. Instead, a high-pitch voice is believed to be annoying. However, it should be remembered that women and men don't have same the vocal features.

Indeed, a woman has normally a high-pitch and high frequency voice, whereas a man has a lower voice and a smaller frequency range. This is reflected even in police interrogatories or in police actions occurring in their working life. The role of voice in police is ubiquitous and can alter the perception of police from the civilian-side, making the police officer appearing more aggressive or not.

Furthermore, it is not always true that a lower voice is the best choice. There are some occasions where a very loud voice becomes the only option.

It is the case when, for instance, a police officer screams "Hands up!", "Get down!" or "Show me your hands!"⁷². If they did not use a loud and determined voice pitch, they wouldn't have the same effect on the person they want to block.

In this case the loud voice becomes an important instrument which has the purpose to affirm assertiveness and leadership. A lower voice would never have the same effect in situations like these.

Expressions like those cited before have to be trained in order to be pronounced as much resolutely as possible. The objective of a police officer is

⁷² O' Brien, R. (2008) *Verbal commands*, Police. Law enforcement. Solutions

to obtain and maintain the control of the action, both their and the one of the offender's side, especially to persuade and intimidate them.

Non verbal interaction and integration can clarify or change verbal communication. It works even with vocal cues. Voice tone, frequency and pitch become important instruments to give commands and recommendations, among other things.

The objective of police officer's voice in police-citizen relationship is that of being always assertive. Assertiveness' modalities have to be adapted to the situation. They are necessary in order to obtain control, dominance also in the sense of protection towards civilians, prevention, a good interaction with people. All communication is projected to authority, never using aggressiveness nor passiveness.

Police have to be able to transmit a clear message, concise, with coherent motivations. Showing fear and weakness, like shivering hands or voice, hesitations, stammering, are not allowed in the moment of giving a command or establishing rules⁷³. But the communicative style, in particular the voice style, changes in the relation to the kind of person with whom a police officer interacts.

For instance, if the subject is passive, the voice tone doesn't need to be loud, because they are already suitable to be given a command, due to their lack of aggressiveness.

But the voice tone should not be aggressive although the subject is violent or contentious⁷⁴. By any means, indeed, the police officer has to demonstrate assertiveness, which means expressing agreement, disagreement and solutions for conflicts, without being aggressive.

Even if it is more difficult when someone demonstrates violent and brutal behavior, the best way to do it is speaking calmly, without losing patience and showing a perfect control and emotions management.

⁷³ Riva, B. (2016) *La comunicazione assertiva e i servizi di Polizia Locale: come garantirla*, pp. 29-31

⁷⁴ Batic, D., Gogov, B. *Assertiveness as communicative style in the work of police*, Skopje, Macedonia, pp. 200-201

A low-pitch voice conveys a greater idea of dominance and assertiveness⁷⁵; it makes the other realize that the police officer does not need to scream or speak loudly in order to be heard or to dictate rules. A good officer is able to manage a difficult situation even using a normal-volume voice; actually it is better because a high-pitch voice conveys the idea of anxiety and difficulty in contrasting extraordinary events like the contact with criminality.

Also the use of intonation is a useful indicator of emotional state and assertiveness. In order to appear more dominant and self-confident, declarative tone sentences are preferred. They are recognizable thanks to the downward pitch/frequency⁷⁶.

The contrary of declarative sentences is rising pitch/frequency, given by interrogative sentences. They identify mostly a submissive tone, which is typically not used in police context.

Declarative and interrogative sentences, in psychological terms, are not referred respectively to an affirmation or question-sentence, necessarily.

Instead, they indicate a way of pronunciation, comparing to that if an individual's personality is more submissive or dominant, according to their frequency voice and the low or high pitch at the end of the sentence.

A police officer should adopt a low pitch and declarative tone of voice, in order to show to the interlocutor that they are sure and confident about what they say and the way in which they act to make the justice to be respected.

Together with pitch and frequency, the rate of speech, pauses, proportion of speech time are indicators meaning the dominance of the personality in question. They can all signify assertiveness, both silences and pauses as much as fast tempo and loudness. It depends on how the officer manages them during a conversation.

⁷⁵ Matsumoto, D., Frank, M. G., Hwang, H. S. (2013) *Non Verbal Communication: Science and Applications*, Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, pp. 61

⁷⁶ Greene, J. O., Burleson, B. R. (2003) *Handbook of Communication and Social Interaction Skills*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 186-187

Pauses, for instance, can signify that the person is taking time for reflecting and answering later, and they do not act impulsively.

Together with silences and pauses, a well thought and educate tone of voice can make a difference.

The majority of police officers knows that a polite but assertive voice is all that is needed to obtain collaboration, and that it is useful to shape police's perceived legitimacy⁷⁷ by the side of civilians. An officer will never rise the volume of their voice unless the civilian demonstrates an aggressive and unashamed attitude; if they did first, they would immediately be perceived as an enemy. This is why diplomacy can be applied even in vocal cues; the risk, otherwise, would be that of finding themselves in situations of danger.

At the same time, a police officer who speaks to the suspect person, during an interrogatory, using a loud voice volume and fast rate speech, could mean that they are very angry and they are succeeding in intimidating the other. From such behavior, the latter can understand that the police officer is losing their patience and they do not believe to other's words.

In this case a low tone of voice would have not worked, because there are some times where aggressive voice tone is more efficacious than a softer one.

What can be deduced from all these variables is that the way of speaking must be adapted to the dangerousness of the context, the person whom the officer is confronting with and what they want to obtain from him.

Trust for police is also determined by the way in which police operates for the rights and for justice, for fighting crimes. But trustworthiness is also clearly visible from the way in which an officer discusses with a civilian, that has to be fair and anyway respectful, without abusing of their power. Loudness doesn't mean assertiveness, but it can be a consequence of a civil disobedient behavior.

2.6 Gender

⁷⁷ *Police Conflict, Management, Volume I. Challenges and Opportunities in the 21th century*, Mario S. Staller, Swen Koerner, Benni Zaiser, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, 2023, p. 269

As said before, the individual appearance of a police officer conveys a certain idea of police from the counterpart. Contributions to individual appearance are conveyed by a series of elements: voice cues, touch, physical aspect, posture and gestures. But there is a variable which cannot be trained nor changed: the gender.

A female or a male police officer are often perceived differently from society. Since an officer can be a man or a woman, there are physiological characteristics which vary according to the gender.

Just to make an example, vocal pitch and frequency vary. A woman, typically, has a more melodious voice, a higher pitch and a larger vocal frequency range. Consequently, she will give a certain idea of dominance, which is related to her biological features. According to these features, a woman appears less dominant than a man, if considered the fact that a lower pitch voice is related to assertiveness. However, it is not always true, because also higher pitch voice transmits leadership and commanding.

A woman is also typically perceived less aggressive than her male counterpart, because of her tendency to take care of interpersonal relationships and conflicts, of group participation and democracy⁷⁸. She is more inclined to touch, as a gesture of reassurance, than men. This can make her appear less leadership-equipped and less suitable in front of an emergency situation, when it requires a certain moral inflexibility or rigidity. However, at the same time it can be an advantage, because of her more consistent ability of reading others' emotions and body signals, and doing it in a more caring and delicate manner. Because of her different attitude to talk to people, by being comprehensive and an acute listener, a woman officer is considered more suitable when dealing with people attending the enquiry desk⁷⁹, for instance.

⁷⁸ Randhawa, G., Narang, K. (2013) "Women in police: employment status and challenges", *ASCI Journal of Management*, pp. 46-47

⁷⁹ Westmarland, L. (2017) *Putting their bodies on the line: Police culture and gendered physicality*, Milton Keynes, UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 307

In general, there could be greater difficulty or more embarrassment during a deal between a man officer and a woman civilian, rather than the contrary.

Indeed, when, during a woman's arrest, it was asked to a man officer the reason why he had difficulty in arresting and putting her inside the police van, he answered that he didn't like laying his hands on a woman's body, even during an arrest⁸⁰.

The reason behind his answer could be connected to the general reluctance to touch, to look in the sense of examination, to search the opposite gender's body, mostly from the male side to the female side; but vice versa, too. This reluctance is born from the fact that touch has a sexual connotation, and officers, both men and women, would feel like "perpetrators", while the touched ones would become "victims". The police officer is hesitant to become a sort of executor of this action⁸¹.

What concerns decency and embarrassment for naked bodies is raising questions about the rules in police procedures. Despite the fact that touch is considered a sign of dominance and it seems commonly accepted that gendered bodies have different functions and physical appearance, there is still a certain difficulty in touching the opposite gendered body of a suspected person, or naming body parts even if the police officer is dealing with a dead body, for instance⁸².

A woman police officer could be perceived less dominant because of her body posture, which is usually different in comparison to a man's posture.

In general, a man police officer uses more open hands and body gestures. He tends to open his legs to express self-confidence and awareness of his strength; this body gesture is called *crotch display*⁸³ and it highlights masculinity because it puts in evidence male genitals. See *Figure 4*.

⁸⁰ Westmarland, L. (2017) *Putting their bodies on the line: Police culture and gendered physicality*, Milton Keynes, UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 306

⁸¹ Westmarland, L. (2017) *Putting their bodies on the line: Police culture and gendered physicality*, Milton Keynes, UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 307-308

⁸² Westmarland, L. (2017) *Putting their bodies on the line: Police culture and gendered physicality*, Milton Keynes, UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 308

⁸³ Pease, A., Pease, B. (2004) *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, Buderim, Australia: Pease International, pp. 212-213

A variation of this position consists in putting hands' thumbs into the belt or in the pockets, and it confers the impression of a relaxed position because the person in question is aware of their body presence as police officer.

A woman will hardly tend to adopt this posture. Her body gestures are less space-consuming and sweeping, but anyway decisive. Her body language is considered more positive than men's⁸⁴.

A male officer prefers an approach from the side, both when a person comes near him, and also if he has to stand near someone. Indeed, men tend to adopt more often a challenging position, conveying arrogance, indifference and self-confidence, all given by the fact that they don't need to assume a confrontational/frontal position, relating to the other person, in order to express power. They normally feel confident enough through their own physical presence.

Differently, a female officer tends to prefer a frontal approach. Indeed, when speaking, two women tend to position themselves one in front of the other, because of the gendered preference to have a more direct confrontation, even with an eventual touch⁸⁵.

For a similar reasoning, a man officer tends to maintain eye contact longer, as a sign of challenge, endurance and power, to show to the counterpart who is ruling.

A woman officer, instead, maintains eye contact but not in a dominant way as her male colleague. She looks for a middle road between resoluteness and openness towards the other, to show comprehension, always maintaining her professional role and formal aspect.

The main eye contact difference between men and women is that: habitually a man doesn't fixate longer the person in front of him in the eyes, and when he does, it is usually perceived as a sign of challenge, power. The woman, instead, tends to maintain eye contact longer and more intensely (and this is visible also

⁸⁴ Vala, M., Blanco, G., Paiva, A. *Providing Gender to Embodied Conversational Agents*, Porto Salvo, Portugal, pp. 2

⁸⁵ Goman, C. K. (2023) *What Leaders Need To Know About Male/Female Body Language*, Forbes

in pupils dilatation) because of her habit to listen interestedly. Furthermore, when she looks in the eyes the other person, who could be a potential suspect or even the criminal during an interrogatory, she is a careful observer of non verbal cues, from hand gestures to gaze direction, from voice hesitations to clothing⁸⁶. Differently from a male police officer, who is usually less attentive than his female colleague.

In conclusion, male and female police officers have some differences which depend on their own gender, but they both align to police rules and verbal/non verbal communication, which has to be trained in order to guarantee an always better communication and relationship with citizens.

Obviously, men and women behave differently, each one with their own features, like intonation and frequency, hand gestures and posture, way of gazing and relating with the suspect person, but there is no gender better than the other, in the way of acting. They both have different characteristics, which respectively fit better according to a specific context.



Figure 4. Men's crotch display

⁸⁶ Goman, C. K. (2023) *What Leaders Need To Know About Male/Female Body Language*, Forbes

3. What police officers think about Non Verbal communication uses: data from 2 interviews

Because they have different personalities, police officers have different opinions concerning non verbal communication; furthermore they make different uses of non verbal gestures and cues.

This chapter reports about two interviews to two police officers⁸⁷, who work at the Questura di Treviso, in Italy. They have been asked some questions, formulated by myself, concerning the theme of non verbal communication.

3.1 Question 1

Speaking about NV communication, could you explain, with your own words, what it consists of?

Officer A: "Non verbal communication means how you present yourself immediately, in front of the civilian who needs help or the civilian who has committed a crime.

In fast-response police team... maybe more in the past than in the present... how you intervene, how you get off from the car: almost half of your work is done.

If a person has dangerous intentions, but they see an officer with assertive appearance, who knows where to go, what to do and with a certain posture, they are probably more hesitant to commit an action.

If, instead, they see an officer with the hand into their pocket... unfortunately, it happens also this.

Surely, your first impression to others as officer means NV communication. You already set up the situation.

Secondly, we wear a uniform, and obviously that helps a lot"

⁸⁷ The names of the two police officers will be hidden for reasons of privacy

Officer B: *"At a conceptual level, NV communication includes body language. During police work, I agree with what my colleague said. The way in which we present ourselves, our attitude. The body speaks. For instance, during a documents check, it is more explicit than the voice. Above all at the Immigration Office, we have to deal with people who may not know Italian very well. Thus, our attitude is often a way both to try to understand people and to be understood by others"*

Me: *"To complete, I add that it includes also hand gestures, body posture, gaze and eye movements, clothing, physical aspect, voice (tone, intensity, frequency), movements and position of feet and legs"*

3.2 Question 2

In your opinion, in your work, is Non Verbal communication important?

Officer A: *"Absolutely yes. For what said before. Imagine, from the side of the other person, to see an officer with a lazy attitude, even during one of the worst work shifts. I mean, you don't have to walk and appear as RoboCop, but your attitude and physical aspect are very important. Then, it is obvious that if we ask something to the civilian and they see us in this way, they could be even aggressive to us"*

Officer B: *"Even during a documents check, it is important how we pose ourselves, for all the reasons you explained previously. It is already the main communication we do"*

Me: *"For instance, when you approach to a civilian, you can imagine the effect you produce on that person?"*

Officer A: *"Certainly. You understand the reaction you produce on them and in which way they perceive us"*

Officer B: *"Indeed the uniform is part of the message we bring"*

Officer A: *"Voice itself, too"*

3.3 Question 3

Which Non Verbal communication cues are more important in your work?

Officer A: *"How you pose yourself since the beginning of the intervention you are doing"*

Me: *"For instance, even the voice pitch you use, the imperative tense"*

Officer A: *"All is related to the context. For example, if you intervene in the place of a robbery or of an accident, you can find people who need reassurance. All is related to the situation. The injured part looks always for solace, for help"*

Me: *"In that situation, do you feel more like a parent? Do you want to comfort them or do you maintain a certain distance?"*

Officer A: *"You necessarily have to maintain a distance. You can help others up to a point. You cannot save the situation by yourself and you cannot immediately find what the others have lost by yourself only. However, it is obvious that you are expected to give some small comfort.*

Related to the accident discourse, once it happened to me that my colleges and I had to go to the house of a person, whose relative had just died.

But we didn't say to her that her relative was died.

We received the order to say to her that her relative had an accident and was at the hospital. The person in question would have known the truth after, in the hospital.

I mean, you have to be cautious, because you need to observe how a person reacts.

This is to say that all depends on the situation and what you have to do.

In relation to our work, in this office⁸⁸, you have to say to a foreigner 'Move!' or 'Give me your document!', after several attempts in which they do not collaborate with you"

Me: *"For instance in this case you use the imperative tense"*

Officer A: *"Yes, it is related to the context and how you pose yourself"*

Officer B: *"It depends on the kind of service you do"*

Officer A: *"But, sorry, you asked us what are the most important cues..."*

⁸⁸ Immigration Office

Me: *"I provide an example. If you are in front of someone and your feet are both directed frontally, or your legs are crossed together, or you have the hands in your pockets, the impression on the other part changes"*

Officer B: *"Well, surely the posture. We need to be ready to an eventual aggression. We cannot be sure about the person that we stop in the street.*

So, in a situation of documents check, surely the posture and the proxemics do much, and also the distance from the interlocutor. A safety distance is required to prevent a possible contact with the stranger"

Officer A: *"Some weeks ago, when I participated in an update about operational techniques, they explained to me that when checking the documents of a person, you have to maintain a certain attitude. You cannot present yourself with hands in your pockets, or smoking a cigarette.*

The gun doesn't have to be shown, thus your posture should always have a leg more exposed than the other, and consequently the waist is always a little turned in order to hide the gun. This position is called Combat, it is on guard duty.

The gun is positioned behind, also because in general we are 2 or 3 colleagues and we are a little distant between each other, so that we can cover our view reciprocally. The 'triangulation', the so called 'triangulation'.

Be distant, always keeping under control the viewpoint and the people.

You maintain anyway a certain interpersonal distance, the famous interpersonal distance"

Me: *"Yes, they are called: the intimate zone, the personal zone, the social zone and the public zone"*

Officer B: *"Yes, the intimate zone has be to saved"*

Me: *"Indeed it is the area which is reserved to the partner, pets, intimate friends, familiars"*

Officer B: *"Absolutely"*

Officer A: *"Sons and daughters, too"*

Officer B: *"It has to be maintained a more public distance.*

Thus yes, returning to the question, I would say the distance..."

Officer A: *"For example, crossed arms are not used"*

Me: *"Is this because you are communicating closure?"*

Officer A: *"It is more because you are less reactive"*

Me: *"Because you do not have your hands ready to defend yourself or to intervene?"*

Officer A: *"Exactly"*

Officer B: *"It is all the clusters and the context that you communicate"*

Officer A: *"Furthermore it is a discourse of personal defense, too.*

One that looks at you and sees you in this way... well... [Officer A makes a little interpretation of what is saying].

However, we have seen many ways of behaving.

Honestly, unfortunately, it can even happen..."

Me: *"Have you worked also in the fast-response police team?"*

Officer A: *"No. But, when I came here for the first time, I joined the fast-response police team, during the three summer months. It was 2010"*

Me: *"Did you like it?"*

Officer A: *"It has been a considerable experience. Even if for a little time. After, they put me again in this work area⁸⁹"*

Officer B: *"So I would say the Triangulation, the Combat position, which are related to the concept of distance"*

Officer A: *"Maybe we are too technical speaking in this way"*

Me: *"No. It is perfect. They are interesting details"*

3.4 Question 4

While you are speaking to a civilian, and you wear the uniform, do you pay attention on how you use your body? If this person is aggressive, do you pay more attention in appearing even more authoritative, or in adopting a certain posture and gaze?

Officer A: *"It is always the same key-point.*

⁸⁹ Immigration Officer

Moreover, it is not said that if one acts kindly initially, then they will keep always this kindness. I'm talking about the civilians. We cannot be sure about what the other is thinking of.

We have to maintain a certain guard, and consequently a certain distance, posture.

We have to foresee that even a good person can be different, a moment later.

If I am approaching an old person, I would never go towards them in Combat modality. Obviously you have to evaluate at the moment.

If this old person hardly stands on their feet... actually you help him/her even while crossing the street.

So you adapt, but never giving for granted things. A woman is not necessarily innocuous.

We have seen it all"

Officer B: "Normally, we cannot let our authority to be called into question during our work"

Officer A: "Then, you know, it always depends. Each one of us has a different way of acting. Someone doesn't react, but not by let the other to overpower them.

There are officers who scream and other who, instead, try calmly to find a solution"

Me: "How do you consider yourselves in this sense? In other words, do you react instinctively or not?"

Officer A: "Instinctive up to a certain point"

Officer B: "It depends"

Officer A: "I would never scream in front of someone to make them give me their documents.

I always try to speak calmly, to understand what is the problem, to invite them to understand together.

In any case, we tend always to choose mediation before an eventual aggressive tone"

Officer B: "Yes, it is true"

Officer A: *"Because we are never alone. There are always people who look at us, who judge us and criticize what we do and the way in which we do things.*

Nowadays more, through smartphones, Instagram, videos. You have to put great attention also to this aspect.

But, even so, you cannot take your power as officer and define yourself as the Law"

Officer B: *"We certainly cannot do what we want"*

Officer A: *"This should be the theory, and the practice too. But, unfortunately, each person is different and we react differently. There are those who control more themselves, and others who let the other overpower them"*

3.5 Question 5

Do you think that it is easy to recognize someone who is lying to you? From what?

Officer B: *"It depends also on the culture of the person in front of us. Each one has their own way. I think it is easier to recognize a liar if they speak the same language you speak.*

In the most cases we have to deal with people coming from several different countries, and we have difficulties communicating to each other. I have difficulty understanding if someone is lying to me"

Officer A: *"It depends also on how much a person is familiar with lying. There are people who do it continuously, and in this case it is more difficult.*

Then, people who lie for the first time, and they know to be in the wrong, they start to shiver and to sweat. So, the body language.

In that case, you, as officer, ask them if it's all right, and you could have some suspects"

Me: *"Once I read that police officers are considered the most skillful workers, in comparison to other professions, in recognizing a liar"*

Officer B: *"Maybe it could be a skill that we have learnt while we work in the streets, through the experience and above all it is an ability proper of who habitually stops car drivers, for years. Because they are familiar with asking for*

others' documents, and they can have a first impression of how other people react to this request. They could have drugs hidden in their car"

Officer A: "In general who has nothing to hide is very relaxed. But, there are always the exceptions"

Officer B: "Anyway there could be people really good and respectful of laws who are not familiar with being stopped by the police, and thus they could react nervously, even during a simple document check or even in lack of particular faults.

Each situation is different"

3.6 Question 6

Do you think that police women have a less assertive or less authoritative presence in comparison to police men? If yes, why?

Officer A: "No, on the contrary there are some of them who are even more powerful than men"

Me: "I mean, maybe as a woman, there are some stereotypes..."

Officer A: "I would not say it. It always depends on the personality of the individual, beyond the gender"

Officer B: "Indeed, speaking about our office, there are women to whom I would ask for help, or I asked for a help or advice, even in operative situations. So, I see no difference"

3.7 Question 7

When civilians see you, in quality of police officers, so wearing a uniform, do you think that they have fear in some way of police themselves?

Are there stereotypes, in your opinion, regarding the abuse of power from police side and the fact that police officers boast only because they wear a uniform?

Officer B: "It depends on the time we are living in, on the culture.

For instance, I have had the possibility to travel and to see several cities and places; I noticed that in the South of Italy, from where I come, there is a different

consideration of police. Maybe it could be fear, but in reality I think that it is some kind of respect.

So, in my opinion, it is an anthropological, generational, change. I perceive that today's generations have less fear, also because they are accustomed to see us often..."

Officer A: *"... but also in the South of Italy, or especially here, in the North?"*

Officer B: *"Especially here.*

There is the stereotype of abuse of power. I see myself through social networks. Even a normal control is transformed into a video posted on a social network, then the officer is criticized, and so the police enforcement in general"

Me: *"For example, the scandal happened in February, when a crowd of people was manifesting pro Palestine and against Rai censorship about the war, and police beat them up⁹⁰.*

Officer A: *"Yes, the police in general is criticized. Unfortunately, it is for someone who acted badly that all the police is targeted"*

Me: *"Substantially the bad event is always more remembered in comparison to all the good things"*

Officer B: *"Exactly. It is generalized.*

Personally, in this new generation I see a sort of..."

Officer A: *"... being against. Almost to follow a trend. Can I say it?"*

Me: *"Maybe it could be the idea of comparing the today's police to the past's police?"*

Officer B: *"I believe that there is much confusion about the argument and the work of police.*

I always give the following example: 'A falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest'. It is really much related to situations like these.

There will always be those who criticize the work of police"

Officer A: *"Unfortunately the political theme is underlined"*

Me: *"So, among your colleagues, have you ever seen attitudes of abuse of power?"*

Officer B: *"No. Never"*

⁹⁰ *A Napoli la polizia picchia chi manifesta contro la censura*, Nicole Zaramella, 2024

Me: *"Or colleagues who boast?"*

Officer B: *"Absolutely no"*

Officer A: *"Anyway, this is a small reality, and consequently there is no one who boasts.*

Maybe in bigger realities... For instance, I worked in Milan for some years and there was a certain abuse of power, but also a lot worse, and fittingly, there have been specific consequences.

Fortunately people who abuse of their power have been punished, also because it is not a secret of the state"

Me: *"In Milan did you always work at the Immigration Office?"*

Officer A: *"Yes, too"*

Me: *"Did you like that experience?"*

Officer A: *"Yes, but Milan has a lot of more cases and a lot of confusion. But also more work area and departments"*

3.8 Question 8

Have you ever taken a course on NV communication during the school for agents trainee? If not, do you think it would be important to do it and to give notions about it?

Officer A: *"Never did it"*

Officer B: *"Never did it at a theoretical level. But, as told before, all the knowledge and notions taught during school are related to non verbal communication. So I believe that, even indirectly, we have done it"*

Officer A: *"Deontology itself. In other words, during the course we have learnt police rules"*

Officer B: *"Do you understand? Maybe at a formal level we didn't do a course or some classes about non verbal communication, but in the end, during operative activities and training (position, triangulation) we have learnt a lot about non verbal communication, too"*

Officer A: *"Specifically, no. But indirectly yes.*

Concerning deontology, they give you knowledge about the use and importance of uniform, for instance.

Once agents wore their uniform listlessly or they were unkempt. But today it is really different.

They taught you how to take care of your person. However I think that it is not something to teach. Is it really important that someone teaches you how to care about your aspect and the way to wear the uniform?"

Me: "Personally I think that just because you are going to do a similar work, you should be honored to do it and to wear the uniform. So, consequently, you should be respectful of it"

Officer A: "Of course.

I don't know if it could be about it... but some years ago a circular about the use of social networks was issued. It was addressed mainly to police members.

Let's speak about photos in uniform"

Me: "In the sense that they are not good? Why?"

Officer A: "No"

Officer B: "No. Unless they are not formal photos, taken during ceremonies"

Officer A: "Exhibitionism is not good. Besides the fact that it is tacky..."

Officer B: "... It is also forbidden. Some rules exist!"

Officer A: "Just imagine that a delinquent could know who you are, where you are, what you are named. People don't think about it"

Officer B: "It could be that you, as officer, wants to do an investigation plainclothes. But some people in the street see and recognize you, just because you have posted some photos on social networks. In this way you have compromised yourself by your hands.

Hence it is right that police officers have to be educated in this sense.

Unfortunately the new generations, which are familiar with digital world, may not understand very well what there is behind a photo. For this reason there must be an education about the possible consequences and prohibitions provided for by the law"

Conclusion

Soon I will start the police school. So, the theme that I choose for this thesis is very personal for me.

I believe that having joined the police theme and one of the subjects that I have studied more passionately during my Master's degree, would have been really useful for my future job.

The research through the different sources made me aware of several aspects of non verbal communication, and how they can influence the presence and impression of a police officer seen from the civilian side. In this sense, police have a great responsibility.

I think that non verbal communication is an extremely powerful resource to understand interpersonal relationships, and I think that it is still more powerful in order to be aware of the mechanisms and of the power of gestures.

To know how to communicate means a clear and unambiguous communication.

Non verbal communication is really important in such jobs as police officer.

A police officer has to control their behavior, by making it more or less explicit following the cases. They have to protect themselves, using both their body, self-control and appropriate non verbal cues, but also they have to be empathetic.

The purpose of this thesis was to show the main non verbal communication cues and how they are used by police officers to appear dominant and assertive, when it is necessary, and to show empathy from human side.

Finally, a contribution by two real police officers has been added, under the shape of two interviews.

The objective was to understand what two Italian police officers really think about non verbal communication, if they are aware of it when working and if they consider it important.

It has been demonstrated that non verbal communication is undoubtedly essential to make clear the real intention of communication, even if the interlocutor has not any theoretical knowledge about it. Most of the times, the perception of non verbal gestures is quite immediate.

Moreover, thank to the contribution of the two police officers, it has been shown that they are conscious of how they manage their body in the space and towards the civilian. The attitude, the approach and the external impression do the difference when speaking of job professionalism.

Non verbal communication deserves a more theoretical in-depth analysis in the deontology of all jobs; its study should be still more required, purposely to guarantee an appropriate and efficacious communication and, consequently, a good relationship between colleagues and in the dialogue with the citizen.

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