

What Is Your Body Telling People? | Otherwords https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-i3Q_LUsDro&t=23s Transcript: <http://dontveter.com/ec/bodylanguage.pdf>

What if your superpower was being able to tell if someone was lying?

In "Poker Face", Natasha Lyonne's character Charlie can instinctively and immediately tell with 100% accuracy if someone is lying to her.

Now, that kind of precision isn't achievable outside of television, but a research study conducted by Paul Ekman and Maureen O'Sullivan called The Wizards Project, discovered that there are real people with the ability to identify deceit with at least an 80% accuracy.

Since the average person does no better than chance, that is pretty significant.

O'Sullivan explains that the wizards are extraordinarily attuned to detecting the nuances of facial expressions, body language, and ways of talking and thinking.

Research from this project inspired the TV show "Lie to Me", where the team solves crimes through micro-expression and body language analysis.

You don't have to be a wizard to know that there's more to in-person communication than just words, and you'll be amazed at the unexpected and unintentional messages you just might be silently sending without even knowing.

I'm Dr. Erica Brozovsky, and this is "Other Words".

Despite what the name suggests, body language is not what linguists would describe as a language.

It adds a lot of nuance to our words, but it's insufficient to fully communicate your thoughts about life and love, and your last vacation, or give your presentation at work.

This is why there's no confusing sign language and body language.

Sign languages have full vocabularies and complex grammars just like spoken languages.

Words are words, signs are signs. It's not really open to interpretation the way that body language is.

While language is unique to humans, body language isn't.

Showing off a belly might be an invitation for petting, or at least acknowledgement of submission and trust, and we all know better than to pet a dog bearing teeth with hackles raised.

[HACKLES definition in American English | Collins English Dictionary](#)

2 senses: 1. the hairs on the back of the neck and the back of a dog, cat, etc, which rise when the animal is angry or afraid....

This extends to the facial elements of body language as well.

Quokka's smiles and Grumpy Cat's frown may not be reflective of their emotions, but a recent study led by psychologist Brittany Florkiewicz found that cats have 276 facial expressions.

And scientists have been able to apply the human facial action coding system or FACS, to animals from chimps and gibbons, to dogs and horses, to measure facial movements which may correspond to expected behaviors.

Of course, the data can't truly tell us what the animals are feeling or thinking, but it's a start.

Unlike our furry friends, our faces have evolved to be practically naked.

However, besides your preferred facial hair, there's one hirsute feature that stands out, and is often invoked when making expressions: eyebrows.

Yes, they serve a physical purpose to keep water and sun out of our eyes, but scientists suggest that we've evolved mobile eyebrows to support communication in signal subtle emotion.

Interestingly enough, our canine friends had a matching eyebrow journey through the centuries of domestication, just for improved facial communication with us.

Your dog's eyebrows are expressive for a reason. If eyes are the windows of the soul, eyebrows are the curtains.

Smiles that reach our eyes, crinkling the corners seem more genuine.

We widen our eyes in surprise or narrow them in disgust.

Work by human development Professor Adam Anderson and psychological scientists Daniel Lee suggests that there may be some evolutionary basis for eye widening and narrowing.

In a surprise situation, the optical field needs to be as broad and well lit as possible, perhaps helping you look for the best escape route.

Narrowing your eyes in disgust improves visual acuity on a specific point, perhaps to pick out gross things from your food.

Humans aesthetically appreciate symmetry. We tend to consider more symmetrical faces to be more attractive, and symmetrical expressions more genuine.

However, most faces are not particularly symmetrical, and neither are expressions.

In fact, studies have shown that because the right hemisphere of the brain is more dominant in emotional control, the left side of the face is more expressive than the right.

The muscles in the left cheek move more, and show stronger emotion than the right. And this affects everything, from the way we pose for photographs, to the way we hold babies.

To the left. To the left.

Which brings me to my favorite part of body language: gestures, the things you do with your hands.

We can divide them into three categories, illustrators, adapters, and emblems.

Illustrator gestures are the movements you make to expound on or emphasize what you're talking about.

Think talking with your hands, which might help illustrate your point.

The fish was huge, or, the speaker kept droning on and on and on.

Adaptor gestures are movements that help you adapt to the situation you're in, often to decrease anxiety or improve comfort.

They also serve to use up excess nervous energy.

Self adapters involve yourself, like scratching to relieve an itch, moistening your lips, or general fidgeting.

Object adapters involve engaging with an object like clicking a pen or peeling a label.

While illustrators and adapters tend to be fairly subconscious and without fixed meaning, emblems are deliberate gestures with a specific meaning to a specific group of people, which means they are not universal.

For me and most of the world, nodding my head like this means yes, and shaking like this means no.

But how do we all come to the same conclusion?

Charles Darwin posited that the no shake comes from babies declining food by moving their heads to the side.

He suggested that the nod, yes, was also baby food related, but a study on the gestures of blind children found they don't actually nod, so turns out it's not intrinsic.

It's also not universal because if you're Bulgarian or Turkish, the meanings are switched. Yes. No.

And the Indian head bobble can mean yes, or maybe, or I understand, or I acknowledge you, or even be intentionally vague so I can politely avoid saying no directly.

Darwin also had some ideas about the shrug, which to me and probably you means either I don't know or I don't care.

He considered it to be the exact opposite of an aggressive posture, which helps when avoiding a fight.

Hand gestures, on the other hand, vary a lot across cultures, and it behooves you to know the differences when traveling.

Where I'm from, raising your middle finger is considered a rude gesture, but in some places, it's just another finger to point with.

And in Egypt, they reverse it. All fingers up except for the middle.

In the US, thumbs up means things are all good, but the same gesture in parts of the Middle East, or Latin America, or West Africa has a vulgar up yours meaning.

[up yours - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

Short for shove it up your ass.

Throwing up a rock on, or hook 'em, is all fun and games unless you're in parts of Europe where it's considered the sign of the devil, or someone might think you're telling them their spouse is being unfaithful.

In most countries, the okay sign means everything is all good, but if you're in Brazil, vulgar.

Crossing your fingers might seem like an innocent wish for good luck, but in Turkey or Vietnam, vulgar.

Throwing up a peace sign has gotta be guiltless, right?

Well, in the UK, if you turn your hand around, vulgar.

You might also have noticed that flight attendants never point with their index fingers.

It's always two fingers or a full hand.

That's because it's a no-no in many cultures to point with the forefinger. Vulgar.

We've established that body language isn't a standalone language, but it does a lot of work contributing to effective communication.

Making eye contact and nodding while listening strengthens a connection.

Your gestures can support the points you're making, and sometimes you can even verify how forthright or genuine the verbal communication is, if there's a mismatch with the body language.

But you may be able to use this mismatch to your advantage.

Not for deceit and nefarious purposes, but to trick yourself into feeling better.

And there are entire courses on how to present yourself with positive body language to make good first impressions, and if you're confident and trustworthy.

Whether that's a power pose before your big meeting, or a smile when you're feeling pretty meh, there's evidence that shows that the way you move your body can influence the way you feel.

"Fake it 'til you make it" might just be legit.

You can't live every day like a poker player trying to mask tells.

We are constantly perpetually sending and receiving messages.

Maybe it's the eye contact you make with a friend when someone says something wildly out of pocket, or a little shimmy when you eat something delicious, or even a little wink at the cutie across the room.

Body language augments our communication, so we can say a little more with just as many words.