

Every Move You Make

Tannen, D. (2006, 08). Every move you make. O : The Oprah Magazine, 7, 175-176. Retrieved from <http://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/219600024?accountid=11091>

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Abstract

If you're interested in these signals - and who isn't?-follow up with some of the Peases' sources: Paul Ekman's *Telling Lies*, Edward Hall's *The Silent Language*, Desmond Morris's *Bodytalk*, as well as Erving Goffman's brilliant analysis of women's and men's postures, *Gender Advertisements*. But this book is a great place to get an overview. What fun to try the Power Gaze and see what happens.

Full Text

Headnote

Your friend didn't say a word. She didn't have to. Her eyes told you everything. So did the tilt of her head and that fierce little nod. DEBORAH TANNEN on how to read-and speak-body language.

"I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING!" A MOTHER PROTESTS, WHEN HER DAUGHTER accuses her of being critical. "Yeah," the daughter protests in turn, "hut you had that look." Facial expression is one of many nonverbal communication channels Allan and Barbara Pease illustrate in *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, a revised and expanded edition of Allan Pease's 1984 *Signals*. They've added recent research in evolutionary biology and psychology, along with brain studies, and examples to include current personalities like Tony Blair and George W. Bush. The basic idea is endlessly fascinating: When we talk to each other, we get and reveal meaning not only from speech but also from the way we position our bodies, tilt our heads, move our limbs, and arrange our faces. Learning to read and manipulate these signals gives you an arsenal of secret weapons to make friends and influence people.

Let's start with faces. The Eyebrow Flash-raising your brows for a split second-is a welcoming signal that can draw others to you. The Power Gaze-staring at the center of someone's forehead just above the eyes - intimidates and will stop a bore in his verbal tracks. This is not to be confused with the Power Stare, which lends authority: Without blinking, narrow your eyelids and maintain eye contact.

Even tiny changes in eyes can have a big impact. Enlarged pupils attract others, because pupils dilate when their owners see something or someone they like. That's why dim lighting creates a romantic atmosphere. (It's also why, in one experiment, men's pupils dilated most when viewing pornographic films, while women's dilated most over pictures of mothers and babies.) Since small pupils put others off, try not to look at a bright light before gazing at someone you want to attract.

The Peases suggest that women's greater peripheral vision explains why men get caught checking out women's breasts whereas women get away with checking out men's crotches while appearing to look at their faces. (Though this maybe true, it also seems likely that women are less interested in men's crotches than men are in women's breasts.)

You can create reservoirs of goodwill by laughing or nodding, which is contagious. Smiles are contagious, too, but watch which type you use: The Tight-Lipped Smile is a rejection signal, the Twisted Smile shows sarcasm, and the George W. Bush Grin may come across as a smirk. Mirroring happens automatically when there's rapport: People move their hands, legs, and bodies in synchrony, and it feels as good as dancing together. So you can create that feeling of rapport by intentionally mirroring. Be careful, though, because the one who leads, just as in dancing, is the one with more power.

The authors provide a panoply of ways to gain power: Make sure you initiate handshakes and get your hand in the palm-down position. Take the seat at the head of a rectangular table, but not with your back to the door. Sit with your elbows out or on the arms of the chair; keep your fingers closed and your hand below chin level; keep your chair higher and make the other person wait for you rather than the other way around. (As a manager I interviewed for my book *Talking from 9 to 5* put it, "Just a dime waiting on a dollar.") I'd caution that what works for men can backfire for women: A man who acts aggressive appears authoritative; a woman who acts the same way comes across as... well, you know the words that hover over our shoulder ready to be affixed.

In fact, sometimes behavior described as universal is actually male. For example, the authors recommend that well-meaning humans position themselves at angles to each other because a head-on approach signals a desire to fight. But this pattern typifies men, not women, as I discovered in my own research. When I wrote *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, I videotaped adults and children as young as 3 talking in pairs. At every age, the boys and men sat at angles or parallel and looked around the room, while the women and girls faced each other directly and kept their eyes anchored on each other's faces. This explains what has been a mystery to many women. "You're not listening," a woman complains, and the man says, "Yes I am." She challenges: "Then what did I say?" And he gets it right, but she still thinks he wasn't listening because he wasn't looking at her. Given these gender patterns,

a woman who tries to point her body away and avoid looking directly at the person she's talking to will make a very bad impression on other women. And a man might make a better impression on women if he faces them directly.

ANOTHER REASON FOR CAUTION is that body language, like verbal language, can have multiple meanings. Dictionary definitions don't tell us what others intend. We are all experienced bloodhounds at sniffing out implied meanings. A recently married young man commented that he learned a new grammatical construction, the interrogative imperative: "Is that what you're going to wear" is not a question but a command. The same goes for body language. For example, the Crossed-Arms-on-Chest position, as the Peases observe, is "an attempt to put a barrier between the person and someone or something they don't like," so it reveals a "nervous, negative, or defensive attitude." Use this knowledge: Avoid crossing your arms if you don't want to appear negative. But how about reading others' feelings? Just the other day, a woman was sitting in a restaurant with her arms crossed; her colleague concluded she was unhappy with the meal or disagreed with what was being said. But wait. It turned out that she wasn't feeling negative at all; she was cold. The solution was not to break that negative position by passing her the bread basket but to lend her a sweater.

If you're interested in these signals - and who isn't?-follow up with some of the Peases' sources: Paul Ekman's *Telling Lies*, Edward Hall's *The Silent Language*, Desmond Morris's *Bodytalk*, as well as Erving Goffman's brilliant analysis of women's and men's postures, *Gender Advertisements*. But this book is a great place to get an overview. What fun to try the Power Gaze and see what happens. And it could be especially satisfying to be able to tell your mother exactly what it was about her arms, her legs, her eyebrows, and her blinking that made up "that look."

Deborah Tannen's most recent book is *You're Wearing That? Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation*.

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