

THE DICTIONARY OF
BODY
LANGUAGE

A Field Guide to
Human Behaviour



Internationally Bestselling Author

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The Dictionary of Body Language

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Аннотация

From former FBI agent and bestselling author Joe Navarro, a field guide companion to his classic *What Every BODY is Saying*, revealing the more than 400 essential body language indicators.

A decade after his huge international bestseller *What Every BODY is Saying*, which has sold more than half a million copies in the U.S. and been published in dozens of foreign territories, retired FBI agent Joe Navarro offers its follow-up. *The Dictionary of Body Language* is a companion field guide to *What Every BODY is Saying*, expanding the original work with hundreds of additional behaviours, and presenting them all in an easy-to-reference format.

Moving from the head down to the feet, Navarro explains the hidden meanings behind the many conscious and subconscious things we do with our bodies. We learn how to tell a person's true feelings from movement and dilation in their pupils; what to watch for in the lips of a person who may be afraid, or lying; the many different varieties of arm-crossing, and what each one means; how the position of our thumbs when we stand akimbo reflects our mental state;

and many other fascinating insights. The applications for readers are numerous, from the business environment to romantic relationships.

After reading *The Dictionary of Body Language*, you'll have a new ability to read other people's true intentions, and to adjust your own body presentation so that you can convey the right messages.

Содержание

Copyright	8
Dedication	10
Epigraph	11
Introduction	12
The Head	20
The Forehead	27
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	28

Joe Navarro
The Dictionary of
Body Language

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Human Behaviour

JOE NAVARRO

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While the manuscript for this book was reviewed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) prior to publication, the opinions and thoughts expressed herein are those of the author exclusively.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the love of my life, my best friend, and the first editor of everything I do—my wife, Thryth Hillary Navarro

Epigraph

If language was given to men to conceal their thoughts, then gesture's purpose was to disclose them.
JOHN NAPIER

Introduction

In 1971, at the age of seventeen, for reasons unknown to me then or now, I began to keep a journal on human behavior. I catalogued all sorts of “nonverbals”—what is more generally called body language. At first it was the quirky things people did: why did they roll their eyes when they were disbelieving or reach for their neck when they heard bad news? Later it became more nuanced: why did women play with their hair while on the phone or arch their eyebrows when they greeted one another? These were small actions, but they captured my curiosity. Why did humans do such things, in such variety? What was the purpose of these behaviors?

I admit it was an odd pursuit for a teenager. My friends told me as much; they were focused on trading baseball cards, knowing who had the best batting average or kicked the most extra points that season. I was far more interested in learning the intricacies of human behavior.

In the beginning I catalogued my observations on three-by-five-inch cards for my own benefit. At that time I was unfamiliar with the work of Charles Darwin, Bronisław Malinowski, Edward T. Hall, Desmond Morris, or my future friend Dr. David Givens—the giants in the field of human behavior. I was simply interested in how others acted, and *why*, and I wanted to preserve my observations. I never thought I would still be collecting them

on index cards forty years later.

Over the years, I collected several thousand entries. Little did I know back then that I would later become an FBI Special Agent and would, for the next twenty-five years, use those observations as I pursued criminals, spies, and terrorists. But perhaps, given my interest in how and why people behave, that was the natural trajectory all along.

I CAME TO the United States as a refugee fleeing Communist-controlled Cuba. I was eight years old and didn't speak English. I had to adjust quickly—in other words, I had to observe and decode my new surroundings. What native speakers took for granted, I could not. My new existence consisted of deciphering the only thing that made sense—body language. Through their countenance, their look, the softness in their eyes, or the tension in their face, I learned to interpret what others implied. I could figure out who liked me, who was indifferent toward my existence, whether someone was angry or upset with me. In a strange land, I survived by observing. There was no other way.

Of course, American body language was a little different from Cuban body language. People in America spoke with a different cadence and vibrancy. Cubans got close to one another when they spoke, and often touched. In America they stood farther apart, and social touching might receive an uncomfortable glance or worse.

My parents worked three jobs each, so they did not have the

time to teach me these things—I had to learn them on my own. I was learning about culture and the influence it has on nonverbals, even if I couldn't have put it in those words at the time. But I did know that some behaviors were different here, and I had to understand them. I developed my own form of scientific inquiry, observing dispassionately and validating everything I saw not once or twice but many times before it made its way onto an index card. As my cards grew in number, certain patterns in behavior began to stand out. For one, most behaviors could be broadly categorized as markers of either psychological comfort or discomfort; our bodies reveal very accurately, in real time, our state of unease.

I would later learn that many of these *comfort markers* or behaviors, to be more precise, originated in the mammalian or emotional areas of the brain—what is often referred to as the limbic system. This type of involuntary response squared with what I had seen in Cuba and was seeing now in America. At school or through the window at the corner store, people would flash their eyes with their eyebrows to greet those they truly liked. Such universal behaviors I grew to trust as authentic and reliable. What I did doubt was the spoken word. How often, after I had learned English, I heard people say they liked something when just an instant earlier I had seen their face reveal the complete opposite.

And so, too, I learned at an early age about deception. People often lie, but their nonverbals usually reveal how they actually

feel. Children, of course, are terrible liars; they might nod to acknowledge they have done something bad even as they are verbally denying it. As we get older, we get better at lying, but a trained observer can still spot the signs that say something is wrong, there are issues here, a person does not appear to be completely forthcoming, or someone lacks confidence in what he is saying. Many of those signals or behaviors are collected here in this book.

As I grew older, I came to rely more and more on nonverbals. I relied on them at school, in sports, in everything I did—even playing with my friends. By the time I had graduated from Brigham Young University, I had collected more than a decade's worth of observations. There, for the first time, I was living among many more cultures (east Europeans, Africans, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese, among others) than I had seen in Miami, and this allowed me to make further observations.

At school I also began to discover the fascinating scientific underpinnings of many of these behaviors. To take just one example: in 1974 I got to see congenitally blind children playing together. It took my breath away. These children had never seen other children yet were exhibiting behaviors that I had thought were visually learned. They were demonstrating “happy feet” and the “steeple” with their hands, despite having never witnessed them. This meant these behaviors were hardwired into our DNA, part of our paleo-circuits—these very ancient circuits that ensure

our survival and ability to communicate and are thus universal. Throughout my college career, I learned about the evolutionary basis of many of these behaviors, and throughout this book, I will reveal these often surprising facts we take for granted.

WHEN I FINISHED my studies at Brigham Young University, I received a phone call asking me to apply to the FBI. I thought it was a joke, but the next day two men in suits knocked on my door and handed me an application and my life changed forever. In those days, it was not unusual for FBI scouts to look for talent on campus. Why my name was handed up, or by who, I never learned. I can tell you that I was more than elated to be asked to join the most prestigious law enforcement agency in the world.

I was the second-youngest agent ever hired by the FBI. At the age of twenty-three I had again entered a new world. Though I felt unprepared in many ways to be an agent, there was one domain I had mastered: nonverbal communication. This was the only area where I felt confident. FBI work is, for the most part, about making observations. Yes, there are crime scenes to process and criminals to apprehend, but the majority of the job is talking to people, surveilling criminals, conducting interviews. And for that I was ready.

My career in the FBI spanned twenty-five years, the last thirteen of which I spent in the Bureau's elite National Security Behavioral Analysis Program (NS-BAP). It was in this unit, designed to analyze the top national security cases, that I got to

utilize my nonverbal skills as if on steroids. This unit, comprising just six agents selected from among twelve thousand FBI Special Agents, had to achieve the impossible: identify spies, moles, and hostile intelligence officers seeking to do harm to the United States under diplomatic cover.

During my time in the field I honed my understanding of body language. What I observed could never be replicated in a university laboratory. When I read scientific journals about deception and body language, I could tell that the authors had never actually interviewed a psychopath, a terrorist, a “made” Mafia member, or an intelligence officer from the Soviet KGB. Their findings might be true in a lab setting, using university students. But they understood little of the real world. No lab could replicate what I had observed in vivo, and no researcher could approximate the more than thirteen thousand interviews I had done in my career, the thousands of hours of surveillance video I had observed, and the behavioral notations that I had made. Twenty-five years in the FBI was my graduate school; putting multiple spies in prison based on nonverbal communications was my dissertation.

AFTER RETIRING FROM the FBI, I wanted to share what I knew about body language with others. *What Every BODY Is Saying*, published in 2008, was the product of that quest. In that book the concepts of “comfort” and “discomfort” took center stage, and I unveiled the ubiquity of “pacifiers”—such as touching our faces or stroking our hair—body behaviors we use

to deal with everyday stress. I also sought to explain where these universal behaviors came from, drawing upon psychological research, evolutionary biology, and cultural contexts to explain *why* we do the things we do.

What Every BODY Is Saying became an international best seller; it has been translated into dozens of languages and has sold more than a million copies around the world. When I wrote *What Every BODY Is Saying*, I had no idea how popular it would become. At my speaking engagements in the years following its publication, I kept hearing the same thing: people wanted more, and they wanted it in a more easily accessible format. What many readers asked for was a field guide of sorts, a quick reference manual for behaviors they might encounter in day-to-day life.

The Dictionary of Body Language is that field guide. Organized by areas of the body—moving from the head down to the feet—it contains more than four hundred of the most important body-language observations I have made over the course of my career. My hope is that reading through *The Dictionary of Body Language* will give you the same insight into human behavior that I and other FBI agents have used to decode human behavior. Of course, we have used it when questioning suspects of crime. But you can use it as I have every day since I came to this country—to more fully understand those we interact with at work or at play. In social relationships, I can think of no better way to comprehend your friends or partners than by studying the primary means by which we communicate

—nonverbally.

If you have ever wondered why we do the things we do, or what a particular behavior means, my hope is to satisfy your curiosity. As you go through the dictionary, act out the behaviors that you read about and get a sense for how they appear as well as they feel. By acting these out, you will better remember them the next time you see them. If you are like me and enjoy people watching, if you want to discern what people are thinking, feeling, desiring, fearing, or intending, whether at work, at home, or in the classroom, read on.

The Head



All behavior, of course, originates from inside the head. The brain is constantly at work, whether on a conscious or subconscious level. The signals that go out from the brain regulate the heart, breathing, digestion, and many other functions—but the exterior of the head is tremendously important as well. The hair, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, nose, lips, ears, and chin all communicate in their own way—from our general health to emotional distress. And so we begin with the part of the body

that, from the time we are born until we die, we look to for useful information—first as parents, later as friends, work mates, lovers—to reveal for us what is in the mind.

1. HEAD ADORNMENT—Head adornment is used across all cultures for a variety of reasons. It can communicate leadership status (Native American chiefs' feather headdresses), occupation (a hard hat or miner's hat), social status (a bowler hat or an Yves Saint Laurent pillbox hat), hobbies (bicycle or rock-climbing helmet), religion (cardinal's cap, Jewish yarmulke), or allegiance (favorite sports team, labor union). Head adornments may offer insight into individuals: where they fit in society, their allegiances, their socioeconomic status, what they believe, how they see themselves, or even the degree to which they defy convention.

2. HAIR—Sitting conveniently on top of the head, our hair conveys so much when it comes to nonverbal communication. Healthy hair is something all humans look for, even on a subconscious level. Hair that is dirty, unkempt, pulled out, or uncared for may suggest poor health or even mental illness. Hair attracts, entices, conforms, repels, or shocks. It can even communicate something about our careers; as renowned anthropologist David Givens puts it, hair often serves as an “unofficial résumé,” revealing where one ranks in an organization. And in many cultures hair is critical to dating and romance. People tend to follow both cultural norms and current trends with their hair; if they ignore these societal standards, they stand out.

3. PLAYING WITH HAIR—Playing with our hair (twirling, twisting, stroking) is a *pacifying behavior*. It is most frequently utilized by women and might indicate either a good mood (while reading or relaxing) or stress (when waiting for an interview, for example, or experiencing a bumpy flight). Note that when the *palm of the hand faces the head* it is more likely to be a pacifier, as opposed to the palm-out orientation discussed below. Pacifying behaviors soothe us psychologically when we feel stress or anxiety; they also help us to pass the time. As we grow older we go from pacifying by sucking our thumbs to such behaviors as lip biting, nail biting, or facial stroking.

4. PLAYING WITH HAIR (PALM OUT)—When women play with their hair with the *palm of the hand facing out*, it is more of a public display of comfort—a sign that they are content and confident around others. We usually only expose the underside of our wrists to others when we are comfortable or at ease. This is often seen in dating scenarios where the woman will play with her hair, palm out, while talking to someone in whom she is interested.

5. RUNNING FINGERS THROUGH HAIR (MEN)—When stressed, men will run their fingers through their hair both to ventilate their heads (this lets air in to cool the vascular surface of the scalp) and to stimulate the nerves of the skin as they press down. This can also be a sign of concern or doubt.

6. VENTILATING HAIR (WOMEN)—The ventilating of hair is a powerful pacifier, relieving both heat and stress. Women ventilate their hair differently

than men. Women lift up the hair at the back of their neck quickly when concerned, upset, stressed, or flustered. If they do it repeatedly, most likely they are overly stressed. Nevertheless, we cannot discount overheating due to physical activity or ambient temperature as a cause. Men tend to ventilate on the top of the head by running their fingers through the hair.

7. HAIR FLIPPING/TOUCHING—Hair flipping, touching, or pulling is common when we are trying to attract the attention of a potential mate. The movement of the hand as it touches the hair is often deemed attractive (note most any hair commercial). Our *orientation reflex* (OR), a primitive reaction that alerts us to any movement, is especially attuned to hand movements—something magicians have always counted on. A hand reaching for the hair can draw our attention even from across the room. Incidentally, the orientation reflex operates on such a subconscious level, it is even seen in coma patients as the eyes track movement.

8. HAIR PULLING—The intentional and repetitive pulling out of hair is called *trichotillomania*. Hair pulling is more often seen in children and teenagers who are experiencing stress, but it is also occasionally seen in adults. Men tend to pluck hair from the corners of their eyebrows, while women are far more wide-ranging: plucking their eyelids, head hair, eyebrows, and arm hair. This is a stress response; even birds will pull out their own feathers when stressed. The repetitive pulling out of the hair, like a nervous tic, pacifies by stimulating nerve endings; unfortunately,

when it becomes severe, it requires medical intervention.

9. HEAD NODDING—During conversations nodding serves to affirm, usually in cadence, that the person is hearing and receptive to a message. Generally, it signals agreement, except in those situations where the head nodding is accompanied by lip pursing (see #154), which might suggest disagreement.

10. HEAD NODDING (CONTRADICTION)—We usually see this in young children, as when a parent asks a child “Did you break the lamp?” and the child answers “No” but nods. This contradictory behavior betrays the truth. I have seen this with kids, teenagers, and even adults.

11. HEAD PATTING, BACK OF HEAD—When we are perplexed or mentally conflicted, we often find ourselves patting the back of our head with one hand, perhaps even stroking our hair downward as we struggle for an answer. This behavior is soothing because of both the tactile sensation and the warmth that is generated. Like most hand-to-body touching, this is a pacifying behavior that reduces stress or anxiety.

12. HEAD SCRATCHING—Head scratching soothes us when we have doubts or feel frustrated, stressed, or concerned. You see it with people trying to remember information or when they are perplexed. This explains why it is often seen by teachers as students ponder a test question. Very rapid head scratching often signals high stress or concern. It can also signal the person is conflicted as to what to do next.

13. HEAD STROKING—Beyond the function of

keeping one's hair in place, people will stroke their hair with the palm of the hand to soothe themselves when stressed or confronted with a dilemma or while pondering how to answer a question. This is not dissimilar to a mother comforting her child by stroking the child's head. This pacifying behavior can have an immediate calming effect. Once more, this behavior may signal doubt or conflict, especially if done to the back of the head.

14. HEAD SCRATCHING WITH TUMMY RUBBING—The simultaneous rubbing of the belly and the head indicates doubt or wonder. It can also signal insecurity or incredulity. Interestingly, many primates do this as well.

15. INTERLACED FINGERS BEHIND HEAD, ELBOWS UP—The interlacing of the fingers behind the head with the elbows out is called “hooding” because the person looks like a cobra when it hoods—making the person seem bigger. This is a territorial display we do when comfortable and in charge. When we hood, the interlaced fingers behind the head are both comforting and soothing, while the elbows out project confidence. Hooding is rarely done when someone of higher status is present.

16. REACHING FOR HEAD (STUPEFIED)—People who are shocked, in disbelief, or stupefied might suddenly reach for their head with both hands so that the hands are near the ears but not touching them, with the elbows out toward the front. They might hold this position for several seconds as they try to make sense of what happened. This primitive, self-protective response might

follow when someone has made a major faux pas, such as a driver crashing into his own mailbox, or a player running toward the wrong goal line.

17. INTERLACING FINGERS ON TOP OF HEAD—Usually performed with the palms down, this behavior stands out because it is intended to cover the head and yet the elbows are usually out and wide. We see this when people are overwhelmed, at an impasse, or struggling, when there has been a calamity (after hurricanes or tornados by those who lost property), or when things are not going their way. Note the position of the elbows: as things get worse, they tend to draw closer together in front of the face almost unnaturally, as if in a vise. Also note the pressure: the worse the situation, the greater the downward pressure of the hands. This behavior is quite different from “hooding” (see #15), where the palms are placed on the back of the head and the person is quite confident.

18. HAT LIFTING (VENTILATING)—Under sudden stress, people may suddenly lift up their hat to ventilate their head. This often occurs when receiving bad news, during an argument, or after a heated moment. From a safety perspective, be aware that in situations of high anger (e.g., traffic accidents or road-rage incidents), disrobing (removing hats, shirts, sunglasses) often precedes a fight.

The Forehead



From the time we are babies, we begin to scan the forehead for information. Even at just a few months of age, infants will respond to the furrows on their mother's forehead—perceiving it as something negative. This small space between the bridge of the nose and the hairline reveals to others, in real time, how we are feeling. It is a remarkable part of the body closely connected to the brain, which allows us to communicate sentiments quickly, accurately, and prominently.

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