

→ **INTRODUCING**

**BIG IDEAS
FOR
REAL LIFE**

BODY LANGUAGE

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

GLENN WILSON



MANAGEMENT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

ALISON & DAVID PRICE

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1. Everybody's second language

Fie, fie upon her!

There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip.

Nay, her foot speaks: her wanton spirits look out

At every joint and motive of her body.

Ulysses, in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

I speak two languages – Body and English.

Mae West

There are many jokes about dogs that talk. They are funny because we know that dogs don't talk. Or do they? Dog owners know that Fido can express himself quite effectively in a variety of ways. He can wag his tail and bark excitedly when anticipating food or walkies. He can lower his head and cower as though expecting to be hit when feeling guilty about stealing some sausages. These emotions are readily understood by dog owners. Fido can also glean a great deal about how we are disposed towards him from our gestures and behaviour. Although he might be responsive to the shape of certain words, such as his own name, most of this communication is through the reading of body language and tone of voice.

Humans don't have to rely on such indirect signals because we have an advanced language capability and can state our case much more clearly and explicitly. At least we think we can.



All of the emotional signalling that animals use is still present in humans and registers importantly with us. After all, we cannot always trust what someone tells us: they may have reasons for wanting to be deceptive. Some things, like cold facts and statistics, are best communicated by words and numbers – but attitudes and intentions are better read through body language.

In some ways, body language is even more highly developed in humans because we have the most expressive face that has developed in connection with our preferred front-on interaction. Powerful signals are transmitted by facial expressions. We also have a highly developed capacity for 'mind-reading'. This is the very useful capacity to second-guess what someone has 'in mind' for us based on voice inflexions and body language cues. Obviously it is important to know whether or not someone fancies us or wishes we would just go away. It is also important to know whether they are on-side or on the verge of attack. Mind-reading ability has been retained and in some ways further evolved in humans because it has considerable survival value.

Where there is a discrepancy between what is said verbally and the feelings that are indirectly transmitted through facial expression and body language, we quite rightly set great store by what we see, rather than what we are being told. This is because body language 'leaks' certain emotions and attitudes that we might have preferred to conceal from those who observe us (and they know it). The reception process is immediate and largely unconscious, though it can be made conscious through a process of analysis such as that used in this book.

It is widely said that 93% of our communication is through body language, while only 7% is based in the words themselves. Although Albert Mehrabian, the researcher on whose work

the 1960s this assertion is based, has said this is a simplification of his findings, others have produced data suggesting that around 60–70% of our communication is non-verbal.



Studies of US presidential election campaigns have been done in which the speeches of candidates are assessed through watching videos with and without sound, listening to sound recordings alone and simply reading transcripts. This allows comparison of the power of the various channels to influence voter choice and it confirms that visual body language, and even tone of voice, are much more persuasive than the verbal content of the message. Not surprisingly a new breed of 'speech doctors', image consultants and television coaches has grown in strength.

It is now widely recognised that what we often think of as our second language is actually more important than our first. Any poker player, salesperson, investigating detective, actor or nightclub dancer will attest to this, so it is important to study it and understand its principles.



Seen and not heard

Next time you are at a noisy cocktail party or social function where you can barely hear the person you are talking to, take a look at groups of people interacting across the other side of the room. Even though you cannot hear a word they say, you will be able to divine a great deal about what is really going on between them and their true feelings and intentions towards each other. Perhaps one is making a play for the other that you can tell is unwelcome and will come to nothing. One may be clearly dominant over the others because the others are all respectful and attentive towards that individual. In a funny way, you can often tell *more* about the real relationship among people when you are not distracted by the content of the 'small talk' that is going on between them.

But how can you ever know if you were right? The same effect can be achieved by turning off the sound on the TV when a drama or soap is playing. An amusing party game is to suppress some of the dialogue that you cannot hear on a video, then afterwards replay it with the sound up to see how far wide of the mark you were. At the very least, you will probably have been right about which characters were at loggerheads and which were enjoying warm rapport. If you were wrong, was it bad acting, or was there some additional agenda or undercurrent that might explain why the words were inconsistent with the body language?

Deaf people are particularly good at the body language game (even without lip-reading) because they have more experience at the skill. The American performance artist Terry Galloway, author of the book *Mean, Little, Deaf, Queer* (2009), reported on her own experience of going deaf in early childhood as a side-effect of an antibiotic: 'Deafness has left me acutely aware of both the duplicity that language is capable of and the many expressions the body cannot hide.' There is also some evidence that women are better at reading body language than men, which is the truth in the phrase 'women's intuition'.

The beast within

What is the origin of this non-verbal code to which we are all responsive? The great

evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin pointed out that the expression of an emotion is usually achieved by delivering a sample or residue of a more complete and overt instinctive behavioural pattern.

'Disgust' literally means rejecting something that is foul tasting. Even though it may be induced by social events, the facial expression of disgust still resembles regurgitation of tainted food. Fear is indicated in various ways: by freezing, by preparing to flee or by clinging to the hold of someone/something for support. Such strategies might be of value when confronted with a lion in the wild but they are less appropriate when the source of 'danger' is an audience to whom we have to make a speech. This is why 'stage fright' is something we try to overcome.

A dog snarls in anger as a threat to bite. In much the same way, when humans are angry they show preparation to fight. They clench their teeth, make a fist with their hand and thrust their head forward. They may not actually be about to bite, punch or butt the other person but they are indicating that they are inclined to. Body language enables us to make threats to others that, if properly received and responded to, can deflect actual aggression. In this way competitor males do not necessarily have to fight to the death to establish dominance. A ritual struggle will do instead. Of course, it doesn't always work: sometimes the mere act of looking at another person is seen as aggressive and violence is provoked, especially among testosterone-fuelled young male gangs. But for much of human interaction a show of anger may be sufficient without the need for actual violence.



When a cat wants to show trust it rolls over on its back and exposes its belly, inviting us to tickle it. When a woman is feeling sexually receptive towards a man she will expose vulnerable areas of the body such as the wrists and neck, the parts that are normally well protected. We may not be aware of the exact significance of each gesture but the overall impression is usually quite accurate.

Body language can be used as an invitation to greater intimacy without the need for showing cards upwards on the table, and the invitation can be subtly declined without major loss of face.

Cross-cultural accord

Many emotional expressions are universal across cultures. For example, people throughout the world smile and laugh when happy, and they cry or frown when sad. In all places, the 'eyebrow flash' (lifting the eyebrows in pleasant surprise) is used when greeting an old friend that one has not seen in a long time. Even monkeys do this, confirming the evolution of our body language. Turning the head from side to side means 'no' in any culture and anthropologists trace this to the suckling baby turning its head away from its mother's breast when it has had enough milk.

The tendency of women to make brief eye contact with a man and then avert their gaze away and downward is observed even in little girls born blind. This means that it could not have been acquired through imitation. While we might think of it as a display of female modesty, some anthropologists interpret this behaviour as a ritual invitation to chase, the expectation being that they would eventually be run down and caught by a 'fit' male. This is why gaze-averting comes across as a flirtatious gesture. The courting male would thus be

tested both for his determination and his physical fitness, attributes that would be useful any offspring that might result from mating with him. Whatever the precise interpretation, the appearance of universal behavioural patterns of this kind may be taken as evidence of the instinctual origin.



Conveying refusal

Ask a friend to role-play an actor doing an audition. Their job is to say the line 'No, I absolutely will not do what you ask' direct to the camera. If you have a mobile phone that will record a video of them doing this, all the better. Almost certainly, they will be seen to turn their head from side to side in support of the verbal refusal. This is a cross-culturally universal gesture that probably derives from the infant's turning away from the mother's breast when satiated.

Failure of mind-reading skills

For the majority of people, the capacity for reading body language emerges spontaneously at a certain age. However, for a minority (mostly males) the mind-reading module in the brain seems to be largely absent and social skills are mastered only with difficulty or not at all. Such individuals are called autistic, or described as suffering from Asperger's Syndrome, because they lack the ability to connect properly and empathise with others.

Since this deficit is based in early (even pre-natal) brain development, with no obvious differences in upbringing, it appears that the reading of body language is a natural human function. The same is true for verbal language: although the environment determines which particular language we speak, the development of the grammatical and other deep structures of language unfolds quite spontaneously. And here too, the process is more reliable in females than male children.

Posture and gesture

There is a distinction to be made between posture and gesture that is crucial to the reading of body language.

A *gesture* is a socially learned signal that involves only one part of the body (usually the hand). It tends to be disconnected from the rest of the body and is usually devoid of emotional investment. When we are asked a street direction by a stranger we casually point the way with our finger, while the rest of our body is not involved. Pointing to the side of one's head to indicate that someone is lacking in the brains department is another example of a hard gesture that does not go beyond the hand and which depends upon the observers agreeing on its meaning.

Gestural codes differ from place to place and there is great scope for misunderstanding. Making a small circle between the forefinger and thumb has many different meanings around the world: in some places it means 'zero' or 'worthless', in Japan it means money, but in Italy it means homosexual. Jerking the thumb upwards means 'OK' in English-speaking countries and is used by hitchhikers to solicit a ride. In Greece it is an obscene insult roughly equivalent to 'get stuffed', hence the lack of success experienced there by some British hitchhikers.



Such misunderstandings may have fatal consequences. Two holidaymakers who had strayed from Greek waters into Albania were shot dead because they mistook a beckoning signal from the border guards as telling them to go away. Around this part of Europe there is a point where the beckon gesture changes from 'pulling' with palms upward to waving the hands forward and downward. It can be very important to know the code.

A *posture* involves the whole of the body acting in concert. This is usually invested with much greater emotional significance and conveys deep feelings. If, rather than pointing out a street direction, we are pointing to a child who is about to be hit by a bus, the whole of our body will be aligned so as to communicate the urgency of the situation. This shows a consistent instinctive attitude, rather than an empty signal that may be culturally variable. It is one of the ways in which we are able to assess the feelings and intentions of others. Part of the art of reading body language is therefore to look past gestures and evaluate postures.



Most of the points above will be illustrated more clearly as we go through the book. However, it is worth summarising some major principles at the outset:

1. Body language is rooted in our animal past. It is largely transmitted and read unconsciously. It can be subsequently broken down and analysed but the registration is more immediate than that. It is processed by brain modules that have evolved because they aid survival.
2. Where body language conflicts with the words that are being said, the body language will usually be the more 'truthful' in the sense of revealing true feelings.
3. Where body language is giving mixed signals (e.g. a smile that borders on a grimace or fails to involve the eyes) then the more negative, less socially desirable component is usually the more telling. This is because we are more often motivated to conceal unpleasant truths and anti-social feelings than pleasant, benign ones.
4. Where there is a discrepancy between a particular hand gesture and the rest of the body (a posture), the posture will be the more telling.

The many applications

In the pages of this book we show how the management of our own body language and the reading of that in others has important relevance to our social survival in many real-life contexts. These include such areas as:

1. Conducting ourselves in a job interview or evaluating a candidate for a job.
2. Attracting a partner in a singles bar or party and spotting whether a potential partner fancies us.
3. Assessing the warmth and sincerity of current partners, friends or strangers.
4. Interrogating a suspect at a police station or in a courtroom.

5. Recognising when road rage is potentially dangerous.
 6. Spotting whether or not a salesperson is being deceitful.
 7. Learning to be an effective actor or performer.
 8. Delivering a persuasive speech at a conference or making a favourable impression in a TV interview.
-

In almost any aspect of our social lives, the ability to interpret accurately the signals of body language, and to manage the impression we are giving to others, may be critical to our success, or even our survival.



The demise of Captain Cook

Captain James Cook, the great English explorer and cartographer, met his death in Hawaii 1779, and a failure of body language may have been responsible. In one account, he stuck out his hand to shake with the islanders' chief in a typically British act of greeting that was misread as an aggressive gesture, resulting in him being speared to death on the beach. In another account, which perhaps has more credibility, he was first received as a god by the islanders and given both deference and provisions. However, shortly after setting sail, his ship was ravaged by a storm, the mainmast was snapped, and he had to return for repairs. This enabled the witchdoctors (who were envious of his status and felt displaced) to denounce him as a fraud. Thus stripped of his aura of invincibility, he became involved in violent skirmishes with the islanders and was ultimately pursued and killed as he and his crew attempted to return to the stricken ship. Either way, this example shows how a command of body language and its cultural variations may literally be a matter of life and death.

2. How do I look?

We are often told not to judge a book by its cover. Yet that is precisely what we do a lot of the time. We sum up others at a glance by the way they are dressed and presented and by certain aspects of their body language and facial expression. Are they clean and well-groomed? Is their dress appropriate for the situation? Do they move with a confident gait? Do they smile warmly and make eye contact? It is as though we take an immediate snapshot of a person that is almost indelible and which determines our reaction to them. We might revise our opinion after we hear how they speak, learn what they have to say and what finer personality traits and other virtues they have to offer. But only with great reluctance do we change a negative evaluation based on that initial glance. The first impression sets the stage for all further interaction.

When people are shown photographs of strangers' faces whose personality has been previously assessed, they are able to detect immediately those who are high in 'psychoticism'. This is a major personality trait that is partly inherited and which goes with slightly weird behaviour, irresponsibility, risk-taking, criminal activity and delinquency. Quite how we are able to judge this in the faces of others is a bit of a mystery because the facial differences were not obvious to the researchers. However, there are clear survival advantages in spotting someone untrustworthy, especially for a woman choosing a partner. No such ability to detect other personality traits such as extraversion or neuroticism from facial characteristics alone has been found, but there are many other cues we can pick up on.



Gaining an impression

When you are sitting in a park or on a bus and feel like playing a little game, try the following. Pick out a particular individual that you have never met and glance at them for a couple of seconds. Now close your eyes and go through some questions in your head.

1. How old are they?
2. What is their nationality and ethnic group?
3. What is their social class?
4. What job do they do (if any)?
5. Where are they going and what are they involved in doing at present?
6. What is their personality like? Are they friendly or cold, trustworthy or unreliable, aggressive or timid?
7. How well do you think you would get on with them socially?

It doesn't matter whether you are right or wrong (you will probably never find out) but it is interesting to note that you probably believe you can make these sort of judgements after only a brief glance. So what cues are you working on?

The reason we can assess people so rapidly is that we compare what we see before us with a set of previously established *stereotypes* – expectations based on what we have been told and what we have gained from past experience. Usually there is some element of truth in these stereotypes but they can also be misleading.



Getting it wrong

An episode in a British courtroom some years ago illustrates how serious misleading stereotypes can be. A young black lawyer with dreadlocks was escorting his client, a white man in a suit, into the courtroom at his trial. The usher directed the lawyer towards the prisoner's dock on the presumption that he was the one who was charged. This resulted in great embarrassment all round. Clearly, the usher had seen many men with dreadlocks in the dock but he had never previously encountered one who was a lawyer.

Obviously, people should be free to present themselves any way they like, but they need to be aware that every choice has consequences with respect to how they are perceived. Young men who hang around street corners wearing 'hoodies' and gloves on a warm night can hardly be surprised if they are picked out disproportionately for 'stop and search' by the police. Criminals, drug dealers and gang members have uniforms every bit as much as soldiers and police officers.

The recent 'slut walks' around the world were intended as a feminist demonstration that dressing provocatively is not an invitation to rape. Certainly, scanty clothing is in no way an invitation, much less a *justification* for rape, but most women recognise that the way they dress inevitably transmits signals regarding their sexual interest and availability that is bound to affect the likelihood of unwelcome sexual advances. At the other end of the spectrum is the concealment favoured by nuns and some Islamic groups, which critics claim is an insult to men because it implies they would not otherwise be able to contain their bestial urges. We all have choices to make about how we present ourselves to others but we need to be aware of their likely impact.

Clothes maketh the man (and woman)

What can we tell about a person by the way they dress? For one thing, we might get clues about how much money they have to spend. It also gives away much about how they want to be seen by others – the image that they choose to project. One can spend a lot on clothes yet still not appear as ostentatious. Designer labels do not have to be vaunted by massive lettering that are intended to impress others. Expensive fabrics may be evident simply by the way they are tailored and hang on the body without any need for trumpeting.

Regardless of expense, the way we are dressed can show how much pride we take in ourselves and how we value cleanliness. The impression given can range from careless and sloppy to precious and obsessional. Perhaps the most important thing is to be appropriate; we are generally most comfortable when wearing the right thing for the occasion. The man who wears a suit at the beach looks slightly ridiculous, as does the man who wears trainers with a dinner jacket and bow tie.

Broadly speaking, men dress to display status. They use their clothes as a kind of uniform or badge of identity. Many men still wear a tie as a symbol of occupational status and respectability. However, showing freedom from the necessity of being 'bonded' in this way may be an even greater statement of social power. Top actors like Colin Firth and businessmen like Richard Branson feel no need to 'conform' in this way. A bow tie comes across as slightly arty and eccentric, if possibly a bit affected. Choice of colour may also be

telling: research suggests that ambitious men and introverts favour discreet colours like green, blue and brown, while extraverts and thrill-seekers go for brighter colours like red and orange.

Women dress largely to enhance sexual signals or to damp them down, depending on the interest at the time. They may also be sending signals to other women concerning their wealth and social position, or that of their partner. Expensive jewellery, hairstyles, hats and blatant displayed designer labels help them to do this. Increasingly, though, as women move into positions of power, their style of dress, and their motivations, begin to merge with those of men.



Psychoanalyst J.C. Flugel introduced the concept of *power dressing* as early as 1930. His idea was that people who wanted to get ahead in the world should dress for dominance, with large shoulder pads, vertical stripes to increase apparent height and sharp, pointy, 'masculine' lines to their clothes. Whereas women's clothes were traditionally soft, rounded, pink and fluffy (in line with their passive role and skin texture), men's clothes were supposed to reflect their active, thrusting role, being hard-edged and angular. For Flugel, the black brogue, tails, bowler hat, blade-shaped tie and lapels and shiny black shoes were all to some degree phallic symbols. Certainly, they could be regarded as the antithesis of feminine softness.

This theory helps to explain why polishing boots is such an important military ritual and why mediaeval authorities condemned pointed-toe shoes as lecherous and provocative. A fifteenth-century Papal Bull described the *poulaine* (upturned shoe) as 'scoffing against God and the Church'. Likewise, during the reign of Edward IV, it was decreed that 'no knight under the rank of a lord ... shall wear shoes or boots having pikes or points exceeding the length of two inches, under forfeiture of forty pence'. The concern was that people should know their place and reflect it properly in their style of dress.

As women have moved into occupations that were once male-dominated they have also had to engage in power dressing in order to compete (recall the monstrous lapels worn by women in American soaps of the 1970s and 80s like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*). Remnants of this persist today in that women in executive positions often wear pin-striped suits and shorter haircuts in order to increase their credibility in the workplace by appearing more masculine. Paradoxically, 'phallic' characteristics can seem very sexy to heterosexual men when worn by women. A man does not need to be a total fetishist to find a certain frisson in black high-heeled shoes and women in uniform. A mild degree of 'disciplinary threat' can be advantageous in the bedroom as well as the boardroom.



What do a man's shoes tell you?

Imagine that you can see only the shoes that a man is wearing. What do you think you might be able to infer from that? Many men think their shoes are unimportant because they are below the usual gaze line. This is quite mistaken. Shoes are boundary markers and thus stand out with greater significance. We talk about people being 'down at heel', 'well shod' or 'on their uppers', alerting us to the fact that shoe style and condition is a key marker of economic status and prestige. Shoes are often a giveaway of the type of occupation one has. For doctors, lawyers and salesmen

clean, shiny shoes are virtually essential, whereas for other jobs (farmer or decorator) cleaning one's shoes would be a waste of time. This is why clean shoes are seen as important by employers and clients: the man who does not bother to clean his shoes is subconsciously relegated to the class for whom shoe-cleaning is futile. Far from going unnoticed, shoes are major indicators of grooming, on a par with clean hair and teeth.

What sort of car?

Just as the male bower bird has replaced the cumbersome tail display of the peacock in favour of elaborate colourful constructions that draw attention to their fitness, so modern men display status indirectly in a number of ways. One of the best known is the kind of car that a man drives.

Research shows that women do judge status (hence desirability) by the car men drive. Luxury cars such as a Bentley, Mercedes, Audi or Lexus convey high status. Large four-by-fours like Land Rovers can be impressive but suggest a more practical attitude, and high-wheeled cars are often driven by women because they feel more secure. Hatchbacks imply a family man/woman and the drivers of sports cars are likely to come across as menopausal and desperate to impress. When a woman drives a sports car it is perceived as a slight aggressive show of independence and can be intimidating to a man. 'Mondeo Man' is a way of dubbing the ordinary person, while the image of 'white van man' is so well known as to require no comment.

Hair styles

The courtroom example above illustrates how important hair styles may be. Long hair on a woman is associated with femininity and youth, which is why Muslim women are often required to cover their hair in public, for reasons of modesty. Short hair often suggests a businesslike attitude or greater maturity. The 'blue rinse brigade' is a derogatory allusion to conservative older women. In men, excessively long hair looks bohemian and may create a tramp-like impression if it is not properly washed and styled. Very short hair sometimes comes across as thuggish (the 'skinhead' look) but has recently gained fashionability among gay men and those who are making the best of encroaching baldness. Outlandish hair colours like green and magenta, and styles like the Mohican, also carry a message – usually non-conformity and eccentricity. However, no hard and fast rules can be laid down because the acceptability of various hairstyles is context-dependent and subject to rapid social change.



Blonde or brunette?

If you are a heterosexual man, suppose you are going on a blind date and know nothing about your partner except the colour of her hair. How would your expectations vary according to whether she was described as blonde or brunette? Jot down a few traits you might anticipate finding in each of them. Finally, ask yourself which you would prefer to meet.

The stereotype of a blonde (perhaps typified by Marilyn Monroe) is that of a fun-loving, extravert, sexually receptive and desirable woman – at least for a one-night stand. On the other hand, as recognised by the popularity of 'blonde' jokes, blondes are regarded as slightly scatty, if not downright stupid. Brunettes tend to be taken more seriously and for that reason may be preferred as long-term partners or business associates. Some of these ideas may

have emerged in your ratings of the traits you anticipated in your date, and whether you preferred the blonde or the brunette might have depended on the purpose for which you hoped you would be meeting them.

Female journalists and others who have changed their hair colour as a social experiment attest to the fact that men (and society in general) treat them differently in accordance with these expectations. They report having 'more proposals and more fun' when in the guise of blonde, but being shown more respect as a brunette.

There is some truth in the stereotypes relating to women's hair colour as indicated by psychometric personality and ability tests, but since few women are natural blondes beyond a certain age, there is a degree of self-fulfilling prophecy involved – those who want an exciting, sexy lifestyle are more likely to dye their hair blonde. As a result, they are more often invited to parties and attract men wanting short-term flings.

There is, of course, a third possibility for women – that of red hair. Over the years redheads have had something of a bad press, being thought witches in certain times and places. Today they maintain a reputation for being fiery and temperamental and once again the stereotype is vindicated to a degree by personality tests. In other respects, redheads fall about halfway between blondes and brunettes.

Make-up

Asked what they think of make-up on women, many men claim to prefer the natural look. What they really mean is that the make-up, which is used to disguise blemishes and emphasise feminine facial features, should itself be disguised and not be too obtrusive. Otherwise, there is concern about what horrors it might conceal. Red lipstick has clear sexual connotations, dating from the use of carmine by ancient Egyptian prostitutes to advertise their services.



Recent research in the US found that when a woman wears heavy make-up she is inclined to be seen by both men and women as shifty and untrustworthy. It seems we subconsciously think of make-up as a disguise, which suggests that someone is trying to deceive us. On the upside, women wearing make-up were judged as more 'competent' than those without, perhaps because they were seen as taking pride in their appearance.

At present, make-up on men is generally viewed with suspicion despite several attempts by cosmetic companies to normalise it. There are no clear rules about the use of make-up but messages are transmitted whatever choice is made. The absence of make-up may also be a statement – suggesting a down-to-earth, possibly puritanical, woman who prefers no artifice. Obviously, the situation is also important; heavy make-up is more appropriate on an evening out than for doing the housework or a day at the office.

Spectacles

The old cliché is that 'men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses'. There is a kernel of truth here too because research shows that people who wear glasses (especially women) are seen as slightly less attractive on average than those who do not. Children in the

playground are slightly less popular if they wear glasses and again this applies more so with girls. However, there are also some positive stereotypes associated with wearing glasses. People wearing spectacles are judged as more studious and more intelligent by up to 5 IQ points. This stereotype is also in place by childhood: 8–10-year-olds asked to draw 'clever' and 'stupid' persons are more likely to give glasses to the clever one.

People wearing glasses are not only seen as more intelligent; they are also rated as more virtuous. Glasses enhance perceived honesty in both men and women compared with no eyewear. Sunglasses, however, have the opposite effect. They may make us look 'cool' but they create the impression that one is a 'poser' (trying to look like a celebrity), slightly villainous, or with something to hide.



Glasses rank fourth (after sex, race and age) in a hierarchy of salient features in spontaneous verbal descriptions of others. This lessens discriminability and hinders recognition of people wearing glasses. In the situation of having to identify someone it is very hard for people to see past the spectacles, since they stand out in the memory. Not surprisingly, when people want to disguise themselves, spectacles are called upon about as often as wigs and false noses.

Is there any truth to the stereotypes about those who wear glasses? IQ tests show that spectacle-wearers are *actually* more intelligent than non-wearers on average (though not quite to the extent that judgements are affected). It is often supposed that this is because short-sighted people, being poor at sports, develop studious, indoor interests like reading. That may be true, but genes are also involved and the link might have arisen because, before the invention of spectacles, people with poor eyesight needed to be smart to survive. Personality questionnaires confirm that wearers of glasses tend to be more introvert, more conscientious and less open to experience, in line with their 'bookish' rather than outdoor interests.

Facial hair

To shave or not to shave? A man's decision has an important effect upon how others will react to him. Although the impression gained is immediate and felt as instinctive, it actually derives from assessments made about what his motives are and what kind of person he is.

The acceptability and desirability of beards varies from time to time and according to the social context. In ancient Rome only barbarians had beards. In some Muslim societies a beard is a religious requirement. Beards were the norm at certain times in Western history; in the nineteenth century they were a mark of authority and respectability. Today they are associated with particular groups such as naval officers, theatre directors, artists, folk singers and scientists. (Tom Lehrer refers to 'ivy-covered professors in ivy-covered towers'.)

Where there is choice about whether or not to shave, the presence or absence of a beard may be diagnostic of personality, occupation and lifestyle. Some men adopt beards because they believe them to convey a bohemian or intellectual image, signalling that they 'have more to think about than a narcissistic concern with their own looks'. However, more conventional conservative people tend to view bearded men as unkempt, radical and unreliable. Many reckon that men grow beards to hide something, such as their emotions or a 'weak chin'.



Any style of facial hair that requires a great deal of upkeep (e.g. Poirot moustache, or a goatee beard that needs frequent grooming and trimming) transmits a message that is the exact opposite of the abandoned, unshaven hippo. It may, however, come across as precious or obsessional.

Women are divided as to whether they find men with beards attractive but the majority deny that they find them appealing. This is surprising given that gender signals (visual characteristics that differentiate men and women) are usually sexually attractive. Women with big eyes and soft skin are attractive to men, while men with swarthy complexions and strong jaw-lines tend to be attractive to women (especially in the fertile phase of their cycle, where good genes are sought before good husbands). Since facial hair is a testosterone marker, beards ought to be attractive to women. Indeed, it is the association with masculinity that is the reason why British military leaders in the last century sported moustaches and only officers in the British navy had the right to grow beards (lower ranks needed 'permission to strike').



Despite the survey findings relating to women's attitudes, experimental studies reveal a largely positive view of bearded men. In one American study, women and men were asked to evaluate pictures of college men that varied systematically in the amount of facial hair. The same eight young men were photographed at successive phases of depilation – full beard, goatee and moustache, moustache only, and clean-shaven. Generally, the hairier the face the more favourably it was rated. Bearded faces were seen as more mature, good-looking, industrious, creative, self-confident, liberal, non-conforming, courageous, masculine and dominant than shaved faces, by both men and women. The researcher concluded that 'the male beard communicates an heroic image of the independent, sturdy and resourceful pioneer, ready willing and able to do things'.

Other research, however, has turned up negative stereotypes concerning facial hair. Although supporting the masculinity finding, one study found that bearded men were regarded as 'dirtier' and lacking in self-control. Another found clean-shaven men were judged as more trustworthy in certain occupations where this would be a prime consideration (e.g. salesmen). Other findings show that moustaches are usually seen as less attractive than either full beards or clean-shaven faces.

Why men shave

If beards are manly, and frequently seen as attractive, then why do so many men undertake the tedious, time-consuming and hazardous task of daily shaving?



Desmond Morris said that by showing he has time to spare for toilet rituals a man signals that he is of high status, which naturally appeals to women. This would apply equally to facial hair patterns that require a great deal of attention, as opposed to an unkempt beard. Morris also referred to the ability to transmit more subtle emotions by facial expressions with a clean-shaven face. Others argue that there are advantages to remaining inscrutable, which could be a reason why men have facial hair in the first place (so rivals, partners and poker opponents can't read them so easily).

easily).

Shaving creates an impression of trust that women may find particularly attractive in a man. By shaving, a man 'softens' his face so he is seen as less threatening to other males and more of a new man (gentle and empathic) to women. Modern women are not just seeking dominance in male partners; especially when in the non-fertile phase of their cycle, they are at least equally interested in character traits that go with being loyal and supportive partners and fathers. It may also be a matter of hygiene – less food and drink gets stuck around the mouth to breed germs, a particular concern in some occupations, such as surgery and cooking.

The main disadvantage of a beard (apart from hygiene) is that it makes a man look older. Most obviously, the flowing white 'Father Christmas' type of beard ages a man, even though it comes across as friendly and avuncular. God is often portrayed as having this sort of beard, an image emulated by religious gurus around the world. But although age correlates with social power, there usually comes a time in a man's life when he wants to look younger. It is the age factor that probably accounts for the difference in findings between experimental studies (which usually control for age) and surveys (which do not). When only young men are used, more favourable stereotypes of beards emerge, especially as regards sexual attractiveness.

Because there are both advantages and disadvantages to having a beard, some men compromise by trimming their beard fastidiously or cultivating a permanent five-o'clock shadow (sometimes called 'designer stubble'); this permits a display of testosterone without the wearer looking too old (beyond breeding age). In fact, this image (popularised by the likes of Russell Crowe) can make a man look particularly virile because it gives the impression that he does shave, but his beard grows so quickly that he can't keep up.



Stubble is not impressive when respectability is a key consideration, as with politicians seeking election. Richard Nixon notoriously lost to JFK because he declined make-up before a key television debate and his shadowy chin appeared unshaven and untrustworthy.

Changing one's image

Once a beard has been established for whatever reason, it can be quite hard to dispense with. It becomes a 'trademark' – an important part of the man's identity and image. Children often react with distress when their father shaves for the first time after they have become accustomed to a hirsute Daddy. Research confirms that we are more comfortable with people who are familiar-looking, whether we know them very well or have not previously met them.

Of course, some men will grow facial hair or shave off a beard precisely because they want to change their image. This may coincide with some other life change, such as a new partner or career. Alternatively, they may have grown out of the need for the signal (e.g. no longer feeling rebellious or in need of looking sage-like or manly). The ageing biker who continues to sport a walrus beard and leather jacket well into middle age comes across as slightly pathetic. On the other hand, some men perhaps change their style of facial hair rather too frequently, which (like David Beckham's haircuts) suggests insecurity and instability – a quest for an elusive identity that can never quite be satisfied.

Moustaches and sideburns

The moustache is a way of paying 'lip service' to masculinity while at the same time conveying a well-groomed look. But there are many different kinds and styles of moustaches, each with their own stereotype. They may impress as debonair and dashing, hence their popularity with fighter pilots in the Second World War (handlebars), Hollywood leads of the 1950s (Clark Gable), and gay men in the 1970s and 80s (Peter Mandelson ditched his when the sign became dated). The fashion for moustaches in the 1970s appears to have been sparked by certain sportsmen like the American swimmer Mark Spitz and British athletes Dale Thompson and David Bedford. However, a moustache may come across as sinister and untrustworthy – a superficial attempt to seduce or impress (typified by used car salesmen and pantomime villains like Terry-Thomas).

THINK ABOUT IT

Moustaches make striking trademarks. Hitler, Charlie Chaplin and Groucho Marx are famous examples, even though the latter two mostly just painted them on. It has often been remarked that TV presenter Robert Winston is reminiscent of Groucho, adding a good-humoured touch to his distinctive image. Another iconic moustache is that of Merv Hughes, the macho Australian cricketer whose look continues to be imitated comically by Australian cricket fans today. The moustache was so central to David Bedford's image that he sued British Telecom for using it in their '118 118' campaign.

Sideburns are another way of showing off masculinity while still seeming well-groomed. They were most popular in Victorian and Edwardian (Gilbert and Sullivan) times and came across as affluent and respectable. Today, full sideburns, or 'mutton-chops' as they are known, are very uncommon and suggest old-fashioned eccentricity. Smaller and neater sideburns still make an appearance, however.



Facial hair and the marriage market

One evolutionary psychologist found historical evidence that men are more likely to advertise their masculinity with facial hair when they are having difficulty in obtaining spouses. Records on British facial hair fashions as depicted in the *Illustrated London News* from 1842 to 1971 showed that moustaches (and facial hair generally) were more popular when there was a surplus of single men in society and when illegitimacy rates were high. The conclusion was that men adopt facial hair to enhance their marriage prospects, increasing their attractiveness and apparent social status when partners are in short supply. Other research shows that a fashion for beards correlates with eras in which women wear long skirts (also a sign of austerity?).

Variations in the popularity of facial hair tell us much about a society and its times. Within a given cultural context, however, individual choices tell us much about the message that the wearer intends to convey. Stereotypes concerning the meaning of facial hair patterns may be inaccurate and unjustified in particular instances, but they contain a kernel of truth and generalities, based as they are on experience and observations of personality types.

Summary

Reasons for growing a beard

1. Convenience – dispenses with daily ritual.
2. Sexually attractive to some women.
3. Increase in gravitas – to look older and wiser.
4. Look more masculine and heroic.
5. To conceal emotional expressions.

Reasons for shaving

1. Hygiene – easier to keep face clean.
2. More attractive to some women.
3. Look younger.
4. Look more respectable/trustworthy.
5. More emotionally expressive.

Tattoos and piercings

While the stereotypes of facial hair are mixed and situation-dependent, those of tattoos and piercings are fairly consistently negative (except perhaps among people who actually sport them). These 'adornments' tend to be perceived as threatening, desperate, nihilistic, and indicative of anti-social traits like criminality, drug addiction and sexual perversion (much like the reactions to scars). At best, people with tattoos and piercings are seen by the general population as tough and independent; at worst they are seen as dangerous delinquents or self-absorbed fantasists.

There was a time when tattoos were almost exclusive to sailors trying to assert their manhood, or too drunk to protest when their mates pushed them to 'join the club'. More recently, they have become badges of gang membership and flags of the capacity to be dangerous – 'not to be messed with'. Sometimes they appear as a kind of graffiti carried on the body, which include messages ranging from the name of a partner or child to the expression of far-right political views.

Today there is a trend towards more artistic patterns in tattoos and piercings and a growing fashionability among young people. This means that the image of such adornments is improving among certain circles but their generally negative image has not been totally reversed among the wider population.



Those who choose to be tattooed or pierced should be aware that messages are often conveyed beyond those intended, and their permanence results in many regretting their decision to have them early in life. For example, the name of the boy/girlfriend may have changed or they have children and need to find a job that requires a clean-cut, respectable image.

Impressing in a job interview

A situation in which first impressions are particularly important is that of the job interview. Jo

selection interviews typically last for about half an hour but research shows that most of the decisions are made within the first four minutes, far too soon for personality and intelligence to be properly assessed. This is so even when the employer has not seen the application form and has no prior knowledge of the candidate. In fact, what the interviewer thinks of the candidate's appearance (before they have said anything at all) predicts the final decision 80% of the time. Obviously, this snap judgement must be made on the basis of superficial appearance and mannerisms.

Among the characteristics that emerge as favourable are self-assurance, eye contact, enthusiasm, cologne, a firm handshake and spectacles (probably for their effect on appearance, IQ and conscientiousness). Tattoos, piercings and scars are especially detrimental. Among other pet hates of interviewers (though not all) are smoking, unkempt hair and beards, dirty fingernails, scuffed shoes and extreme haircuts/colouring. Humour may be beneficial but not if it comes across as smart-arse, competitive or hostile.



Mirroring the body language of the interviewers may be a way of increasing rapport and making them feel more receptive towards you. However, care must be taken that it is subtle and does not come across as mocking. Also, if you are getting cold and negative signals from the panel the last thing you want to do is reciprocate them.

In most matters it is a question of achieving a proper balance between extremes. A firm handshake means neither flabby nor knuckle-crunching. Warm signals, like smiles and nods of agreement, are generally good, up to the point where they might seem weak or ingratiating. It is best not to seem overly serious, but nor should one adopt a permanent silly grin. Overly casual postures such as leaning back in the chair and crossing the legs so that one ankle rests on a knee will appear sloppy or impertinent. Self-assurance is good up to the point where the boss is threatened by over-confidence and pushiness. After all, your employer wants to remain boss after he/she has taken you on.

Dress should be neat, fashionable and appropriate, showing that an effort has been made to be respectful but without seeming overly 'fussy'. Men should dress so that their clothes do not upstage their personality and distract from what they have to say. Lighter clothes often give a younger, more relaxed appearance. Natural fibres, like cotton and wool, give a better impression than most man-made fibres and of course they should be clean and properly pressed. Women should dress so as to be neither too severe nor too flighty, depending on whether feminine charms are essential to the job. A low-cut dress might be good for glamour modelling, or even the role of receptionist, but it does not go down well for a female business executive.

The important thing about dress is that it be appropriate to the occasion and to the job. A bow tie, for example, would seem slightly peculiar if one was applying to be an office cleaner. Bank clerks are expected to be conservative and reliable, whereas designers would be expected to show some flair for style and colour. In other jobs, such as scientific research, there may be no clear expectation about how a candidate would dress since it is largely irrelevant.



1. It may be worth hanging around outside the desired workplace to scout out how current employees are presenting themselves before appearing for your interview; this might help you blend with the culture and look as though you would 'fit in'.
2. Stylish dress is important but designer labels do not necessarily impress in a creative context in which individuality is valued. You should be seen to have made an effort to impress without appearing to be a 'fashion victim'.
3. Avoid jangling, ostentatious jewellery because it is distracting and may come across as venal. Bling on a man definitely creates a bad impression in most contexts.
4. Wearing a watch is fine but don't keep looking at it as though you are anxious for the interview to be over.
5. Make-up should be subtle and not sexually provocative unless central to the job. Even if male employers might be impressed, the chances are the panel will also contain some women who might be annoyed by it.
6. Talk with a comfortable tempo – too fast sounds nervous and you might lose the audience, too slow can come across as dull-witted.
7. Avoid negative body language such as avoidance of eye contact, touching the face, looking at the ground, and slumping in the chair. As a rule of thumb, it is best to maintain eye contact for about one third of the time during an interview. Much less seems awkward and furtive; much more might be threatening.
8. Keep an appropriate distance from the interviewing panel; if you are close enough for them to smell last night's garlic on your breath you are crowding them.
9. Try to make the panel like you, using genuine smiles.
10. Be attentive and connect with what they are saying (see [Chapter 4](#)).



How to hitch a ride

Being a successful hitch-hiker is a bit like applying for a short-term job (that is, a companion to a lonely driver). Furthermore, it is a situation where first impressions are critical, since a driver has only a split second to decide whether or not to stop. Clearly, any danger signals like tattoos, scars and piercings will deter drivers, whereas respectable dress might swing it positively. They may even think it is a fellow driver who has broken down and needs a ride to a service station. As noted above, be careful not to use the thumb-thrusting gesture to request a lift; in certain countries, such as Greece, this may be seen as an obscene gesture.

One study of hitch-hiker success concluded that eye contact was the key factor in getting a driver to stop. This could be because it signals trustworthiness and arouses empathy. However, cause and effect goes both ways and drivers who have no intention of stopping usually avoid eye contact (rather as they do with 'squeegee' merchants). Another study

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