

The importance of body language

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



The Importance of Body Language By: Yulia P [pic] Communication is the key to every functioning society. Since before verbal communication has ever even been established, humans have been expressing themselves using other tactics. How you may ask? Through body language! Even now, understanding both your own body language, as well as others is crucial. Body language, also known as meta-communication, is used both consciously, as well as sub-consciously. Whichever intention is has, it often shows more about what a person is feeling than any words could ever conjure. Using facial expressions, hand movements, and posture, people express what they are truly thinking and feeling. Analyzing these types of behaviors, we can learn a lot about how people communicate, and what people are trying to express when they use certain types of body movements. It is important to be able to understand ones mannerisms because the way we react to them can alter relationships, and change the dynamics between people. Often times, when a person is feeling flirtatious towards someone, they tend to smile more. This is to show that special someone that the person is engaged in the conversation and is happy to be around them. Next comes physical contact. Physical contact doesn't necessarily have to be a big, or seemingly significant gesture. It can be something small, such as putting ones hand on the persons shoulder for a moment. Doing so shows that you are comfortable enough with the person to come into subtle contact with them. Lastly comes posture. When someone is interested in a person, they tend to stand up right and be at a closer proximity, then let's say someone who doesn't share the same feelings, or isn't yet comfortable enough with the person. Taking into account the

relationship between people, the culture, and the genders, we can speculate a lot of different things simply by looking at the meta-communication that is being exchanged, but the things we know about it also have reverse effects. What this means, is that our physical actions express our feelings, but we can also change our feelings based on our actions. A study was performed where people were asked to strike a “ power pose” (whatever pose made them feel confident and powerful) for two minutes, and then perform a few tasks. After doing the power pose, a sample of each person’s saliva was looked at for increases and decreases in testosterone (steroid hormone) and cortisol (adrenal-cortex hormone). The same thing was done again, except instead of a power pose, the people were asked to make a low-power pose. The results showed that the testosterone level in the high-power pose increased by 20% and the low-power poses experienced a 10% decrease. The high-power poses that were tested for cortisol had a 25% decrease, and the low power-poses experienced a 15% increase. All this information is shown in the charts below: [pic] This means that our non-verbals do in fact dictate how we think and feel about ourselves. This also means that our bodies change our minds significantly! Advice that Amy Cuddy gives is, “ Don't fake it till you make it. Fake it till you become it. ” What she means by this, is not to fake confidence just up until you get what you want (whether it be a job, or successfully interacting with people) but to “ fake” confidence until you BECOME confident. The topic of nature vs. nurture has been widely discussed for a very long time, but let’s apply this to body language. The way newborns react to things are completely by nature, since they are too young to be taught how to. There are muscles in our bodies that naturally

react in certain ways, such as smiling. When people feel enjoyment, the muscles in their faces reciprocate accordingly. A lot of the reactions that babies have are still used by adults. Some of these movements include sucking and chewing on things (which is associated with calming nerves), startling (which in reacting to unexpected fear, leaves a person with eyes wide open, and arms flat out against their bodies), and gaze aversion (which is looking away and avoiding eye contact, used when one is uninterested or bored of something). Babies depend on non-verbal communication to express their wants and needs, so when non-verbal communication isn't enough, they express the ultimate display of body language: the tantrum. When we interact with babies, we never really take into account how important body language really is. Especially when it comes to the babies' mental development. There have been studies that have shown that mothers who have depression often raise children who are also depressed. This is due to lack of smiles and displays of happiness. Babies who are raised by depressed mothers' usually have a tense mouth, avoid eye contact, and usually grow up to have problems in their social development. As the child is growing up, they will interpret the way adults act, and mimic it. So if an adult crosses their arms when they are angry, the child will do the same. This means that adults have to watch what they do, and how they react to things to ensure that their child will not develop any bad meta-communicational habits. Lastly, I would like to talk about common misconceptions in the field of non-verbal communication. Sometimes when people communicate with each other, they send out double messages. This means that the words that are being spoken do not correspond to the actions that are being expressed.

An example of this could be a group member being asked if they are okay with the idea that the group has went with, and them verbally agreeing, but physically he/she will show signs of contradiction to what they said, such as having their arms crossed while swaying side to side, or they might scratch their face while saying it (a sign of lying), or even lack of attentiveness. This person is being passive-aggressive, which can result in group tension, as well as the person him/herself being unhappy. This example also corresponds with the statistic that 55% of communication consists of body language, 38% through tone of voice, and 7% communicated through words. Some other misconceptions about body language involve culture. Customs and norms that you have, may not be the same as the one's in another country. An example of this is two men kissing each other's faces when they are greeting each other. While in some countries, this action is as normal as shaking hands is to us; others might see it as strange, or even uncomfortable. In many countries, pointing is considered rude, while to us, it's a harmless gesture. Furthermore, explaining my point, which is that body language, and understanding it is vital in terms of getting along with each other. Something we don't consciously think about, yet use daily is a thing we ought to put a little more thought into. Understanding one another is an essential part of being human, and learning how to interact with each other will help us further progress as ever-evolving beings.