

Body Language 50

Clothing

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On the surface, it seems like clothing has very little to do with the signals that are being sent or interpreted by body language, but that is not true at all. Just as the cultural background for some forms of body language has major impact on the interpretation, so do the trappings we wrap ourselves in.

Let's examine some examples of ways clothing might make us interpret body language in a specific

way.

Suppose you were on an elevator with one other person who is obviously a female executive. She is dressed in a neat gray suit and has her hair tied back in a businesslike manner. As she leaves the elevator you say, "have a nice day," and she gives you the OK sign, which you interpret as "Thanks, I appreciate the good wishes."

Now when the door opens on the next floor, a maid comes in with frumpy clothes and a dust rag over her shoulder. You say "Good Morning" and she flashes an OK sign at you. She seems to be saying "I'm bushed. I have been working since 11 pm."

After the maid reaches her floor, she leaves and is replaced by a much younger female. She looks to be about 20 years old. She is dressed in a trendy outfit that is very tight on her. She is concentrating on her cell phone and is in the process of texting a friend while chewing gum. You remark, "Isn't it a beautiful day?" She does not even look up from the phone but flashes an OK sign with the hand she has been using to text. It seems like she is saying "whatever."

How we present ourselves to the world has a lot to do with how other people will interpret our body language. For example, even the footwear we choose will cause people to interpret our actions as those of a stodgy blowhard or a creative free spirit.

If you want to try an interesting experiment, simply change the style you normally wear and go through your normal daily routine. You might wear a different style of jewelry. People will look at you in a funny way. You appear to be different from your normal self, but often others cannot pinpoint what the difference is until you tell them.

For a man, there are usually two options for keeping your pants up. The first is a belt pulled tight enough to keep the pressure between the pants and your stomach from allowing the pants to fall down. The other option is suspenders, where the pants cannot fall because their weight is being held up by both shoulders.

If the man was your superior, would you rather have him be uncomfortable with the pressure on his abdomen or would you like to see him express his artistic nature with a pair of very colorful suspenders? If you felt insecure with the man, which option would make you feel more at ease?

If a man came to a business meeting dressed as a baseball umpire, would that suggest there is tension in the group that requires some judgments to be made?

If a neighborhood child that you know well rang your doorbell on Halloween and you opened the door to see him dressed in his normal play clothes saying "Trick of Treat," how would you react?

Suppose you were on a plane that just landed and was at the gate. Now the pilot steps out of the cockpit wearing a bathing suit; would you freak out? I'm pretty sure that I would.

Keep in mind that how we present ourselves to the people we interface with has a lot to do with how they will interpret our actions.

This is a part in a series of articles on "Body Language." The entire series can be viewed on <https://www.leadergrow.com/articles/categories/35-body-language> or on this blog.