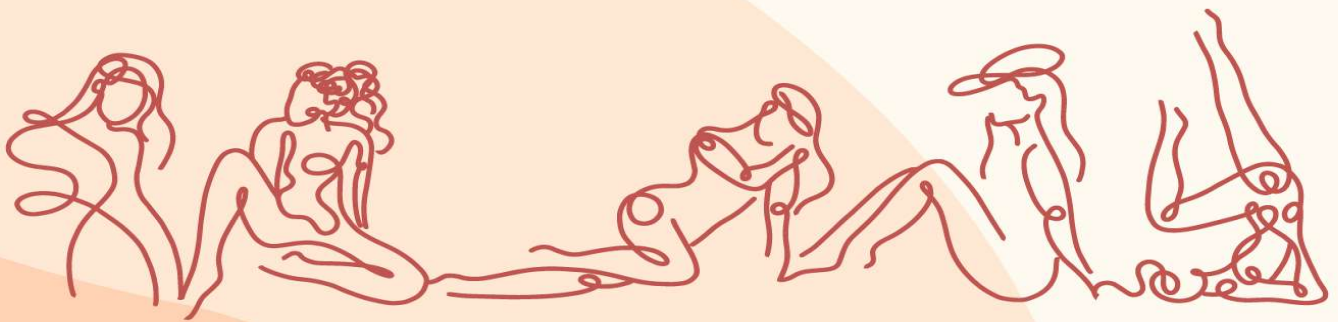


SUMMARY
BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

What Every
BODY
is Saying
By Joe Navarro



What Every BODY is Saying **by Joe Navarro**

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Learn how to decode the hidden messages of body
language.

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Introduction

Have you ever seen that popular Facebook meme that reads, “I’m sorry for what my face said while you were talking?” This meme gives us a good chuckle because we can all relate; even if we manage to restrain ourselves from saying what we really think, our facial expressions can give us away. For example, our words might be saying, “Oh, you’re not annoying at all!” while we’re secretly wondering if this person will ever shut up. And sometimes that annoyance shows on our faces even when we’re saying something different with our mouths. In those cases, we might hope that the person we’re speaking with isn’t able to decode the body language we’re trying to hide. But at other times, the ability to decipher subtle nonverbal cues can be a very useful skill. For example, maybe you’d like to know how to tell if someone is lying to you. That’s when these skills can come in handy! But this book isn’t just about catching lies-- it’s also an expert guide to understanding all types of nonverbal human behavior. So, over the course of this summary, we’ll dive in to the treasure trove of nonverbal knowledge cultivated by a former FBI agent and learn how you can apply his top tips in your own life.



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Nonverbal Communication is More Honest Than Our Words

People lie all the time. Whether we like it or not, lying is as much a part of the human experience as breathing. However, we don't always lie with malicious intent; sometimes, we simply fib to spare someone else's feelings. For example, does your friend really need to know that you secretly hate her dress? Does your mother-in-law need to hear the truth that you hate her potato salad? In some cases, being honest about little things can cause much more harm than good, so we lie. But what about the not-so-little lies? The lies that really matter? That mess with people's hearts and lives? When you're dealing with darker, more insidious lies, sometimes it can be important to know when someone is lying to you. And in those cases, the ability to decipher nonverbal cues can be extremely helpful.

The author's experience as an FBI agent has taught him that our bodies are honest even when our words aren't. In fact, our bodies are so honest that sometimes they can give us away, even when we're doing our best to lie. For example, maybe you've heard the old saying that "the eyes are the window to the soul." This is often true because, when someone is lying, their eyes can tattle on them in a variety of ways. Some people may inadvertently avoid your gaze while they're lying. Others may blink five or six times in rapid succession and some people's eyes might dart around the room like a trapped animal if they're feeling stressed about their falsehood.

You can also detect a lie by following the direction of a person's eyes. For example, let's say you ask someone about something she's seen. If she really saw what she says she saw, her eyes will probably move up and to the left; this indicates that she is accessing her visual memory and trying to recall the details of what she genuinely saw with her own eyes. But if her eyes shift upward and to the right, she's tapping into her imagination in an attempt to fabricate details. These nonverbal cues are so simple that you might miss them if you aren't looking. But if you know what to look for, you may find that people's bodies speak the truth even when their words are lying.

Of course, these tips aren't completely universal; neurodiverse people and people who struggle with mental illnesses or physical disabilities may differ in the nonverbal cues they present. These differences should be taken into account if you're interviewing someone who fits into any of these categories. But if you're dealing with an average, neurotypical person, these behavioral cues can help you catch them in a lie.



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Our Honest Brains

In the previous chapter, we affirmed that our body language tells the truth even when our words don't. But where does this physiological honesty come from? And how can we account for such vast disparities in our verbal and nonverbal communication? The author explains that this difference stems from our limbic brain, which is often called our "honest brain." If you're not familiar with the limbic brain, let's take a moment to learn how it works. The limbic system is the part of the brain that is involved in our behavioral and emotional responses. It helps to regulate many of the instincts we need to survive. For example, our limbic system controls our "fight or flight" response, our reproductive instincts, and our drive to eat. This means that our limbic system is always "on"; because it's responsible for our survival responses, it never takes a break.

Because our limbic system is so primal and instinctive, it reacts independently of our conscious thought. That means that we can't fool our own limbic systems or manipulate it in an effort to be dishonest. To understand more about how that works, just think about the mechanics of lying. Let's say that your mother asks you if her Thanksgiving turkey tastes dry. The turkey is, in fact, woefully overcooked; it's dry as a bone and it tastes awful. But you know your mother worked really hard on her turkey and you don't want to hurt her feelings. So, whether you realize you're doing it or not, your brain is quietly going through a host of mental calculations. Inside, your brain is saying, "Okay, we've weighed our options and we're not going to tell her the turkey is dry. We're going to say, 'No, the turkey tastes great to me!'" So, while your brain is quickly making those calculations, it's also informing your mouth and your linguistic abilities. And by the time you get ready to utter the words, "No, the turkey tastes great to me!" your mouth and your brain are both fully prepared to say something that you know is not true.

Your body, however, takes a little longer to catch up. Even if our minds and mouths are prepared for it, our bodies find lying very stressful. So, whether you're aware of it or not, when you get ready to lie, your heart rate increases, you start to sweat, and your mouth goes dry. You may also find that you get

shaky and that you have trouble breathing. These symptoms of anxiety pop up because you're activating your limbic system-- the part of your brain that controls your fight or flight response. So, even if you're mentally and emotionally prepared to lie, your limbic system understands that lying can damage your reputation and your relationships with others and your body involuntarily experiences stress. That's why it's possible for your body to give you away when you're lying. Even if you're feeling calm and prepared to lie, your body might be freaking out and produce the shaky, sweaty, nervous nonverbal behavior that tells someone else you're lying.



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Honest Hands and Honest Feet

Are you familiar with the old saying “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil?” Today, this proverb is so commonly referenced that we’ve probably forgotten where it came from and what it originally meant. In Western culture, we often use this phrase to condemn people who turn a blind eye to things that are morally or ethically wrong. But this saying actually originated as a Buddhist proverb with a meaningful purpose: the goal of this phrase was to remind us not to dwell on evil or upsetting thoughts. In admonishing us not to fill our minds with evil things, the proverb addressed the three key parts of our bodies that we most commonly associate with information and expression: our eyes, our ears, and our mouths.

It makes sense to reference these parts of the body because we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and speak with our mouths. Because we use these body parts so often, it’s easy to assume that they’re the most important when it comes to giving and receiving communication. But the author’s training has taught him that other parts of our body can be even more communicative-- and more honest as well. And that honesty comes from two body parts we might never consider in the context of communication: our hands and feet. So, can we use our hands and feet to lie? Or, conversely, to tell the truth? The author’s experience has shown him that we can. In the previous chapter, we learned about the limbic system and how it sends distress signals to our bodies when there is a disconnect between what we know and what we’re saying.

But now it’s time to take a closer look at the limbic system’s impact on our body language. Because our limbic system activates our fight or flight response, your body can be flooded with adrenaline when it perceives a threat. So, for example, let’s say that you’re in the process of telling a lie. You’re feeling relatively calm and prepared to go through with your lie. Maybe you’ve even managed to suppress the other nervous nonverbal cues that are typically associated with lying. But you probably can’t do anything to control your hands and feet. Because of the adrenaline that’s pulsing through your body, your hands may quiver and your feet might start to tap

or move around. So, if your hands begin to shake and your feet involuntarily tap up and down, this is a dead giveaway that you're lying. Anyone who knows you well-- and anyone who's skilled at reading body language-- will be able to understand what this means.

So, the key takeaway from this chapter is that, even when we try to hide it, our hands and feet are relentlessly honest!



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How to Read Body Language

In the previous chapter, we've examined some common forms of nonverbal communication. We've also learned about the connection between our bodies and our brains and how this can influence our behavior when we're lying. In this chapter, we're going to expand on that knowledge by taking a closer look at the study of body language and exploring some common tools we can use to understand what every body is saying. The author asserts that when you're studying body language, two things are very important: good observation skills and a good understanding of the person you're analyzing. Obviously, this can be a little tricky if you're an FBI agent interviewing a suspect you've never met before. But the average person probably is not an FBI agent and it's unlikely that you'll be interviewing a suspect in a professional capacity.

Instead, you're more likely to be studying someone you do know well, like your spouse or your child. If so, then it's important to develop a solid understanding of that person's normal nonverbal communication. After all, you can't tell that something is off if you don't know what "normal" looks like in the first place! So, make sure that you start with a good foundational understanding of that person and their normal behavior. Once you're certain that you have that knowledge under your belt, the next step is to develop your observational skills. When you have good observational skills, you'll be able to notice a few different things at once. For example, when you walk into your kitchen, you might simultaneously notice that there are dishes in the sink, that the dishwasher is open, that butter has been left out on the counter, and that there are empty plates scattered around the breakfast table.

As you can see from this example, good observational skills enable you to observe your environment and gain a great deal of information from a few skilled glances. The same is true of studying someone's nonverbal behavior. For example, if you know your son very well, you might quickly notice when something seems to be amiss. You might notice that he is bouncing his leg up and down while he talks to you; you will clock this as unusual behavior because it isn't something he normally does. You might observe that he's

looking away while he speaks to you and that this is weird since he normally makes good eye contact. If you have cultivated your observational skills, you will be able to incorporate these signs into a cohesive behavioral analysis and affirm that something is up: your son is hiding something.

This is only one hypothetical example, but as you can see from this scenario, it's easy to cultivate strong observational skills that can help you interpret the behavior of others.



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Final Summary

Shows like *Criminal Minds* and *Law & Order: SVU* have glamorized the role of the behavioral analyst. Because they display an almost superhuman ability to get inside the heads of their suspects, we are impressed by their skills and assume that they have some uncanny and remarkable gift. But the reality is that behavioral analysts have simply developed strong observational skills and a good understanding of nonverbal communication. In fact, anyone can cultivate those skills by simply following the tips outlined in this book.



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