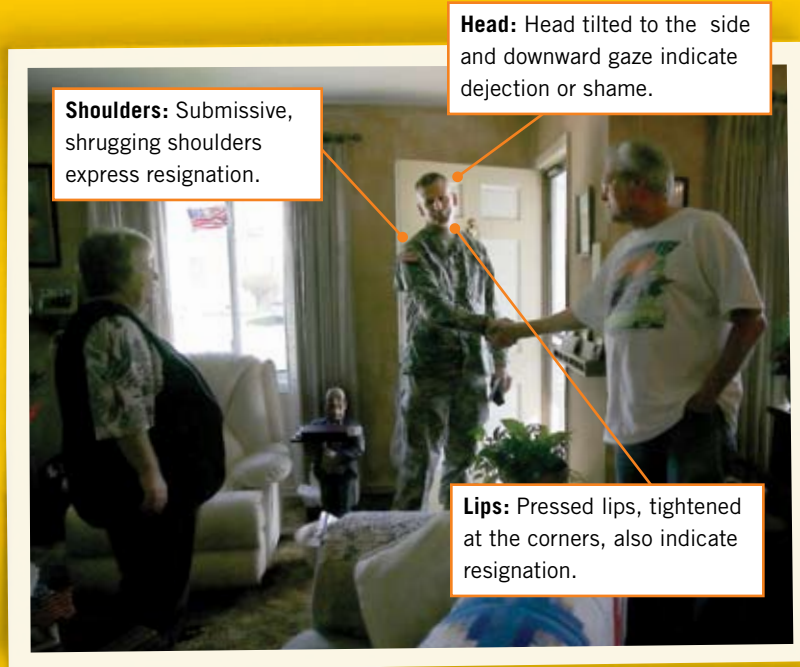


BODY LANGUAGE

DACHER KELTNER REVEALS THE STORIES BEHIND EVERYDAY GESTURES

The scene: At the end of a visit to the home of James and Beverly Balsley, whose son Michael Balsley died in Iraq, Maj. John Preston says goodbye at the door.



The analysis: THE EMOTIONAL POWER of this photo comes from the contrast between the parents and the soldier. Major Preston, in his shrugging shoulders and caved chest, is expressing weakness, resignation, and submission. We also detect resignation and disappointment in his lips, which are pressed and tightened at the corners. Notice the downward direction of his gaze and the tilt of his head away from Mr. Balsley: These movements differ dramatically from usual signs of strength and engagement, such as moving toward people with eye contact and expanded, upright posture. Major Preston's body conveys dejection, disappointment, and perhaps remorse.

His gestures contrast with what we see in the Balsleys. They both look with a fixed gaze toward Major Preston. The father in particular moves forward with his handshake: He wants to connect.

But Major Preston doesn't reciprocate. He moves away and into himself. These are people who are sharing the same space, but they're really in separate worlds.

Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., a co-editor of *Greater Good*, is expertly trained at decoding the emotional messages conveyed by facial expressions and body language. Body Language is a new feature to help readers improve their "emotional literacy"—their ability to identify and empathize with other people's emotions, and to understand their own emotions.

The quiet diet

IF THE PARENTS OF OVERWEIGHT teens want to boost their kids' self-esteem, here's what they should say to them about dieting: nothing.

A new study, published in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, looked at how families affect the mental health of overweight adolescents, many of whom suffer from low self-esteem and show symptoms of depression. It found that parental encouragement to diet has a clearly negative impact on kids' psychological well-being. Even parents' seemingly kind weight-related comments have the potential to lower children's self-esteem and influence them to take unhealthy steps to control their weight, such as skipping meals or using diet pills.

On the contrary, scheduling a regular family mealtime and creating a pleasant mealtime atmosphere—while refraining from any discussion of diets or weight, not to mention teasing—may boost overweight teens' self-esteem, lower their depressive symptoms, and lead to better family connectedness.

"Adolescents can be very sensitive about their bodies, particularly during periods of great bodily changes," says Jayne Fulkerson, the lead researcher and a professor at the University of Minnesota. "Instead of commenting about an overweight adolescent's weight, parents may be more effective focusing on the health of the entire family by providing healthful foods in the home and promoting physical activity for everyone." —**Julia Barzik**