

How Everyday Ergonomics Shape Your Behavior

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Fast Company:

One of Darwin's greatest insights came at the end of his 1872 work, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. "The free expression by outward signs of an emotion intensifies it," he wrote. Darwin simply meant that emotion and expression cut both ways: you can thrust out your chest because you feel proud, or you can feel proud because you thrust out your chest.

Modern science has confirmed the wisdom of this perception time and again. People feel happier when their facial muscles are positioned into a smile. And they feel sadder when they're made to hunch over. And, sure enough, they feel a surge of power when their chests and arms are expanded—so much so that their testosterone levels increase. The expression of power indeed intensifies the emotion, all the way down to its physiological roots.

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Recently, M.I.T. management scholar Andy J. Yap, one of the collaborators on the power pose study, wondered what might happen to emotions if the environment put people in a powerful posture by accident. After all, some of us take the wheel of enormous SUVs, or sit down to work at large corner desks. Perhaps the casual ergonomics of our lives have an unintended influence on our thoughts and behavior.

"We don't need to stand like Superman or Wonder Woman to actually feel powerful," Yap tells Co.Design. "Our posture is being shaped by these environments, and that could *make* us feel powerful."

Yap and two other researchers tested this idea in a series of experiments published online last month in the journal *Psychological Science*. They found that everyday ergonomics can, in fact, make us feel powerful, but not necessarily in a good way. With empowerment comes entitlement, and with entitlement comes dishonesty.

Read the whole story: [Fast Company](#)