

Body Language Fact Sheet

Research indicates that even small changes in body language can significantly impact behavior, perception, and mood.

Smiling

- Noted social psychologist Fritz Strack and colleagues conducted a study in 1988 to understand how our perception changes depending on our facial expressions.
- Participants were asked to rate the funniness of cartoons while holding a pen between their teeth without touching their lips or in their lips without touching their teeth.
- The study showed that simply contracting the same muscles as when we're amused or not changes how we perceive things.
- Results showed that participants who knew they were being filmed had some sensitivity to appearance, and smiling did not cause them to think they were more amused.

Sources:

- Strack, Fritz, Leonard L. Martin, and Sabine Stepper. "Inhibiting and facilitating conditions of the human smile: a nonobtrusive test of the facial feedback hypothesis." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 54.5 (1988): 768.

Sitting upright

- Posture has a demonstrated influence on our mood and energy.
- A 2004 study examined the effects of upright and slumped posture on college students' recall of both positive and negative thoughts.
- Participants were asked to generate positive and negative thoughts in upright and slouched positions.
- The study found that it is significantly easier to generate positive thoughts when body posture is upright.
- Participants also reported that negative thoughts were more easily generated in the slumped position than when sitting upright.
- When sitting upright and looking upwards, it was difficult and, for many, almost impossible to recall hopeless, helpless, powerless, and negative memories and easier to recall empowering positive memories.

Source:

- Wilson, Vietta E, and Erik Peper. "The effects of upright and slumped postures on the recall of positive and negative thoughts." *Applied psychophysiology and biofeedback* vol. 29,3 (2004): 189-95.
doi:10.1023/b:apbi.0000039057.32963.34

Confident posture

- Walking with a positive posture can affect how you feel
- A 2014 study by Johannes Michalak examined the relationship between posture and emotions
- Participants walked on a treadmill while matching either a sad or cheerful walking style
- While walking, they were shown a list of words associated with positive and negative emotions
- Participants who had a happier gait remembered more cheerful words
- Those with a depressed style remembered more negative words
- The study concluded that how we walk influences our mood and the information we pay attention to.

Source:

- Michalak, Johannes, et al. "Sitting posture makes a difference-embodiment effect on depressive memory bias." *Clinical psychology & psychotherapy* vol. 21,6 (2014): 519-24. doi:10.1002/cpp.1890

Laughter

- Laughter relaxes our muscles, improves blood sugar, and lowers blood pressure.
- Laughing is social, and you're 30% more likely to laugh with others than alone.
- Laughter decreases isolation.
- A study showed that watching a 1-hour humorous video (spontaneous laughter) increases our natural killer cell activity, IgG, IgM, and other leukocytes.

Sources:

- Berk, Lee S., et al. "Modulation of neuroimmune parameters during the eustress of humor-associated mirthful laughter." *Alternative therapies in health and medicine* 7.2 (2001): 62-76.
- Louie, Dexter, et al. "The Laughter Prescription: A Tool for Lifestyle Medicine." *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* vol. 10,4 262-267. 23 Jun. 2016, doi:10.1177/1559827614550279

Open Body Language

- Closed and protective body language is adopted when feeling anxious, stressed, or uncomfortable
- Closed body language (aka "body blocking")
 - crossing arms and legs, lowered head, less eye contact
- Body "mirroring" can be hindered when we experience social anxiety
- Adopting an open and confident posture can change mood and increase confidence
- Open body language includes uncrossed legs, open arms, shoulders back, and head up
- Small changes in body language can impact our mood and how we receive information

Sources:

- Bambaerero, Fatemeh, and Nasrin Shokrpour. "The impact of the teachers' non-verbal communication on success in teaching." *Journal of advances in medical education & professionalism* 5.2 (2017): 51.

