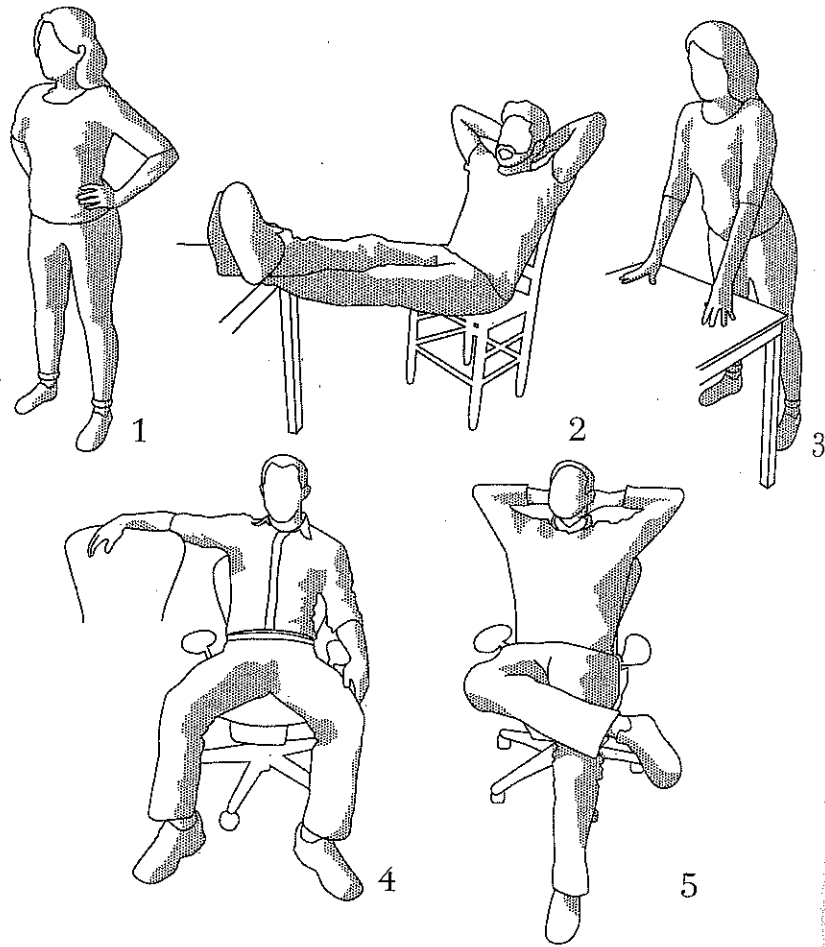
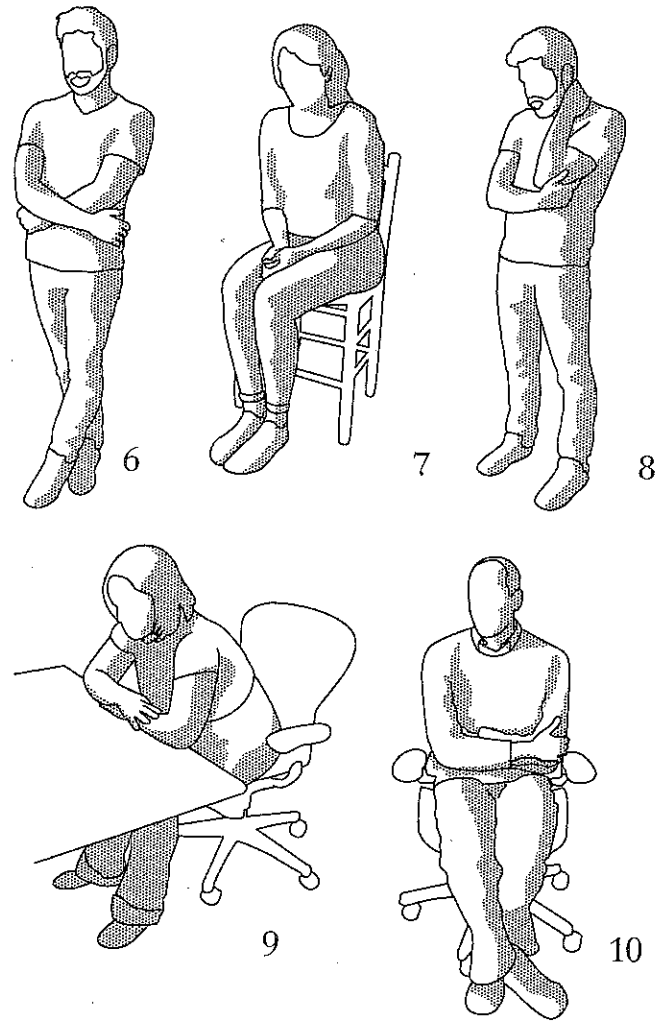


Powerful Poses



Powerless Poses



Joe interpreted the man's peacocking not as a message to the interrogator, however, but as a signal to himself — a way to puff up his nerve in a tough situation. I asked Joe if anyone had scientifically tested the hypothesis that one can make oneself feel more powerful by “faking” dominant body language. His response: “Not yet, but you're going to do it.”

That's when it all came together. Fear was limiting me, and it was limiting my students, but maybe it didn't have to. We were going to do this research, damn it — we were going to study how the body talks to the mind.

This science isn't just about how people perceive us through our body language, and the story isn't only about whether or not college students speak up in class. The way we carry ourselves from moment to moment blazes the trail our lives take. When we embody shame and powerlessness, we submit to the status quo, whatever that may be. We acquiesce to emotions, actions, and outcomes that we resent. We don't share who we really are. And all this has real-life consequences.

N.B. * The way you carry yourself is a source of personal power — the kind of power that is the key to presence. It's the key that allows you to unlock yourself — your abilities, your creativity, your courage, and even your generosity. It doesn't give you skills or talents you don't have; it helps you to share the ones you do have. It doesn't make you smarter or better informed; it makes you more resilient and open. It doesn't change who you are; it allows you to *be* who you are.

Expanding your body expands your mind, which allows you to be present. And the results of that presence can be far-reaching.

Taking control of your body language is not just about posing in a powerful way. It's also about the fact that we pose in a powerless way much more often than we think — and we need to change that.

Our Experiments in Power Posing

As scientists, the first thing we needed was a clear hypothesis.

This was our thinking: if nonverbal expressions of power are so hardwired that we instinctively throw our arms up in a V when we win a race — regardless of cultural background, gender, or whether we've seen anyone else do it — and if William James was right that our emotions are as much a result as they are a cause of our physical expressions, then what would happen if we adopt expansive postures even when we are feeling powerless? Since we naturally expand our bodies when we feel powerful, do we also naturally feel powerful when we expand our bodies?

If our experiment demonstrated that the answer is yes, it could provide the tool I'd been searching for to help students (and others) become present when they most needed to be, the tool that would help them bring their boldest selves to their biggest challenges.

Eager to test our hypothesis that expansive postures can cause people to feel more powerful, we decided to begin by looking at two key factors: feelings of power and confidence and willingness to take risks.

But before my collaborators Dana Carney and Andy Yap and I could begin our first experiment, we had to take care of some critical groundwork — identifying and testing appropriate poses. From a thorough review of the body-language literature, we selected five high-power poses (see figures 1–5) and five low-power poses (see figures 6–10). The high-power poses were both expansive (meaning that the body took up a significant amount of space) and open (meaning that the limbs were held far away from the body), and the low-power poses were constricted and clenched, as I was when riding in a car after my accident.