

New study: Does putting your feet up = power?

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(Medical Xpress)—A new set of studies by researchers at three universities led by University at Buffalo psychologist Lora E. Park, PhD, has found that the previously assumed link between expansive body postures and power is not fixed, but depends on the type of posture enacted and people's cultural background.

"Stand Tall, but Don't Put Your Feet Up: Universal and Culturally-Specific Effects of Expansive Postures on Power" is reported in the

November 2013 issue of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 49, Issue 5). Park's co-authors are Lindsey Streamer, UB doctoral student in [social psychology](#); Li Huang, PhD, assistant professor of organizational behavior, INSEAD; and Adam Galinsky, Vikram S. Pandit Professor of Business, Columbia Business School.

The researchers conducted four studies with more than 600 men and women born in the U.S. or East Asia (e.g., China, South Korea, Japan) in order to examine the psychological experience of viewing and enacting expansive (versus constricted) body postures.

"The expansive postures, which were based on previous research, consisted of an expansive-hands-spread-on-desk pose (i.e., standing up and leaning over on a desk with hands spread apart), an expansive-upright-sitting pose (i.e., resting one's ankle on the opposite leg's knee with one arm on the armrest and the other hand on the desk), and an expansive-feet-on-desk pose (i.e., leaning back in one's chair with feet on top of the desk, hands placed behind one's head, fingers interlocked and elbows spread out wide)," says Park, associate professor in the Department of Psychology.

"In four studies," she says, "the effect of each posture on participants was evaluated in comparison to a constricted [body posture](#) (e.g., sitting with hands under thighs, standing with arms wrapped around one's body).

Study 1 found that the expansive-feet-on-desk pose, compared to other expansive or constricted postures, was perceived by both Americans and East Asians as the least consistent with East Asian cultural norms of modesty, humility and restraint.

Studies 2a and 2b found that for both Americans and East Asians, the expansive-hands-spread-on-desk and expansive-upright-sitting poses led

to greater feelings of power (e.g., in charge, powerful, dominant, etc.) than those evoked by constricted postures.

Study 3 found that the expansive-feet-on-desk pose led to greater feelings of power and implicit activation of power-related concepts for Americans, but not for East Asians.

Study 4 found that compared to a constricted posture, the expansive feet-on-desk pose led to greater risk-taking among Americans, but not among East Asians. Specifically, after holding the posture for three minutes, American participants were more likely to choose to take action to deal with a problem or situation presented to them, whereas this posture did not have the same effect on East Asian participants.

"Overall, these findings suggest that expansive postures have both universal and culturally specific effects on people's thoughts, feelings and behavior," says Park.

"Some postures, such as the expansive-hands-spread-on-desk and expansive-upright-sitting poses, "she says, "make people across cultures feel more powerful. In contrast, expansive postures that violate cultural norms, such as putting one's feet on the desk, do not make all individuals feel powerful."

"It is the symbolic meaning of a posture," Park says, "rather than the posture itself, that influences the psychological experiences of individuals from different cultures."

More information: [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ...
ii/S0022103113001261](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0022103113001261)

Provided by University at Buffalo

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