

# Swiss Center for Affective Sciences

Reaching to the sky or getting on your knees:  
Emotions expressed in the full body

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## LECTURE SERIES

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16:15 - 18:00

Emotions are expressed nonverbally, and not only in the face, but in the full body. In addition, the body reciprocally influences the construction of an emotional experience. These two statements, although central to many emotion theories, have not received enough empirical evidence attention. In this talk, I will present some relevant and recent results from a larger project studying the embodiment of emotions and of religious experiences. First, we documented full body expressions of various positive (e.g., joy, awe, hope) and negative (e.g., sadness, guilt) emotions by asking participants to position a small mannequin according to how they would express these emotions. Postures were coded for multiple dimensions of expansiveness, arm and head position, and other features. Results document distinct postures for these emotions as well as different meanings. We then focused on specific body postures varying on body's orientation (upward vs. downward) and space (expansive vs. constrictive), to study whether they would be differentially associated with the experience of positive and negative emotions in the real-life context of church attendance (among Christians) and in the context of prayer (among Christians, Hindus, and Muslims). Finally, in two studies we directly manipulated postures in the lab and tested whether they would modify the affective and physiological responses to music. We find the strongest support for an association between positive emotions and bodily postures that are expansive and oriented upward. Together, this research advances our limited knowledge of full body emotional expression, and especially that of positive emotions. It also highlights the importance of studying mind-body connections to more fully understand emotional and religious experiences.

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