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Embodying attentional states: The role of posture in task performance

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Abstract: When participating in either an engaging or unengaging task, individuals appear to adopt consistent postures that may reflect a focused or unfocused attentional state. Posture is known to communicate certain affective states; however, it is of interest whether posture may elicit an attentional state that can influence performance on a task. To address this question, participants were first instructed to sit focused or unfocused while conducting a word recall and visual search task. Results showed a benefit of being in a focused posture in the visual search task as well as consistent postures adopted within groups. However, when participants were given instructions on how to sit, without explicit mention of focused or unfocused postures, no performance differences were observed. These results suggest that posture alone may not be enough to elicit particular attentional states, at least not in the tasks we used. Implications and future directions will be discussed.