

Study suggests poker 'arms' better tell than poker 'face'

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An image of a person playing the poker variant, Texas Hold'em. Credit: Wikipedia.

(Medical Xpress)—A team of researchers at Tufts University has found that college students are better able to gauge the confidence a poker player has in his or her hand watching their arm movements versus studying their face. In their paper published in the journal *Psychological*

Science, the team describes three experiments they ran using volunteers and video clips that examined the confidence level of poker players.

Most everyone has heard of a "poker face"—where a person prevents their emotions from showing in their facial expression. Experienced poker players learn to control their faces to prevent other players from deducing how strong of a hand they are holding. But new research suggests, players may want to look a little lower to gain information from [opponents](#)—to their arms as they are pushing their chips forward during bet making.

To find out if players give away how much confidence they have in their hand with their [arm movements](#), the researchers videotaped professional poker players during a tournament. They then enlisted the assistance of 78 [college students](#) to watch 20 two second videos edited from the tapes to see if they could guess how the players were feeling about their hands. The researchers broke the volunteers into three groups and then ran three types of experiments based on the videos they'd made. The first had volunteers watching videos that showed just the faces and torsos of players in action. This experiment revealed that volunteers did worse than chance at guessing player confidence. In the second experiment, the volunteers watched videos that showed just the arms and torsos of players in action. This time, the volunteers did much better than chance at guessing how confident the players were (based on how the game turned out after the players revealed their cards). In the third experiment, the [volunteers](#) were asked to watch the same videos with just arms and torso showing and then to rate how confident they felt the player seemed and how smoothly they moved their arms. Those with better hands were deemed more confident and moved more smoothly than did those with poor hands.

The experiments show, the researchers contend, that despite years of work on their poker face, professional [poker players](#) have not quashed

obvious types of body language that can give away how confident they are with their hands. This suggests that simple clues such as the way a person moves their arms can offer up evidence of how confident a person is feeling.

More information: Quality of Professional Players' Poker Hands Is Perceived Accurately From Arm Motions, *Psychological Science*, Published online before print September 12, 2013, [DOI: 10.1177/0956797613487384](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613487384)

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