

Poses of power are less powerful than we thought

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

Legs apart, chest thrust forward, shoulders back: these 'power poses' are supposed to influence hormone production and willingness to take on risk in accordance with a study that attained global attention. Scientists from the University of Zurich, however, found no support for these assumptions in a large study. 'Power poses' do not influence behavior, but they might allow someone to feel more secure.

Hands pressed to the hips or perhaps leaning back with arms crossed behind the head are typical poses of power. Referred to as power poses or high status gestures in technical jargon, they are assumed to stimulate both psychological and physiological processes. Researchers around Amy Cuddy of Harvard Business School concluded in a study in 2010 that power poses held for a short time influenced the hormones and the willingness to take on financial risks for the subjects participating in the study. Scientists of the University of Zurich now refute these findings with a large study: power poses affect neither the masculine hormone testosterone, the [stress hormone cortisol](#), nor the subjects' actual behavior.

Power poses let subjects feel more powerful

Bodily demonstrations of power, however, influence one's own perception of power, a result that the previous study also found. Study leader Eva Ranehill of the Department of Economics at the University of Zurich states, "This indicates that the main influence of power poses is the fact that subjects realize that they feel more self-confident. We find no proof, however, that this has any effect on their behavior or their physiology."

In the study, 102 men and 98 women, most of them students from Zurich, were randomly assigned to take on bodily poses with "much power" or "little power". Afterwards, the participants completed a task involving their willingness to take on financial risk where they could choose between a fixed monetary sum and a risky lottery game, the same conditions as in the 2010 study at Harvard. The risky option was a lottery with a 50% chance of either winning either ten or zero francs. The fixed option varied from two to seven francs. In order to assess the effect of the power poses on hormonal levels, two saliva samples from each subject were collected and analyzed. The first saliva sample was taken before the participants had assumed the higher or lower positions and the

second at the end of the study, after the behavioral tasks.

It takes more than just one study

"Our study is much more meaningful than the original study, as we have much more data," states Roberto Weber, Professor at the University of Zurich and co-author of the new study. "The greater number of subjects in our study makes it much less probable that our results are due to coincidence. Our study is to the best of our knowledge the only published paper that again examines the effect of power poses on hormones." Roberto Weber adds that the results of the new, larger study also demonstrate how important it is to replicate published research results.

More information: Eva Ranehill, Anna Dreber, Magnus Johannesson, Susanne Leiberg, Sunhae Sul, Roberto A. Weber. Assessing the Robustness of Power Posing: No Effect on Hormones and Risk Tolerance in a Large Sample of Men and Women. *Psychological Science*, March 26, 2015.

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