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Practice

"Power posing": what remains of one of the best-known ideas about confidence

The 2010 study on hormones and body posture, the replication with 200 participants that did not confirm it, the statement by one of its authors and what really builds confidence

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In 2010 the researchers **Dana Carney**, **Amy Cuddy** and **Andy Yap** published a study that attracted huge attention. They asked 42 participants to hold for about two minutes "powerful", open postures, such as hands on hips or feet on the desk, or "weak", closed postures. According to the results, the open postures raised testosterone, lowered the stress hormone cortisol and made participants more willing to take risks in a game.

The idea spread fast. A talk by Amy Cuddy in 2012 became one of the most viewed of all time on the TED platform.

The replication

In 2015 a team led by the economist Eva Ranehill repeated the experiment with about 200 participants, many more. They found no effect on hormones and no effect on willingness to take risks. They found only a small increase in the feeling of power that participants themselves reported.

In 2016 Dana Carney, the first author of the original study, published a statement in which she wrote that she no longer believed the effects of "power posing" were real, and explained the methodological problems of the first study. Amy Cuddy and other colleagues have argued that there is still evidence for a small effect on the subjective feeling of power.

> *Science did not fail here. On the contrary: someone tested a famous idea again, and one of the authors had the courage to accept the result.*

What remains

Today the most careful conclusion is this: body posture may slightly affect how we feel in the moment, but there is no strong evidence that it changes our hormones or our behaviour in any important way. Two minutes in front of the mirror do not replace preparation.

What really builds confidence

1. **Preparation.** Knowing the material well is the strongest source of assurance.
2. **Practice in similar conditions.** Rehearse the presentation out loud, in front of a friend, standing up.
3. **Experiences of success.** The psychologist Albert Bandura showed that repeated small achievements are the main basis of the belief "I can do it".
4. **Reinterpreting the emotion.** A racing heart before going on stage can be seen as energy, not as a sign of failure.
5. **An upright, calm posture** remains useful, but as part of communication, not as hormonal magic.

Sources

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