If you stand like Superman or Wonder Woman, would you feel stronger?
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Dominant or upright postures can help people feel—and maybe even behave—more confidently. A new analysis by the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (MLU), the University of Bamberg and The Ohio State University has confirmed what small studies already suggested. The team evaluated data from around 130 experiments with a total of 10,000 participants. The results also disprove the controversial claim that certain poses influence a person's hormone levels. The study is published in the *Psychological Bulletin*.

Posture and body language are popular tools used in psychology. "In therapy, they can help people feel secure and experience positive feelings," says psychologist Robert Körner from MLU and the University of Bamberg. The research of power posing deals with the extent to which very bold poses can influence a person's feelings and self-worth. One common example is the victory pose with outstretched arms which, according to several studies, is meant to increase self-confidence. "However, many of these studies are inconclusive and were conducted with small samples. Moreover, studies sometimes have contradictory results," adds Körner. Therefore, the team conducted a meta-analytic (quantitative) review in which they combined the data of around 130 experiments from published and unpublished studies. Complex statistical methods were used to re-assess the data on nearly 10,000 people. The researchers wanted to find out whether posture influences a person's self-perception, behavior and hormone levels.

The team found a connection between an upright posture and power posing and a more positive self-perception. "A dominant pose can, for example, make you feel more self-confident," says personality researcher Professor Astrid Schütz from the University of Bamberg. The team found a similar correlation with behavior, for example task persistence, antisocial behavior, but these effects were less robust. On the other hand, the assertion that certain poses can boost the production of physiological effects, for example hormones, such as testosterone and cortisol, which had been claimed in previous research, was not supported. "The findings on the physiological effects of power posing are not robust and have not been replicated by independent research groups," explains Schütz.

Through their work, the team was also able to identify some limitations in previous research. For example, most studies worked without a control group; participants were asked to adopt either a dominant, open or a more submissive posture. Groups without those poses were only rarely included. "Because of that, it is not possible to say where the differences come from, as only one of the two poses may have an effect," says Robert Körner. Moreover, almost all of the studies have so far been conducted in so called WEIRD societies (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic), so it is not clear whether the findings can be applied to other cultures. The differences between males and females and across different age groups, on the other hand, were nonsignificant.
More information: Robert Körner et al,
Dominance and prestige: Meta-analytic review of
experimentally induced body position effects on
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