

Unit 7 AMY CUDDY

Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are

Part 1

... So **we're**¹ really fascinated with body language, and we're particularly interested in other people's body language. You know, we're interested in, like, you know, an awkward interaction, or a smile, or a **contemptuous**² glance, or maybe a very awkward wink, ...

So **social scientists**³ have spent a lot of time looking at the effects of our body language, or other people's body language, on judgments. And we **make sweeping judgments**⁴ and inferences from body language. And those judgments can predict really meaningful life outcomes, like who we hire or promote, who we ask out on a date. ...

So when we think of nonverbals, we think of how we judge others, how they judge us, and what the outcomes are. We tend to forget, though, the other audience that's influenced by our nonverbals, and that's ourselves. ...

Part 2

So my main collaborator **Dana Carney, who's at Berkeley**⁵, and I really wanted to know, can you fake it till you make it? Like, can you do this just for a little while and actually experience a behavioral outcome that makes you seem more powerful? So we know that our nonverbals **govern**⁶ how other people think and feel about us. There's a lot of evidence. But

our question really was, do our nonverbals govern how we think and feel about ourselves? ...

So this is what we did. We decided to bring people into the **lab**⁷ and run a little experiment, and these people adopted, for two minutes, either high-power poses or low-power poses, and I'm just going to show you five of the poses, although they took on only two. So here's one. A couple more. This one has been dubbed the "Wonder Woman" by the media. Here are a couple more. So you can be standing or you can be sitting. And here are the low-power poses. So you're folding up, you're making yourself small. This one is very low-power. When you're touching your neck, you're really protecting yourself. So this is what happens. They come in, they spit into a **vial**⁸, we for two minutes say, "You need to do this or this." They don't look at pictures of the poses. We don't want to **prime**⁹ them with a concept of power. We want them to be feeling power, right? So two minutes they do this. We then ask them, "How powerful do you feel?" on a series of items, and then we give them an opportunity to gamble, and then we take another saliva sample. That's it. That's the whole experiment.

So this is what we find. Risk tolerance, which is the gambling, what we find is that when you're in the high-power pose condition, 86 percent of you will gamble. When you're in the low-power pose condition, only 60 percent, and that's a pretty **whopping**¹⁰ significant difference.

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1. When Cuddy refers to "we" in the beginning of her talk, she means the general public.
 2. A "contemptuous" glance is one in which you clearly show that you don't like the other person.
 3. A "social scientist" does research about society and relationships.
 4. If you "make sweeping judgments" about something, you form an opinion about something and believe it to be true as a generalization.
 5. Dana Carney runs the Social and Nonverbal Behavior Lab at University of California, Berkeley.
 6. In this case, to "govern" something means to control it.
 7. "Lab" is short for "laboratory," where science experiments and research are conducted.
 8. A "vial" is a small glass container, usually in the shape of a cylinder.
 9. The verb "prime" means to prepare.
 10. The adjective "whopping" is an informal way to say "very large."

Here's what we find on testosterone. From their **baseline**¹¹ when they come in, high-power people experience about a 20-percent increase, and low-power people experience about a 10-percent decrease. So again, two minutes, and you get these changes. Here's what you get on cortisol. High-power people experience about a 25-percent decrease, and the low-power people experience about a 15-percent increase.

So two minutes lead to these hormonal changes that configure your brain to basically be either assertive, confident, and comfortable, or really stress-reactive, and, you know, feeling sort of **shut down**¹². And we've all had the feeling, right? So it seems that our nonverbals do govern how we think and feel about ourselves, so it's not just others, but it's also ourselves. Also, our bodies change our minds.

Part 3

. . . So when I tell people about this, that our bodies change our minds and our minds can change our behavior, and our behavior can change our outcomes, they say to me, "I don't— It feels fake." Right? So I said, "fake it till you make it." "I don't—It's not me. I don't want to get there and then still feel like a fraud. I don't want to feel like an impostor. I don't want to get there only to feel like I'm not supposed to be here." And that really **resonated**¹³ with me, because I want to tell you a little story about being an impostor and feeling like I'm not supposed to be here.

When I was 19, I was in a really bad car accident. I was thrown out of a car, **rolled**¹⁴ several times. I was thrown from the car. And I woke up in a head injury **rehab ward**¹⁵, and I had been **withdrawn**¹⁶ from college, and I learned that my I.Q. had dropped by two standard deviations, which was very traumatic.

I knew my I.Q. because I had identified with being smart, and I had been called gifted as a child. So I'm taken out of college, I keep trying to go back. They say, "You're not going to finish college. Just, you know, there are other things for you to do, but that's not going to work out for you." So I really struggled with this, and I have to say, having your identity taken from you, your core identity, and for me it was being smart, having that taken from you, there's nothing that leaves you feeling more powerless than that. So I felt entirely powerless. I worked and worked and worked, and I got lucky, and worked, and got lucky, and worked.

Eventually I graduated from college. It took me four years longer than my peers, and I convinced someone, my angel advisor, Susan Fiske, to take me on, and so I ended up at Princeton, and I was like, I am not supposed to be here. I am an impostor. And the night before my first-year talk, and the first-year talk at Princeton is a 20-minute talk to 20 people. That's it. I was so afraid of being found out the next day that I called her and said, "I'm quitting." She was like, "You are not quitting, because **I took a gamble on you**¹⁷, and you're staying. You're going to stay, and this is what you're going to do. You are going to fake it. You're going to do every talk that you ever get asked to do. You're just going to do it and do it and do it, even if you're terrified and just paralyzed and having an **out-of-body experience**¹⁸, until you have this moment where you say, 'Oh my gosh, I'm doing it. Like, I have become this. I am actually doing this.'" So that's what I did. . . .

So at the end of my first year at Harvard, a student who had not talked in class the entire semester, who I had said, "Look, you've gotta participate or else you're going to fail," came into

¹¹. A "baseline" is the starting point; in the case of Cuddy's experiment, this refers to the levels of testosterone and cortisol that participants had before starting the experiment.

¹². When a person feels "shut down," they are psychologically unable to respond normally to a situation.

¹³. When something "resonates" with you, you agree with it, often on a deep level.

¹⁴. Cuddy uses the verb "rolled" to explain that the car turned over multiple times during the accident.

¹⁵. "Rehab" is short for rehabilitation.

¹⁶. To "withdraw" from school means to "drop out" or "leave permanently."

¹⁷. When a person "takes a gamble on" someone, they are taking the risk to support that person even though it's not clear if the person will succeed. The expression can also be used for things, such as a new business venture.

¹⁸. An "out-of-body experience" describes the sensation of feeling so unfamiliar with a situation that it seems like it's not you experiencing it.

my office. I really didn't know her at all. And she said, she came in totally **defeated**¹⁹, and she said, "I'm not supposed to be here." And that was the moment for me. Because two things happened. One was that I realized, oh my gosh, I don't feel like that anymore. You know. I don't feel that anymore, but she does, and I get that feeling. And the second was, she is supposed to be here! Like, she can fake it, she can become it. So I was like, "Yes, you are! You are supposed to be here! And tomorrow you're going to fake it, you're going to make yourself powerful, and, you know, you're gonna—" "And you're going to go into the classroom, and you are going to give the best comment ever." You know? And she gave the best comment ever, and people turned around and they were like, oh my God, I didn't even notice her sitting there, you know?

She comes back to me months later, and I realized that she had not just faked it till she made it, she had actually faked it

till she became it. So she had changed. And so I want to say to you, don't fake it till you make it. Fake it till you become it. . . . So I want to ask you first, you know, both to try power posing, and also I want to ask you to share the science, because this is simple. **I don't have ego involved in this**²⁰. Give it away. Share it with people, because the people who can use it the most are the ones with no resources and no technology and no status and no power. Give it to them because they can do it in private. They need their bodies, privacy and two minutes, and it can significantly change the outcomes of their life.

Thank you.

This is an edited version of Cuddy's 2012 TED Talk. To watch the full talk, visit TED.com.

¹⁹. A person who feels "defeated" is demoralized.

²⁰. When Cuddy explains "I don't have ego involved in this." she means that she doesn't need credit for her power poses; she simply wants people who can benefit from them to start using them.