Magic bullet, or mental scam: an examination of the Power Pose

Power posing is a technique that claims to assist in assist in entering an assertive and confident state of mind. One study published in Psychological Science suggests that “high-power displays (as opposed to low-power displays) causes physiological, psychological, and behavioral changes” (Carnet et al. 2010). This is the primary study that is referenced in Amy Cuddy’s TED talk about power posing. Inversely however, there studies that argue the opposite, with a similar study performed on a larger sample in found that similar reported effects of feelings of power, but found no change in participant behavior or hormonal level (Ranehill et al. 2015). Similarly, another study in 2017 performed an interesting experiment involving the examination of the effect of power posing, but also analyzed the effect following participant viewing of Cuddy’s TED talk. This study found no support for Carnet’s findings and suggested cessation of the recommendation of power posing to the low-status and powerless until more supportive data can be gathered (Cesario & Johnson, 2017). In light of these more recent studies, I must conclude that there is a significant lack of evidence that agrees with Carnet’s study, and by proxy Cuddy’s TED talk as well.

Looking beyond the lack of scientific evidence however, I do feel that there is some merit to power posing, and interestingly that the basic philosophy behind this technique falls strongly in line with my personal philosophy. Disregarding the scientific aspect that Cuddy claims in her talk, if we consider the use of power posing as a form of autosuggestion or encouragement placebo, we can find some value for power posing. The idea that simply posing can increase one’s self confidence can be utilized to help influence the mental state in the desired direction, especially in a similar manner to autosuggestion. It is important however to understand that power posing is not a magical or scientific method to instantly improve the performance and influence a successful outcome. Indeed, a similar conclusion is made by Cesario and Johnson’s study, “Failing repeatedly when you expect to succeed (because you held expansive poses and felt powerful) may decrease motivation and increase uncertainty regarding the connection between one’s actions and outcomes” (Cesario & Johnson, 2017). Therefore, when considering the use of power posing, it is best to consider it similar to giving a motivational speech to oneself and not hide behind it when experiencing failure. For my personal case, I can see the value of utilizing this technique to help bolster confidence and at least distract my mind from a negative mental state, but as stated above I will not consider it the reason for any success or failures that may result following its use.

Bibliography

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