

THE FACE OF POWER

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Meeting of the European Human Behaviour and Evolution Association, London, UK, April 5-8, 2016

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do specific postures which are associated with power have a bearing on the participant's facial appearance?
- Are others able to distinguish faces after "high-power posing" from faces after "low-power posing"?

INTRODUCTION

- In humans and other animals, open, expansive postures (compared to contracted postures) are evolutionary developed expressions of power¹
- These postures have been shown to cause neuroendocrine and behavioural changes²

METHOD

- 16 models (8 women, $M = 23.1$ years, $SD = 3.1$) adopted two different high-power and two different low-power postures
- Postures were held for 2 minutes each (power-posing sessions were performed on two consecutive days)
- Postures were described verbally and were demonstrated with images taken from Carney et al. (2010)²



- The models' faces were photographed 4-5 minutes after each power posture



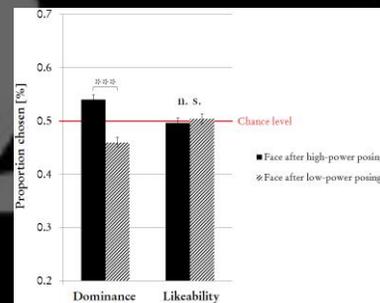
- Saliva samples were taken before (baseline) and 17 minutes after each power posture (cf. Carney et al., 2010²)
- High-power and low-power photographs of each model were paired
- An independent sample of 100 participants (49 women, $M = 23.4$ years, $SD = 4.8$) were asked to pick the more dominant and the more likeable version of each face pair (2-alternative forced choice)

CONCLUSION

- Body postures influence facial appearance
- After adopting a posture associated with high power you look more dominant!

RESULTS

- Facial pictures taken after high-power posing were chosen significantly more often as being more dominant looking than pictures taken after low-power posing ($M = .54$, $SD = .094$, $t = 4.24$, $p < .001$)
- There was no preference when asked to choose the more likeable photograph (50% chance level, $M = .504$, $SD = .091$, $t = .48$, $p = .63$)



- Hormonal analysis of saliva samples revealed only an effect of cortisol: High-power posing resulted in a decrease in cortisol compared to baseline ($t = 2.59$, $p = .017$)
- Facial width-to-height ratio (fWHR) as a marker of dominance³ did not differ between faces after high-power and low-power posing ($p = .36$)
- A further independent sample of 17 participants (15 women, $M = 24.8$ years, $SD = 3.0$) rated each photograph for head tilt; posture of head is not the reason for higher dominance ratings after high-power posing (all p 's $> .15$)

DISCUSSION

- Faces after high-power posing are perceived as more dominant looking than the same faces after low-power posing
- The underlying mechanism remains unclear (at least it seems not to rely on testosterone, or fWHR, or head tilt)
- Maybe postures influence facial muscle activity?
- This finding may have implications for everyday life, for instance when a dominant appearance is needed

REFERENCES

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3. Alrajih, S., & Ward, J. (2014). Increased facial width-to-height ratio and perceived dominance in the faces of the UK's leading business leaders. *British Journal of Psychology*, *105*, 153-161. doi: 10.1111/bjop.12035

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This research was funded by SNF Project No. PP00PI 139072