

(Em)power Posing for Increased Participation

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Introduction

In her TED Talk, viewed over 42 million times, social psychologist Amy Cuddy reveals that assuming a **high power pose** (like those at right) for just two minutes, **boosts testosterone** (the dominance hormone), **lowers cortisol** (the stress hormone), and **makes people more likely to take risks**. Cuddy (2016) also states that power posing makes us “**feel more powerful, confident, and assertive, less stressed and anxious, and happier and more optimistic.**”

Research Questions

Q1: Could power posing **improve participation in small-group work** in the English classroom?

Q2: Could power posing **improve participation in whole-class activities** in the English classroom?

The “feet-on-the-desk” pose was not used due to differences in cultural norms. Female students were not asked to do this “spread-legs” pose for the same reason.

Methods

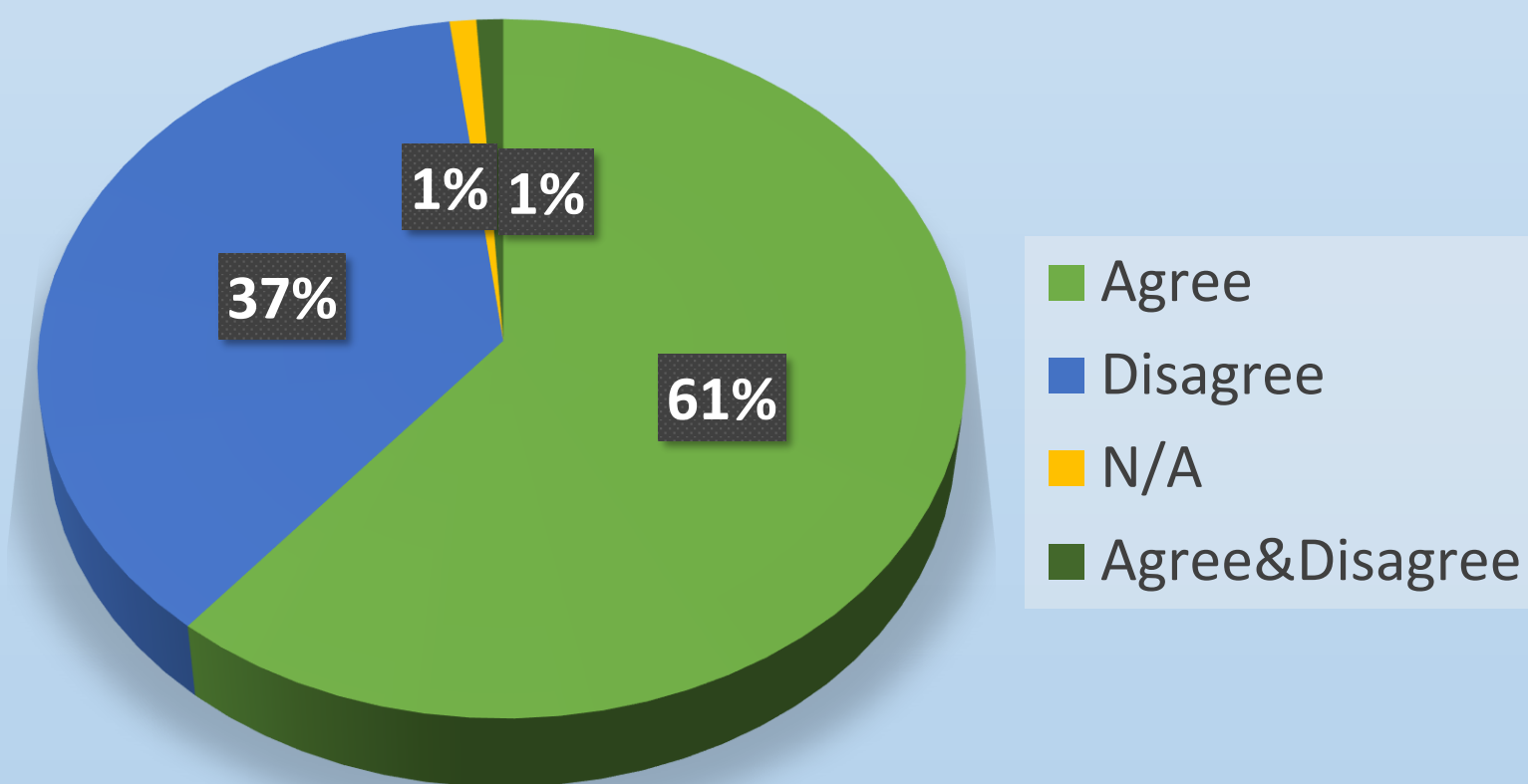
About midway through the semester, students were shown the pictures of “high power” body language at right, and were assigned poses to assume. A timer was set for two minutes and while students held their poses, the instructor explained Cuddy’s original experiment, including the points highlighted in the Introduction at left. Students were not explicitly told why they were doing the experiment. After posing for two minutes, class was conducted as usual: random groups were assigned, and students discussed their answers to a previously assigned task. Following that, a whole group discussion was held.



Results

As shown in the graph at right, most students (61%) agreed that they felt more comfortable doing group work after power posing. This is consistent with this researcher’s notes, which included, “seemed to be paying more attention,” “class atmosphere improved,” and “students listened to each other better.” Also, participation rates signified by the green bars (at far right) show the **best** participation rates of each class, meaning that at the very least, all classes performed at the best level they had ever performed at before, and some showed a dramatic increase in hand raising. In the most extreme case—Electrical Engineering—the number of students who raised their hands to volunteer answers in the class rose 59%. Moreover, in all classes but Pharmacy, the participation rates remained higher in the class following the power pose class. This may suggest a long-term positive effect of power posing on class participation.

Power posing made me feel more comfortable doing group work.



Further study

This experiment was conducted in the ninth or tenth class of the semester.

☞ **If the activity were done at the beginning of the semester when students were new to each other, would there be immediate and lasting effects on class atmosphere and participation?**

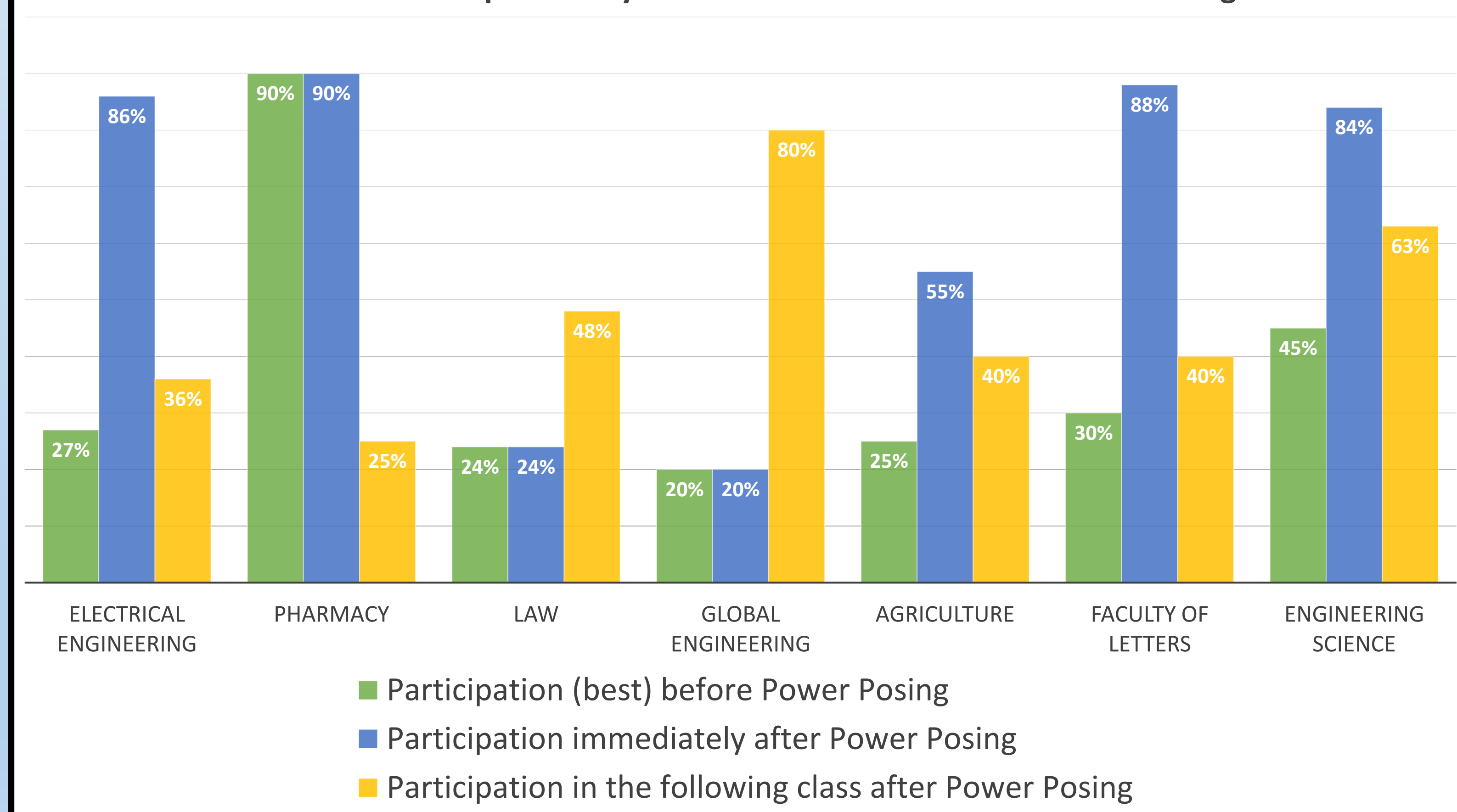
☞ **Would having students watch Amy Cuddy’s TED Talk about power posing perhaps make them more open-minded about the experiment?**

References

Cuddy, A. (2012, June). *Amy Cuddy: Your body language may shape who you are* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are

Cuddy, A. (2016). *Presence: Bringing your boldest self to your biggest challenges*. London: Orion Books.

Participation* by class before and after initial Power Posing



*“Participation” here is defined as one student raising her/his hand. Each student was counted only once, regardless of the number of times s/he raised her/his hand.