

# YOUR BODY LANGUAGE SHAPES WHO YOU ARE

**AMY CUDDY** Social psychologist and academic, TED speaker

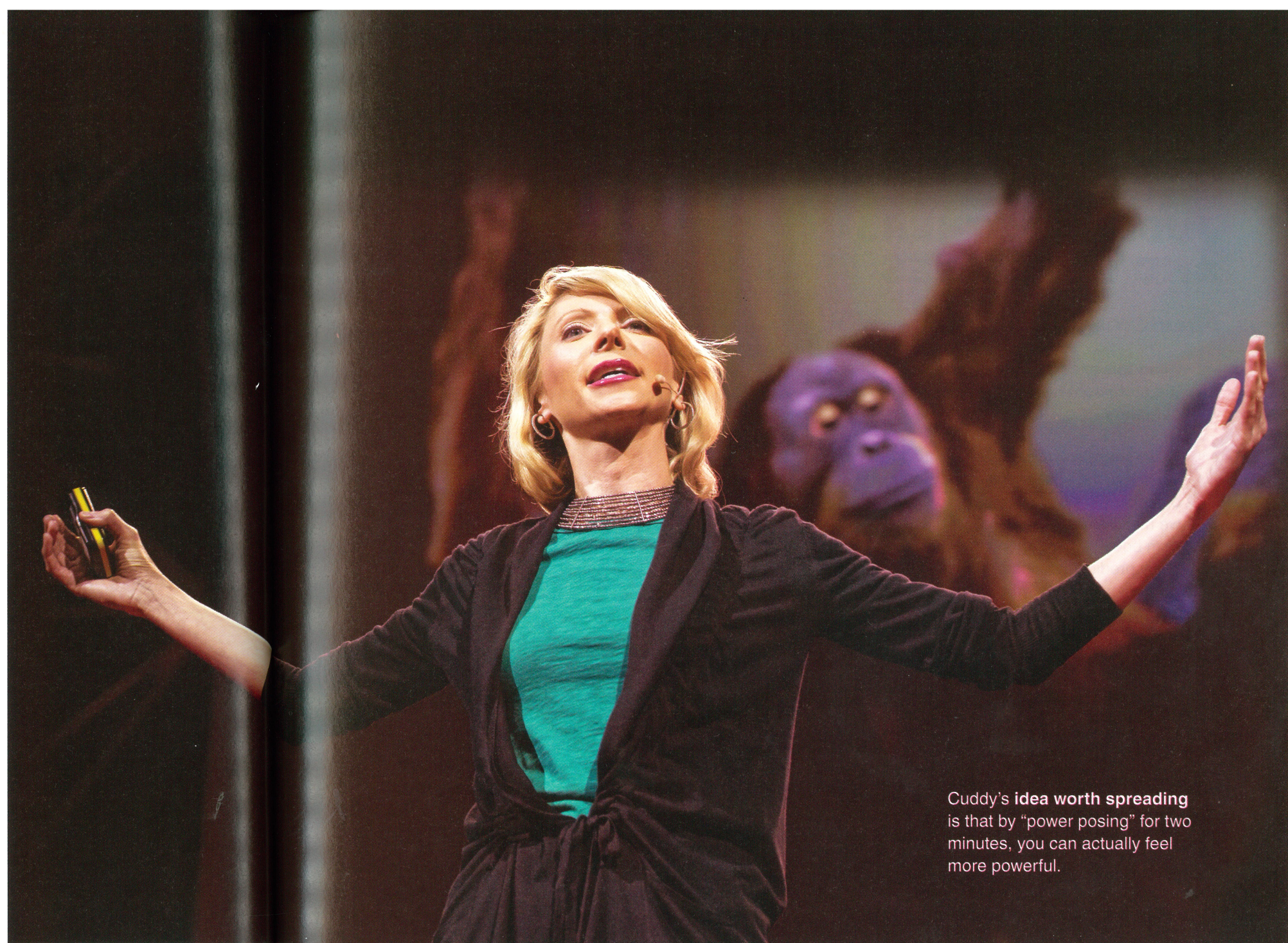
A Amy Cuddy was involved in a serious car accident when she was a student, and doctors believed she would not be able to complete college. But Cuddy prevailed, and that experience taught her a lot about persistence. Now she is a professor and social psychologist at Harvard Business School.

The challenges that Cuddy faced when she was a student have made her keenly aware of her own students' attitudes and feelings. In her classes, she observed important differences between the body language of the male and the female MBA students, and the implications those differences had on student success rates.

These observations led her to research power dynamics based on nonverbal communication—how we judge others and how we are judged without saying a word. Cuddy's work caught the public's attention. Her TED Talk on the subject has been viewed more than 20 million times.

**prevail:** v. to succeed against the odds

**implications:** n. possible future results or effects



Cuddy's **idea worth spreading** is that by "power posing" for two minutes, you can actually feel more powerful.

In this lesson, you are going to watch segments of Cuddy's TED Talk. Use the information about Cuddy on page 100 to answer the questions.

1. What happened to Cuddy when she was a college student?

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2. What did she notice at Harvard Business School?

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3. Why do you think Cuddy's TED Talk has been so popular?

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PART 1

JUDGING OTHERS AND OURSELVES

PREVIEWING

A. Read this excerpt from Cuddy’s talk. Choose the statement below that provides the best summary.

“So social scientists 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 and inferences from body language. And those judgments can really predict meaningful life outcomes, like who we hire or promote, who we ask out on a date.”

- 1. Social scientists judge people based on their body language.
- 2. We make judgments about one another based on our body language.
- 3. Businesses are hiring social scientists to help them choose their employees.

GETTING THE MAIN IDEAS

Watch the first segment of the talk and answer the questions below.

- 1. Why do you think Cuddy shows the photos of famous politicians? Note down some ideas and then discuss with a partner.
- 2. What does Amy Cuddy mean by *interaction*? Choose the best definition.
  - a. Talking to, or doing things with, other people
  - b. The way you feel about something that was said
  - c. Feeling happy about something you did or said

3. Cuddy mentions two areas of our lives on which body language can have an effect. What are they? Complete the sentences with your ideas.

The first is  
The second is

4. When Cuddy talks about “the other audience” that is influenced by our nonverbal communication, who does she mean? Discuss with a partner.

CRITICAL THINKING

Reflecting. Can you think of moments in life where people may judge us based on body language? Note down your ideas and then discuss with a partner.

PART 2

FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT?

GETTING THE MAIN POINT

A. Read the excerpt from the next segment of Cuddy’s talk. What do you think the question “Can you fake it till you make it?” means? Discuss with a partner.

“So, my main collaborator, Dana Carney, who’s at Berkeley, 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?”

B. Watch the next segment of Cuddy’s talk. Complete the sentence about Cuddy’s main point.

When you pretend to be powerful,

- a. most people will realize you are faking
- b. you are more likely to feel powerful
- c. other people around you will feel powerful as well

CRITICAL THINKING

Inferring. What can we infer about risk tolerance from the results of the experiment?

PART 3

OUR BODIES CHANGE OUR MINDS

RECOGNIZING SEQUENCE

A. Read the statements (a–g) about Cuddy’s story. As you watch the final part of the talk, put her story into the correct order (1–7).

- a. She begins graduate school at Princeton under Susan Fiske.
- b. Cuddy fakes it . . . and she makes it!
- c. Her I.Q. level drops, and she is told she won’t be able to finish college.
- d. Her advisor won’t allow her to quit and insists that she fake it.
- 1 e. Cuddy is involved in a serious car accident.
- f. Feeling she doesn’t belong, she wants to quit before her first-year talk.
- g. She completes her college degree four years later than her peers.

UNDERSTANDING KEY DETAILS

A. What do you think people mean when they tell Cuddy that they don’t want to feel like “a fraud” or “an impostor”? Note down your answers and then discuss your ideas with a partner.

**B. Watch** (▶) the final segment of Cuddy's talk again. Then answer the questions.

1. How did the graduate student feel before she came to talk to Cuddy?
  - a. She felt that she was going to fail.
  - b. She felt that she didn't belong there.
2. What did Cuddy tell the student to do?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What was the outcome for that student?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**IDENTIFYING PURPOSE**

Identifying the speaker's purpose is a good way to improve comprehension. Ask yourself questions as you listen. For example, "Why is the speaker sharing this? What does the speaker want me to understand?"

Why do you think Cuddy mentions the graduate student who came to see her? Choose the two best answers.

- a. To illustrate what a supportive teacher she was
- b. To reinforce the topic with an additional example
- c. To prove the point about "fake it till you make it"

**SUMMARIZING**

Summarize the conclusion of Amy Cuddy's talk using the words below.

high-power outcomes power-posing powerless

Amy Cuddy wants people to try \_\_\_\_\_

themselves, and also to share this science with others.

She especially wants it to be shared with those who

feel \_\_\_\_\_. She ends the talk by reminding us that doing \_\_\_\_\_ poses for two minutes, in private, can truly change the \_\_\_\_\_ of a person's life.

**CRITICAL THINKING**

1. **Inferring.** What do you think Cuddy means when she says that the student "had actually faked it till she became it"?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. **Reasoning.** Which do you think is more important, that other people believe in us or that we believe in ourselves? Give reasons for your answer.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**EXPLORE MORE**

Watch Amy Cuddy's full TED Talk at TED.com. In her talk, Cuddy shares several more examples that demonstrate the power of nonverbal communication. Which one was most interesting to you, and why? Share your opinions with your class.

**Project**



High- and low-power poses. Can you guess which are which?

**A. Work in groups of five students. You are going to recreate Cuddy's experiment with low- and high-power poses.**

1. In your group, prepare a short presentation about Amy Cuddy's research on power posing. Or, choose a topic from another unit.
2. Choose a student to be the judge. The judge should leave the room. Two students practice a high-power pose for two minutes; the other two students practice a low-power pose.
3. Ask the judge to come back in. Each student gives his or her presentation prepared in step 1.
4. The judge decides who did a high-power pose and who did a low-power pose.

**B. As a class, discuss the results of the experiment. Use the questions below.**

- Were the judges correct?
- Did the low-power posers feel less confident?
- Did the high-power posers feel more confident?

**EXPLORE MORE**

Find out about the differences in nonverbal communication between various cultures. Is body language the same from culture to culture, or can you find any important differences? What are they? Share what you learn with your class.