

I Look Powerful So You Will Yield to Me: The Effects of Embodied Power and the Perception of Power on Conflict Management

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Abstract : This study investigated the effects of embodiment on conflict management. As shown in the research literature, the physiological (i.e. bodily postures) can affect the emotional and cognitive proceedings of human beings, but little has been shown on whether such effects would have ramifications in decision-making related to other individuals. In this study, conflict is defined as when two parties have seemingly incompatible goals, and the two have to deal with each other in order to maximize one's own gain. In a matched-gender experiment, university undergraduate students were randomly assigned to either the high power condition or the low power condition, with participants in each condition instructed to perform a fix set of bodily postures that would either embody them with a high sense of power or a low sense of power. One high-power participant would pair up with a low-power participant to engage in an integrative bargaining task and a dictator game. Participants also filled out a pre-trial questionnaire and a post-trial questionnaire measuring general sense of power, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Personality was controlled for. Results are expected to support our hypotheses that people who are embodied with power will be more unyielding in a conflict management situation, and that people who are dealing with another person embodied with power will be more yielding in a conflict management situation. As conflicts arise frequently both within and between organizations, a better understanding of how human beings function in conflicts is important. This study should provide evidence that bodily postures can influence the perceived sense of power of the parties involved and hence influence the conflict outcomes. Future research needs to be conducted to investigate further how people perceive themselves and how they perceive their opponents in conflicts, such that we can come up with a behavioral theory of conflict management.

Keywords : conflict management, embodiment, negotiation, perception

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