

## **MEH, WHATEVER: THE EFFECTS OF INDIFFERENCE EXPRESSIONS ON COOPERATION IN SOCIAL CONFLICT**

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This six-studies paper investigates the dynamics of expressing indifference in conflict situations, exploring the interpersonal effects and underlying processes involved. Despite conflicts being inherently emotional, individuals in conflict often opt to overtly suggest indifference. The research is grounded in the Emotions as Social Information (EASI) theory, aiming to distinguish the effectiveness of employing indifference as a conflict-resolution strategy. The first study establishes that individuals generally perceive indifference expressions as neutral emotional signals. However, the second study, conducted experimentally, reveals that counterparts' indifference expressions lead to a reduction in negotiators' cooperative intentions. This effect is observed through both affective processes and inferential processes. Building on this evidence, the third study delves into neurophysiological indicators, showing the negative effects of indifference expressions on cooperative intentions, expected collaboration, and Heart Rate Variability as a measure of affective responding.

The fourth study corroborates these results by establishing the negative impact of indifference expressions on a behavioral measure of cooperation. Finally, Studies 5 and 6, which were pre-registered, highlight the impact of indifference expressions on cooperative intentions and actual cooperation, which is mitigated when counterparts explicitly indicate cooperative intentions. This insight challenges the “diagnostic value” of indifference expressions in social conflict negotiation. Importantly, the research involves a substantial sample size (N = 2,447) and considers various expressive modalities of indifference, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal forms. All in all, the findings underscore that explicit expressions of indifference differ qualitatively from other emotional expressions, including neutral expressions. Moreover, the research raises doubts about the





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efficacy of employing indifference as a deliberate strategy in navigating and resolving social conflicts.

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