



The role of culture and relational context in interpersonal conflict: Do Turks and Canadians use different conflict management strategies?

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Abstract

This study explored cultural differences in conflict management strategies within the context of same-sex friendships, opposite-sex friendships, and romantic relationships. About 114 Turkish and 135 Canadian university students completed a conflict management measure. Results showed that overall, romantic relationships involved a more extensive use of conflict management strategies than did opposite-sex friendships, with same-sex friendships falling in-between the two. Cultural differences emerged, however, in the types of conflict management strategies chosen: Turks reported refraining from conflict, postponing conflict, and employing persuasion to a greater extent than did Canadians, whereas Canadians were more likely to compromise, appeal to third-party assistance, and give priority to the other party in the conflict. Moreover, Canadians tended to vary their strategies depending on the type of relationship, whereas Turks did not. Regardless of culture, men were more likely to refrain, give priority to, and give in to their same-sex friends than romantic partners, whereas women were more likely to use persuasion with their romantic partners compared to their same-sex friends. Although cultural and gender influences on conflict management within different types of relationships is provided, the type of relationship seems to be a more promising indicator of preferred conflict management strategies.

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1. Introduction

In the past few decades, there has been a considerable amount of research on conflict and conflict management within intimate relationships (Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Cahn, 1992; Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Conflict has been conceptualized at many different levels, from subtle non-verbal behaviours that take place in specific interaction episodes to a general expressed dissatisfaction about one's relationship. Interpersonal conflict deserves special attention with respect to its influence on relationship satisfaction and relationship quality, as it is assumed to be inevitable in personal relationships due to the goal discrepancies that arise between the parties (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). Given this inevitability, it is important to examine how conflict is managed. Conflict management involves the strategies that are used to deal with disagreements, ranging from avoidance to direct confrontation. Several typologies of conflict management have been proposed in the realms of intimate relationships (e.g. Canary & Cupach, 1988; Kurdek, 1995) and workplace relationships (e.g. Rahim, 1983). Conflict management in friendships has not received equivalent attention in adulthood to the extent that it has received for that of children and adolescents, perhaps because marital relationships overshadow friendships in terms of importance and prevalence in adulthood (Adams & Blieszner, 1994).

There has been considerable research on intercultural or cross-cultural differences in conflict management styles (e.g. Holt & DeVore, 2005), yet studies tend to focus more on organizational settings than on close interpersonal relationships (i.e., romantic relationships and friendships). The purpose of the current study was to compare the conflict management preferences of young adults from different cultural backgrounds (Canada and Turkey) across friendships and romantic relationships. A second purpose was to examine the influence of gender on conflict management across cultures as well as across different relationships.

Culture is an influential factor in how relationships are conceptualized and in how people choose to manage conflict in their relationships. Culture provides the social norms and rules that regulate and guide interpersonal behaviours, and it can also have an influence through values, self-construals, and relational orientations of individuals (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Goodwin, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, culture may influence perceptions of appropriate modes of communication, face maintenance concerns, and strategies for managing conflict (e.g., Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003).

Various contextual factors within different kinds of close relationships, such as the presence or absence of romantic or sexual involvement, the gender composition, and the power structure can also influence how people manage their conflicts. The typical "demand-withdrawal" pattern that is often found in distressed marriages signifies the consistent gender differences in conflict communication behaviours, yet other contextual factors such as gendered power relations or being the party seeking change may also be important (e.g., Christensen & Heavey, 1990). These contextual factors may operate differently in friendships as opposed to romantic relationships, as the former are typically characterized by a more egalitarian power structure, an absence of romantic or sexual involvement (see Afifi & Faulkner, 2000, for a different perspective), and less interdependence between parties. Thus, romantic relationships, same-sex friendships and opposite-sex friendships become fruitful ground for comparing the effects of gender and relational context on conflict management.

1.1. Culture and interpersonal relationships

Culture shapes the embedded constructions of reality through its influences in a variety of domains such as the educational, legal, and political systems, as well as the media, language, and caretaking practices. These constructions reflect core cultural ideas, values, and norms, and they mould the construals of everyday experiences as being relatively self-determined or as being located within a web of social relations and obligations with less personal discretion (Fiske et al., 1998).

Following Hofstede's (1980, 2001) seminal work on cultural values and dimensions, individualism–collectivism has become the most prominent dimension along which cultures have been categorized (Bond & Smith, 1996; Kagitcibasi & Berry, 1989; Triandis, 1990). Individualism is characterized by self-reliance, independence, detachment from ingroup, and the primacy of personal goals over ingroup goals. Collectivism, on the other hand, is characterized by family integrity, emphases on ingroup harmony and commonalities rather than differences, sharp ingroup–outgroup distinctions, and the regulation of behaviour by group norms rather than personal attitudes (Triandis, 1990, 1995). Individualism and collectivism at the cultural level are generally conceived as the bipolar ends of one continuum along which cultures may be located.

Hofstede's (2001) computed individualism indices for more than 50 nations, where higher scores indicated individualism and lower scores indicated collectivism along the single continuum. Canada ranked the 4th in individualism, with a quite high score of 80, just after the US, Australia, and Great Britain. Turkey, on the other hand, ranked 28th out of the 53 countries in the sample, scoring 37, which was slightly less than the mean of 43 and has been classified as relatively collectivistic since then. Others have also found collectivistic elements in Turkish culture (e.g., Goregenli, 1997; Phalet & Claeys, 1993). Canada has typically been considered an individualistic culture along with the USA (e.g. Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Collectivism at the cultural level tends to be associated with an interdependent self-construal at the individual level, wherein the self is viewed not as a bounded or autonomous entity, but as one that is deeply embedded and defined by its social surroundings and roles (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Consistent with this pattern, Uskul, Hynie, and Lalonde (2004) compared self-construal among young urban Turks and Canadians and found that the Turks scored significantly higher on interdependent self-construal.

Different self-orientations, as well as prevailing social norms, are likely to be associated with cultural differences in how people relate to and communicate with each other in interpersonal relationships. These differences have been investigated in the context of dating and marriage (e.g., Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995), conceptions of romantic love (e.g., Dion & Dion, 1993; Rothbaum & Tsang, 1998), and partner preferences (e.g., Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, & Tatla, 2004). Besides romantic relationships and marriages, friendship has also been a topic of interest, though systematic cross-cultural research on the subject has been scarce with the exception of child or adolescence friendships (Adams & Blieszner, 1994). Nonetheless, some cross-cultural research has considered differences in communication styles, self-disclosure, and intimacy (e.g., Kito, 2005; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 1991; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Accordingly, people from collectivistic cultures tend to self-disclose less, use a more high-context-type communication style, and have more other-related face concerns (rather than self-face concerns) in interpersonal interactions.

Culture also influences whether a relationship is structured as a matter of voluntary personal choice from which a person may freely withdraw (as in a more independent/individualistic construction) or as a less voluntary form of interaction with stronger structural, contextual, and institutional dependencies (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Goodwin, 1999). Such cultural contingencies may influence the preferred strategies of managing conflict (e.g., openly expressing a disagreement or not).

1.2. Gender and conflict management strategies

In addition to the obligatory/voluntary dimension, the gender composition of a relationship (opposite-sex friendship and romantic relationship versus same-sex friendship) may also influence which conflict management strategies are preferred. “Western” research on gender differences in conflict resolution within heterosexual intimate relationships has indicated a typical “demand-withdrawal” pattern, wherein a wife complains or makes demands and her husband responds by withdrawing or otherwise behaving passively.

Christensen and Heavey (1990) found that while men tended to withdraw more overall, it was not the case that women demanded more. A similar finding by Shute and Charlton (2006) indicated that adolescent girls used more anger compared to boys across their same-sex friendships, cross-sex friendships, and romantic relationships. They also found that adolescents resolved conflict in more stereotypical ways (boys using anger and girls compromise) with their same-sex friends, whereas they varied their strategies to match that of their cross-sex friends. A recent meta-analysis by Holt and DeVore (2005) on conflict styles, however, has revealed a different pattern: women reported using compromising styles more than did men, whereas men reported using forcing styles more than women (though the latter finding applied primarily to individualistic cultures). Christensen and Heavey (1990) have also demonstrated that the demand-withdrawal pattern relates to the relationship’s underlying power structure, in the sense that the person who seeks change in a relationship also tends to be the one to make demands (confront), eliciting a withdrawal from the other party.

Based on these findings, it seems that conflict management behaviours seem to become more gender-stereotypical (i.e., women are less confrontational) when a relationship context is not specified (i.e., when general conflict styles apply) or in work settings; whereas within a relational context of both genders, women tend to be more assertive and demanding and men tend to withdraw more.

In addition to general differences of conflict management, culture might influence perceptions of appropriate conflict management behaviours within different relationships such as friendships or romantic relationships for men and women. As suggested by Kagitcibasi and Berry (1989) in their extensive review, gender differences in expressivity and instrumentality might not be as pronounced in collectivistic cultures as has been found in the literature based on individualistic cultures. A more interdependent and relational self-construal might be associated with decreased gender-differences in conflict management compared to an independent and autonomous construal of the self in individualistic cultures.

1.3. Culture, relationships, and conflict management strategies

Common dimensions of conflict management that have emerged within the conflict management literature (e.g., Cahn, 1992) include the degree to which parties withdraw

from conflict or initiate confrontations (e.g., Canary & Cupach, 1988; Kurdek, 1994) and their degree of concern for themselves and for other parties in the conflict (e.g., Rahim, 1983). The withdrawal/confrontation dimension seems parallel to the idea of direct versus indirect communication of conflict or low and high context communication styles (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1996).

Conflict management preferences as well as related communication styles have been proposed to differ across cultures (Holt & DeVore, 2005; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991). People from collectivistic cultures have been found to prefer less direct forms of conflict management, such as third party mediation and avoidance, whereas people from individualistic cultures have tended to prefer more direct and confrontational (e.g., dominating, forcing) strategies (Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Kozan, 1989; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Results of studies with Turkish samples (e.g., Kozan, 1989; Kozan & Ergin, 1998) are in line with this collectivistic trend (i.e., relying on avoidance and third party involvement rather than direct negotiation). More globally, a meta-analysis of 36 cross-cultural studies on conflict styles suggests that overall, individualistic cultures prescribe forcing (i.e., dominating) strategies, whereas collectivistic cultures prescribe withdrawing, compromising, and problem-solving strategies (Holt & DeVore, 2005). Most of the research examining cultural differences in conflict management, however, has not specified a relational context for the conflict (e.g., a friendship) or has mainly focused on managerial relationships in different organizational settings around the world (Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Dos Santos Pearson, & Villareal, 1997; Kozan, 1989; Smith, Dugan, Peterson, & Leung, 1998). Therefore, it remains to be seen whether conflict management strategies across cultures also differ as a function of the type of relationship involved.

Opposite-sex friendships offer an important point of comparison to romantic relationships because they may have less differentiated and relatively more egalitarian roles for men and women. Furthermore, the interdependence that characterizes romantic relationships is typically weaker within opposite-sex friendships, which could result in less conflict and thus the resolution of conflict might not be as crucial to the parties. Moreover, marital and romantic relationships are also characterized by a greater degree of institutionalization and social recognition than are friendships, and the latter may be more prone to termination in cases of conflict (Rawlins, 1994). In addition, the gender differences of conflict management found in romantic relationships might diminish in an opposite-sex friendship. Richardson and Green (2006) examined direct and indirect aggression towards same-sex friends, opposite-sex friends, and romantic partners, and found that it was not the gender composition, but rather the relationship itself that was the important factor: people were more likely to use direct aggression towards romantic partners and indirect aggression towards same-sex and opposite-sex friends.

It should be emphasized, however, that this conception of opposite-sex friendships and romantic relationships is based on individualistic notions (assumptions of choice, equality, existence of opposite-sex friendships, roles of women and men), and that cross-cultural research on opposite-sex friendships is lacking. In individualistic cultures, where friendships are based more on choice and less on obligation (Goodwin, 1999), opposite-sex friendships could be more resilient as individuals could be more committed to maintaining them. Thus, in an individualistic culture like Canada, more active forms of conflict management could be preferred in opposite-sex friendships, perhaps comparable to same-sex friendships and romantic relationships. Alternatively, in a relatively

collectivistic and traditional culture such as Turkey, there could be even less room for conflict (hence conflict management) in opposite-sex friendships due to the traditional gender segregation that makes it difficult to establish and maintain opposite-sex friendships (O'Meara, 1989) compared to same-sex friendships or romantic relationships.

The present study aims to explore the respective roles of gender and relationship type (same-sex friendships, opposite-sex friendships, and romantic relationships) on how young people from a relatively individualistic Canadian culture and a relatively collectivistic Turkish culture prefer to manage conflicts in their interpersonal relationships. We investigated whether cross-cultural differences in conflict management would change as a function of specific relationship types, as well as whether gender differences apply equally to different relationships for Canadian and Turkish cultures. For the purposes of this study, conflict management is defined in terms of broader behavioural and cognitive responses to disagreements measured through self-report, rather than in terms of specific interactive behaviours such as minute verbal and non-verbal reactions to the other party during an episode of interaction. In addition, conflict management was conceived as “strategies” that might be adjusted to the specific relationship context rather than “styles” that imply dispositional consistency. Three clusters of working hypotheses are proposed:

1. Overall, more types of conflict strategies will be used in romantic relationships compared to friendships. It remains to be seen whether conflict management with opposite-sex friends will resemble that of romantic partners or same-sex friends.
2. (a) Turkish participants will use more avoidance (e.g., refraining from discussion), accommodating (giving in to other's wishes), and third-party assisted strategies compared to Canadian participants.
 - (b) Canadians will use more confrontational strategies (e.g., dominating, openly discussing the issue) more than Turks. On the other hand, given a specific relational context,
 - (c) Turkish participants will employ confronting and dominating strategies to a higher degree in their romantic relationships compared to friendships.
 - (d) Canadian participants will employ compromising, accommodating, and avoiding strategies to a higher degree in their romantic relationships compared to their friendships.
3. No overall gender differences across the three relationships are hypothesized. On the other hand,
 - (a) women will use more confrontational strategies with romantic partners than same-sex friends.
 - (b) Men will use more avoiding and compromising strategies with their romantic partners than same-sex friends.
 - (c) Turkish men and women will use more similar strategies compared to their Canadian counterparts.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

The participants were 114 Turkish (73 women, 41 men) and 135 Canadian (99 women, 36 men) university students recruited from Ankara and Toronto, respectively. All

participants included in the analyses were heterosexual, had a close same-sex and a close opposite-sex friend with whom they were not romantically involved, and they were currently involved in a romantic relationship. The mean ages (and standard deviations) were 20.9 (2.08) and 19.5 (1.77), respectively, for the Turkish and Canadian students. Among the Canadian participants, 58.9% identified themselves as being Euro-Canadian, 16.1% as Asian, 9.4% as South Asian, 7.1% as Black, and the remaining 8.5% identified with an “Other” category. Turkish participants were not asked about their ethnic backgrounds due to the current sensitivity to the issue in Turkey. (All citizens of Turkey are presumed to be “Turkish” and other ethnic identifications might sometimes be perceived as a threat to the unity and indivisibility of the state with its nation, especially after the rise of the Kurdish separatist movement.) Participants were recruited through the introductory psychology and business administration courses, and received course credit in exchange for their participation. The questionnaire was originally developed in English, translated to Turkish and then back-translated by an independent translator. The original and back-translated versions were compared and any arising discrepancies were resolved.

2.2. Materials

Participants first answered several demographic questions about themselves and their relationships. The study focused on three types of relationships, and the participants specified a close same-sex friend, a close opposite-sex friend (with whom no prior romantic involvement or romantic intentions were present), and their romantic partner. Then, they indicated the perceived quality (1 = poor, 5 = excellent), how close they felt (1 = very close, 5 = not close at all), and the perceived satisfaction (1 = not at all, 5 = very much so) for each relationship. Finally, participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they employed 11 conflict management behaviours within each of the 3 relationships (same-sex friendship, opposite-sex friendship, and romantic relationship) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = almost never, 5 = almost always). The conflict management items were developed specifically for this study, since the current literature did not provide a conflict management measure that could be applied to all three kinds of relationships. The items were designed to include various strategies such as avoiding conflict, complying, dominating, and compromising. The factor structure of the items (across both cultures) was inevitably different for the three types of relationships, since individual behaviours took on different meanings within the contexts of the different relationships. In keeping with the exploratory nature of the study, we examined the effects of culture, gender, and relationship type on individual items separately. The full list of items may be found in [Table 1](#).

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary analyses—relationship quality

Scales of relationship quality were constructed for each relationship type from the three items on quality, closeness (reversed), and satisfaction. The alpha coefficients for Turkish and Canadian relationships, respectively, were .81 and .79 for same-sex friendships, .83 and .85 for opposite-sex friendships, and .80 and .80 for romantic relationships. Using relationship type (same-sex friendship, opposite-sex friendship, and romantic relationship)

Table 1
Mean reported use of conflict management behaviours across relationships and cultures

| Conflict management behaviours | Relationship | | | <i>F</i> (2,490) | Culture | | <i>F</i> (1, 245) |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------|--------|-------------------|
| | Same-sex friendship | Opposite-sex friendship | Romantic relationship | | Turkey | Canada | |
| I <i>refrain</i> from open discussion in order to prevent unpleasant exchanges | 2.42 | 2.42 | 2.56 | 1.94 | 2.80 | 2.13 | 25.26*** |
| I <i>give priority</i> to his/her wishes and accept his/her point of view | 2.98 _a | 2.86 _a | 3.42 _b | 41.71*** | 2.73 | 3.44 | 43.99*** |
| I try that both of us <i>compromise</i> and agree on a midway solution | 3.70 _a | 3.43 _b | 4.06 _c | 49.21*** | 3.61 | 3.85 | 4.48* |
| I ask for the opinion or help of a <i>third party</i> or ask them to mediate | 1.86 | 1.75 _a | 1.97 _b | 4.89** | 1.54 | 2.17 | 25.92*** |
| I try to use my <i>persuasion</i> power to get my own way | 2.83 _a | 2.73 _a | 3.16 _b | 25.20*** | 3.16 | 2.65 | 12.20*** |
| I behave as if nothing has happened; but behave in a <i>distant</i> and sullen manner | 2.25 _a | 2.14 _a | 2.80 _b | 44.74*** | 2.48 | 2.31 | 1.64 |
| I show consideration and <i>give in</i> to his/her wishes | 3.13 _a | 2.90 _b | 3.46 _c | 42.74*** | 3.11 | 3.21 | 0.65 |
| I <i>postpone</i> the conflict (discussion)/wait for a better time | 2.43 _a | 2.35 _a | 2.65 _b | 10.54*** | 2.65 | 2.31 | 5.92* |
| I either drop the issue or change the topic to <i>avoid</i> conflict | 2.28 | 2.23 | 2.37 | 2.20 | 2.32 | 2.27 | 0.68 |
| I try to <i>dominate</i> to have my opinion or point of view accepted | 2.62 _a | 2.57 _a | 2.80 _b | 8.15*** | 2.61 | 2.72 | 0.61 |
| I bring out my concerns <i>openly</i> in order for us to find a <i>solution that is agreeable</i> to both of us ^a | 3.77 _a | 3.58 _b | 4.08 _c | 37.33*** | 3.93 | 3.69 | 3.74 |

Notes: The means marked by different letter subscripts indicate significant differences between types of relationships at .05 level, using Scheffé post hoc comparisons. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The italic words and phrases capturing the core of these behaviours will be used to refer to the items throughout this paper.

^aThe last item will be called “opening up for an agreeable solution”.

as a within-participant factor, and gender and culture as between-participants factors, a mixed model ANOVA was conducted on perceived quality. Although the exact statistics for degrees of freedom and F statistics are reported here and throughout the text, the Greenhouse–Geisser adjusted statistics were used to decide on significance in order to achieve robustness against sphericity.

Relationship type had a significant effect on perceived quality ($F(2, 470) = 46.24$, $p < .001$) such that same-sex friendships ($M = 4.42$) and romantic relationships ($M = 4.40$) were rated higher in quality than were opposite-sex friendships ($M = 3.90$). There was also a significant three-way interaction between relationship-type, gender, and culture. The Scheffé post hoc tests revealed that for Turkish women and men and Canadian women the pattern was similar: same-sex friendships and romantic relationships were rated higher in terms of quality compared to opposite-sex friendships. However, for Canadian men there was no difference among the three relationships in terms of their quality ratings ($M_{\text{same-sex}} = 4.34$, $M_{\text{opposite-sex}} = 4.12$, and $M_{\text{romantic}} = 4.19$).

In order to explore the association between relationship quality and conflict management, correlations between relationship quality and conflict management items were examined. The median correlations were .02 for same-sex friendships ($N = 512$), .00 for opposite-sex friendships ($N = 470$), and .03 for romantic relationships ($N = 257$). While some conflict management behaviours were consistently and significantly correlated with relationship quality across relationships, they were only moderately related. These behaviours were giving priority to other (r 's = .19, .17, and .18), compromising (r 's = .21, .21, and .12), and opening up for an agreeable solution (r 's = .26, .17, and .14), respectively, for same-sex friendships, opposite-sex friendships, and romantic relationships. Each of these was more likely to be used with higher-quality relationships.

3.2. Conflict management preferences

After the preliminary analyses, mixed model ANOVAs were conducted using Relationship-type (same-sex friendship, opposite-sex friendship, and romantic relationship) as the within-participants factor, and gender and culture as between-participants factors, and each of the 11 conflict management behaviours as dependent variables.

3.2.1. Main effects for relationship type and culture

A main effect of relationship type was observed on all items except refraining and avoiding. The means and the omnibus univariate F -values may be found in [Table 1](#). Post hoc Scheffé procedures revealed that 9 conflict management behaviours were consistently employed most frequently in romantic relationships and least frequently in opposite-sex friendships: these were giving priority to other, compromising, third party help, persuading, distancing, giving in, postponing, dominating, and opening up for an agreeable solution. In addition, compromising, giving in, and opening up for an agreeable solution were used significantly more frequently with same-sex friends than with opposite-sex friends.

There were main effects of culture for 6 of the items. The means and F -values are also reported in [Table 1](#). Post hoc comparisons revealed that the Turkish participants reported using more refraining, postponing, and persuading compared to their Canadian counterparts. In contrast, Canadian participants reported using giving priority to other, compromising, and third party help more frequently than did Turks.

3.2.2. *Culture by relationship-type interactions*

Three of the main effects were qualified by culture × relationship-type interactions: third party help, giving in, and opening up for an agreeable solution. These interactions are

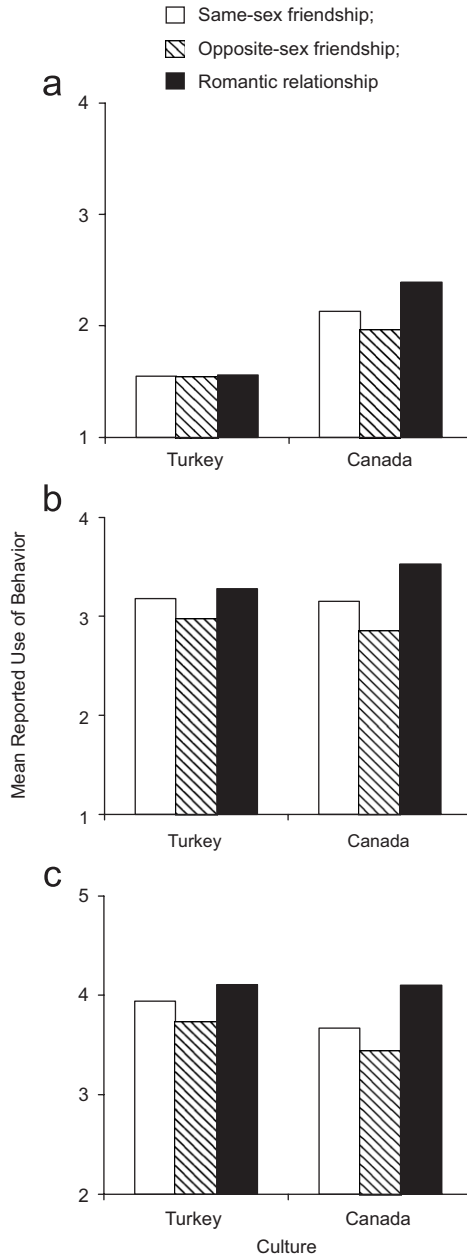


Fig. 1. Mean use of conflict management behaviours by culture and relationship: (a) seeking help from a third party, (b) giving in to friend's/partner's wishes, (c) openly bringing out concerns for a mutual solution.

represented in Figs. 1a–c. Tests of simple main effects within these interactions were conducted using a Scheffé procedure ($p < .05$).

With regards to asking the opinion or help of a third-party ($F(2, 490) = 4.09, p < .05$), Turkish participants' means for the three relationships were not significantly different from one another ($M_{\text{same-sex}} = 1.55, M_{\text{opposite-sex}} = 1.52, \text{ and } M_{\text{romantic}} = 1.56$). In contrast, Fig. 1a shows that young Canadian participants used the third-party help significantly more when the conflict occurred in their romantic relationships ($M = 2.39$) compared to their same-sex ($M = 2.13$) and opposite-sex friendships ($M = 1.95$).

Fig. 1b shows the second culture \times relationship-type interaction for giving in ($F(2, 490) = 5.13, p < .01$). The interaction revealed that Canadian participants reported giving in significantly more to their romantic partners ($M = 3.53$) than to their same-sex friends ($M = 3.15$), whereas Turkish participants did not differ in how much they gave in to their romantic partners ($M = 3.28$) and same-sex friends ($M = 3.18$). Moreover, Canadian participants gave in significantly more in their romantic relationships than their Turkish counterparts, whereas their means did not differ for same- and opposite-sex friends (M 's = 2.96 and 2.83 for opposite-sex friends for Turkish and Canadian participants, respectively).

Fig. 1c shows the culture \times relationship-type interaction effect for opening up for an agreeable solution ($F(2, 490) = 3.14, p < .05$). An analysis of the simple main effect means within Culture shows that, for the Turkish sample, opening up was again the lowest in opposite-sex friendships ($M = 3.71$) compared to romantic relationships ($M = 4.11$) and same-sex friendships ($M = 3.94$); the latter two means did not differ from each other. Canadians, were less likely to open up to opposite-sex friends ($M = 3.42$) compared to same-sex friends ($M = 3.67$), who in turn elicited less opening up than romantic partners ($M = 4.10$).

The pattern of the above means consistently indicate that Canadians tended to distinguish more among the three relationship types compared to Turks, and that distinction was especially evident between Canadian same-sex friendships and romantic relationships.

3.2.3. Gender by relationship-type interactions

There was a main effect of Gender on refraining ($F(1, 245) = 5.87, p < .02$). Men ($M = 2.54$) used refraining more than women ($M = 2.26$), but this effect was qualified by a gender \times relationship-type interaction ($F(2, 490) = 2.44, p < .03$) discussed below. Gender \times relationship-type interactions also qualified the main effects of relationship type for giving priority to other ($F(2, 490) = 9.63, p < .001$) and giving in to the partner ($F(2, 490) = 8.79, p < .001$).

The patterns of the aforementioned interactions indicated that women's use of these strategies did not differ significantly for their same-sex friends and romantic partners (respective M 's = 2.30 and 2.24 for refraining, M 's = 3.25 and 3.42 for giving priority and M 's = 3.24 and 3.35 for giving in). On the other hand, men refrained, gave priority, and gave in significantly less within their same-sex friendships compared to their romantic relationships (respective M 's = 2.51 and 2.86 for refraining, M 's = 2.75 and 3.48 for giving priority and M 's = 2.99 and 3.57 for giving in).

A gender \times relationship-type interaction emerged for persuading strategies ($F(2, 490) = 3.60, p < .05$). In contrast to the previous pattern, women tended to report higher use of persuading in their romantic relationships ($M = 3.14$) than in their same-sex friendships

($M = 2.63$) whereas men did not differ across these two relationships in terms of how much they used persuading (respective M 's = 3.18 and 3.03). More importantly, there was also a three-way interaction: gender \times relationship type \times culture ($F(2,490) = 4.03$, $p < .02$). This interaction revealed that the use of persuading by Turkish men differed significantly across the three relationships; Turkish men tended to use persuading power more in their same-sex friendships ($M = 3.39$) and romantic relationships ($M = 3.46$) compared to their opposite-sex friendships ($M = 2.93$). The use of persuading by Canadian men, however, did not differ by relationship type ($M_{\text{same-sex}} = 2.61$, $M_{\text{opposite-sex}} = 2.64$, and $M_{\text{romantic}} = 2.86$).

Finally, a culture \times gender interaction was also found for distancing ($F(1, 245) = 19.84$, $p < .01$). This interaction indicated that Canadian men ($M = 2.51$) used this strategy more than Canadian women ($M = 2.12$) whereas Turkish men ($M = 2.33$) and women ($M = 2.64$) tended to distance about equally, with a slight tendency in the opposite direction. Turkish women used this strategy significantly more than did their Canadian counterparts, whereas men from two cultures did not differ significantly in terms of how much they used distancing.

4. Discussion

The similarities between Turkish and Canadian relationships in conflict management behaviours seem to outweigh the differences. This is especially evident when one looks at the relatively consistent relationship-type effects in comparison to the somewhat weaker effects of culture. All types of conflict management were employed to a greater extent in romantic relationships compared to opposite-sex friendships, in line with our first working hypothesis. A striking pattern emerged such that opposite-sex friendships and romantic relationships were almost always different from each other in terms of the preferred conflict management strategies (except for refraining and avoiding where no relationship effects were observed), with same-sex friendships falling in between the two. Conflict management in opposite-sex friendships was more similar to that of same-sex friendships and contrasted sharply with romantic relationships.

The only cultural difference across relationships appeared in asking for third party help, accommodating to partner, and openly discussing concerns, where Canadians tended to distinguish more among their three relationships compared to Turks—especially between their same-sex friendships and romantic relationships. Even for the mentioned interactions between culture and relationship type, the means for same-sex friends mostly fell in-between romantic relationships and opposite-sex friendships (with the exception of third party help seeking in Turks, where the means were not different across three relationships). The results suggest that the immediate context provided by relationship type takes precedence over the broader cultural context of norms and values regarding conflict management in general.

Regarding the types of conflict management strategies preferred across these cultures, Turkish participants reported using refraining, postponing, and persuasion to a larger extent than Canadian participants, who in turn were more likely to use giving priority to partner, compromising, and third-party help. This is not what was predicted by our second set of working hypotheses (2a and 2b), except for the differences in refraining, which are in line with those of previous studies that found that people from collectivistic cultures tend to avoid more (e.g. Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Holt & DeVore, 2005; Ting-Toomey

et al., 1991). The findings on persuading and third-party help, however, are somewhat inconsistent with previous literature that has suggested that people from individualistic cultures tend to use dominating strategies (i.e., persuasion) to a higher degree (Holt & DeVore, 2005; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991) and that they prefer indirect communication through third-party involvement (Kozan & Ergin, 1998). Moreover, the Canadians in our sample used compromising to a higher degree than did Turks, contrary to Holt and Devore's (2005) meta-analysis findings that showed compromising to be more characteristic of collectivistic cultures.

One explanation for our discrepant results could be the immediate relational contexts (i.e., close friendships or romantic relationships) for conflict management that were provided in our study. Our expectations had been based on previous studies, which had provided either a task-oriented non-personal context (Kozan, 1989; Trubisky et al., 1991) or no specific relational context at all (e.g., Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996). It seems reasonable to assume, however, that a close personal relationship may be influencing people's preferred strategies of managing conflict; hence, Turks seem to be acting more directly, assertively or persuasively while managing conflict within their friendships and romantic relationships compared to the styles they adopt with non-intimate others. Similarly, Canadians seem to be acting in a more compromising and complying manner and utilizing third-party help more often within these close relationships compared to their more generic confrontational styles of managing conflict. These findings were in line with our second set of working hypotheses (2c and 2d). It appears that prior research, which suggests that people from individualistic cultures use more direct and confrontational strategies (e.g., persuading, dominating) and that people from collectivistic cultures use more indirect strategies (e.g. avoiding, compromising, and third-party help) is not supported when conflict management is contextualized within specific types of close relationships. Canary et al.'s (1995) distinction between conflict management styles (general tendencies) and strategies (more contextual) is very appropriate, therefore, for understanding discrepancies between our results and past findings.

An overall gender difference in our study concerned men's stronger tendency to refrain from conflict relative to women, a finding that partially replicates the Christensen and Heavey (1990) finding of the demand-withdrawal pattern observed in marriages. The present finding was qualified by an interaction of gender and relationship type, suggesting that men refrained from discussion in their romantic relationships more than they did in same-sex friendships, whereas women refrained about the same levels in these relationships. Giving in and giving priority to the other (i.e., complying) followed the same interaction pattern as well. However, the opposite picture emerged for usage of persuasion power: women were more likely to use persuasion in their romantic relationship than in same-sex friendships, whereas men used persuasion to equal degrees in their romantic relationships and same-sex friendships. These two findings support our third set of working hypotheses (3a and 3b). Furthermore, the three-way interaction revealed that Turkish men used persuasion more in their same-sex friendships and romantic relationships than their opposite-sex friendships, whereas Canadian men did not differentiate among the three relationships when it comes to using persuasion. The only significant interaction between Gender and Culture revealed that the distancing strategy was preferred by Canadian men more than women, whereas it was used around the same levels by Turkish men and women, with Turkish women preferring it more than Canadian women. Our final hypothesis (3c) that Turkish men and women would use more similar

strategies compared to their Canadian counterparts was not supported, since the rest of the conflict management behaviours were equally employed by men and women of Turkish and Canadian origins.

Consequently, despite having the same gender composition as romantic relationships, opposite-sex friendships failed to provide evidence for whether gender differences that were found in the literature in conflict management were a question of relationship (the romantic or sexual nature) or of gender. The interactions between relationship type and gender on refraining, giving in, giving priority to other, and persuading all pertained to differences between same-sex friendships and romantic relationships and did not involve opposite-sex friendships.

Accordingly, the different contexts that the three relationships provide seem relatively consistent across cultures. Although they differ in terms of some relational qualities, it seems reasonable to suggest that the influence of culture on conflict management strategies diminishes when these strategies are contextualized within close relationships rather than when they are not contextualized at all. Future research should focus on a comparison of conflict management in different interpersonal relationships of varying closeness levels.

Although the samples from Turkey and Canada in this study are very similar in a number of respects (e.g., both urban and well educated), the findings still provide preliminary evidence that conflict is managed similarly in friendships and romantic relationships across some cultures. This study provides a first step into exploring how the broader context provided by culture and the more specific context provided by the type of relationship dynamically interact to shape the conceptions and management of conflict. The next priority should be to construct a cross-culturally valid and reliable conflict management scale applicable to different personal relationships, as well as confirming that the current results are replicable.

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