A test of a cultural model of conflict styles[*]

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The primary aim of this study is to test a process model of cultural conflict styles. Specifically, we propose a theoretical framework for illuminating the relationship between *individual-level equivalents* of cultural variability dimensions and the face-maintenance dimensions, which, in turn, serve as guiding motives or criteria for selecting conflict strategies. In the model, it was predicted that the greater the individual's construal of self as independent, the higher the concern for self-face maintenance, which, in turn, leads to the higher preference for forcing (dominating) conflict styles. In a separate path, it was also predicted that the greater the individual's construal of self as interdependent, the higher the concern for other-face maintenance, which, in turn, leads to the higher preference for nonforcing (obliging, avoiding, integrating, and compromising) conflict styles. Data to test the proposed model were drawn from undergraduates of diverse cultural backgrounds, studying in Hawai'i. After being presented at random with one of the three conflict situations, participants rated the scales measuring conflict styles, face maintenance dimensions, as well as scales to measure the independent and interdependent dimensions of their self-construals. The theoretical path model was supported by the data except for one path. The implications of the model for theory and practice are discussed.

Conflict, as part of interpersonal interactions, occurs in specific cultural settings. Ross (1993) stresses that viewing conflict as cultural behavior helps explain why disputes over seemingly similar issues can be handled so dissimilarly in different cultures. There have been numerous cross-cultural comparison studies of different conflict management strategies, most studies utilizing a "national culture" approach (e.g., Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Nomura & Barnlund, 1983; Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin, & Nishida, 1991).

The findings reported in the cross-cultural conflict literature point to a picture that collectivists value harmonious interpersonal relationships with others, preferring indirect styles of dealing with conflict, and showing concern for face-saving.

While research on cross-cultural styles of handling interpersonal conflict has gained increased attention recently, two major limitations exist. First, an inherent contradiction has existed in much of the work that measures cross-cultural conflict management. Conflict style, face management, etc. are assessed as individual variables — not cultural norms. Then, researchers aggregate individual level preferences to form cultural measures. The self-construals are measured on the individual level. Hence, it is more logical to link self-construals (as a way people in different cultures conceive of the self), rather than *culture-level* dimensions (e.g., nationality), to conflict styles of individuals.

The second limitation of the past research on cross-cultural conflict styles stems from confusions regarding conceptualizations of conflict styles (see Kim & Leung, 2001). In typical studies of cross-cultural conflict styles, researchers rely heavily on either three or five-styles of conflict inventories, which were based on two dimensions (variously called "concern for production and concern for people" or "concern for self and concern for others") (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Brown, Yelsma, & Keller, 1981; Thomas, 1976). The conceptualization of conflict styles based on these two dimensions may not be generalizable across cultures. For instance, while past literature (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Rahim, 1983) in interpersonal and organizational conflict tends to conceptualize the avoidance style as reflective of both low concern for self and other, the use of avoiding style in collectivistic cultures seems to be associated positively with the other-face concern dimension (see Kim & Leung, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1989).

In this paper, we propose a theoretical framework for studying *individual-level equivalents* of cultural variability dimensions (i.e., independent and interdependent self-construals, Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1995), to examine possible links between individualistic and collectivistic cultural values and preferred conflict styles. Our study tests whether the degree of independent and interdependent construals of self systematically affects the face dimensions, which in turn affect preferred conflict management styles *within a culture*. Thus, the focus of our study was only on the relationship between the self-construals and the conflict management styles of individuals. We are not studying the self-construals as an aspect of "culture". That issue remains to be studied, and is beyond the scope of this paper.

The remaining sections of this paper are organized as follows: first, the concepts of individual-level culture dimensions (i.e., independent and interdependent self-construals) are introduced. Then, conceptual difficulties and the individualistic biases in the past cross-cultural conflict research are analyzed with respect to fundamental theoretical assumptions. Then, we will review the past literature on face-management in conflict situations. Finally, we will integrate this information into a general model of ethno-cultural conflict styles which explains why individuals with different cultural orientations would prefer one set of conflict styles over another. This model will be tested with data drawn from a multi-cultural population.

Self-construals and preferred modes of conflict resolution

Content of self in different cultures

An individual is embedded within a variety of sociocultural contexts or cultures (e.g., country, ethnicity, religion, gender, family, etc). Each of these cultural contexts makes some claim on the person and is associated with a set of ideas and practices (i.e., a cultural framework) about how to be a "good" person (Markus & Kitayama, 1998). The self, then, is an organized locus of the various, sometimes competing, understandings of how to be a person. As such, the self functions as an individualized orienting, mediating, interpretive framework, giving shape to what a person notices and thinks about and (the focus of this paper) how she perceives conflict management styles.

Triandis (1989), who views the "self concept" as a mediating variable between culture and individual behavior, argues that the self can be construed or framed in different ways. Markus and Kitayama (1991) delineated two general "cultural self-schemata", independent and interdependent. These two images originally were conceptualized as reflecting the emphasis on connectedness and relations often found in "non-Western" cultures (interdependent self) and the separateness and uniqueness of the individual (independent self) stressed in "the West". However, members of any society, and especially an ethnically-diverse society such as the U.S.A., are likely to vary in the degree to which they internalize these two senses of self.

In the independent construal, most representations of the self (i.e., the ways in which an individual thinks of himself or herself) have as their referent an individual's abilities, attributes, or goals ("I am friendly" or "I am ambitious").

These inner characteristics are the primary regulators of behavior. The normative imperative of such persons is to become independent of others and to discover and express their own unique attributes (Marsella, DeVoss, & Hsu, 1985). This orientation has led to an emphasis on the need to pursue personal "self-actualization" or "self-development". Individual weakness, in this perspective, is to be overly dependent on others or to be unassertive (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

By contrast, in the interdependent construal, the self is connected to others; the principal components of the self are one's relationships to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This is not to say that the person with an interdependent view of the self has no conception of internal traits, characteristics, or preferences that are unique to him or her, but rather that these internal, private aspects of the self are not primary forces in directing or guiding behavior. Instead, behavior is more significantly regulated by a desire to maintain harmony and appropriateness in relationships. Within such a construal, the self becomes most meaningful and complete when it is cast in the appropriate social relationship. So one's behavior in a given situation may be a function more of the needs, wishes, and preferences of others than of one's own needs, wishes, or preferences. Weakness in this perspective is to be headstrong, unwilling to accommodate to the needs of others, or self-centered.

The distinctions between independent and interdependent construals must be regarded as general tendencies that may emerge when the members of the culture are considered as a whole. Even in North America there is a theme of interdependence that is reflected in the values and activities of many co-cultures. Religious groups, such as the Quakers, explicitly value and promote interdependence, as do many small towns and rural communities (e.g., Bellah et al., 1985). Individuals whose families have immigrated recently to the USA from South America or Southeast Asia also may identify with both senses of self.

Individualistic bias in past inventory of conflict styles

Conflict style is defined as the patterned responses or characteristic mode of handling conflict across a variety of communication episodes (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). In early 1940's, researchers started using a one-dimensional approach to studying ways of conflict management. In this one dimension, competition and cooperation formed as opposite poles (Deutsch, 1949). Later, Blake and Mouton (1964, 1970) proposed a two-dimensional conflict grid. Popular conflict management scales (e.g., the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory,

Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) rely heavily on Blake and Mouton's (1964) conceptualization of conflict management, which yields a five-style configuration based on the two dimensions (self- vs. other-concern). The first dimension explains the degree to which a person attempts to satisfy his or her own concern or own face need. The second dimension explains the degree to which a person wants to satisfy the other's face need. Combination of the two dimensions was conceptualized to result in the following styles: (a) dominating style (high self-face need and low other-face need), (b) integrating style (high self-face need and high other-face need), (c) compromising style (a mutual face-need via middle-of-the-road solutions), (d) avoiding style (a low self-face need and low other-face need), and (e) obliging style (a low self-face need and high other-face need).

The models relying on Blake and Mouton's (1964) work conceptualize avoiding (or withdrawal style) as either negative and/or destructive. According to Rahim (1983), avoiding styles reflect "low concern for self" and "low concern for others". Putnam and Wilson (1982) also consider avoidance or nonconfrontation as "lose-lose" style. Thomas (1976) interprets avoiding as "unassertive" and "uncooperative". Brown et al. (1981) claimed that withdrawing action means "negative feelings" and "low task energy". The flavor of these scales is that confrontation is more desirable than avoidance. Nicotera (1993) highlights possible logical flaws in existing taxonomic structures of conflict strategies. In the "three" dimension model (other's view, own view, and emotional/relational valence) *inductively* derived from the data set, Nicotera (1993) for instance distinguishes, "evasive" style (which is not disruptive to personal relations) from "estranged" style (which is disruptive to personal relations) (see further discussion on this issue, see Kim & Leung, 2001).

The work in this area has been biased by the individualistic assumption that confrontation is more desirable than avoidance, which limits a full understanding of the conflict phenomenon. Hsieh, Shybut, and Lotsof (1969) captured the essence of the individualistic ideology in describing mainstream American culture as "a culture that emphasizes the uniqueness, independence, and self-reliance of each individual…" It, among other things, places a high value on the ideology of "openness" in conflict resolution. Given the general assumption of the desirability of direct confrontation of conflicts, it is not surprising that researchers have conceptualized the avoidance styles as reflective of low concern for self as well as low concern for the other. This assumption is taken so much for granted in individualistic cultures that it has rarely been stated explicitly. Similarly, some researchers, while considering argument (direct confrontation

of matter) as a beneficial and prosocial mode of conflict resolution, view avoidance as less socially acceptable (e.g., Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984; Rancer, Baukus, & Infante, 1985). Because of the individualistic bias, researchers have overlooked the potentially positive attributes of conflict avoidance and suppression. They have ignored the dialectic between conflict avoidance and confrontation and the complexity of avoidance as a conflict management strategy. Robbins (1978), for instance, found that short-term avoidance may be a very effective way to deal with a conflict situation in order to permit time for one or both of the parties to regain their composure and rationally to think through the issue and circumstances of the conflict situation. The benefits of using avoidance strategies among interdependents comes from being understood without putting one's meaning on record, so that understanding is seen not as the result of putting meaning into words, but rather as the greater understanding of shared perspective, expectations and intimacy.

In a similar vein, studies by Van de Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) and Van de Vliert and Prein (1989) took issue with the two dimensional models and showed how plots of relationships among the five styles do not fit the predicted quadrants in the original Blake and Mouton model. By reanalyzing data from six studies of managers, Van de Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) assessed the construct-validity of the two best-known self-report instruments for measuring the five conflict styles originally defined in Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid (Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). Both instruments (MODE and ROCI) more or less failed to discriminate between avoiding and accommodating. Furthermore, compromising did not occupy a midpoint position. Van de Vliert and Prein (1989) investigated whether people think about conflict styles in terms of the classic competition-cooperation dichotomy or the five-part grid. The results revealed that the cognitive representations of the four nonforcing types of conflict behavior have more in common with each other than with the cognitive representation of forcing. That is, dominating or forcing is isolated from the other four styles. The four styles clustered in the same related quadrants.

Previous studies also found that members of the collectivistic culture were found to use a higher level of compromising and integrating styles to handle conflict than members of the individualistic culture (Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin et al., 1991). In Ting-Toomey et al.'s (1991) study, opposite to their predictions, members in collectivistic cultures opted for integrating styles more than members in individualistic cultures. Overall, the evidence suggests that members of individualistic cultures tend to prefer direct (dominating) conflict

communication styles. Conversely, members of collectivistic cultures tend to prefer obliging, compromising, integrating, and conflict-avoidant styles. The latter four styles tend to emphasize the value for passive compliance to a certain degree and for maintaining relational harmony in conflict interactions (see Trubisky et al., 1991).

Because of these difficulties with existing conceptualizations of conflict styles, this study seeks to begin a more adequate explanation of conflict style use based on cross-cultural differences in the self construal. In the following section we will discuss the relationship between the construals of self and interpersonal communication, including that related to conflict.

A model of ethno-cultural conflict styles

The relationship between self-construals and face-maintenance dimensions

The general cultural differences in self-concept have implications about cross-cultural preferences in face-maintenance dimensions. Face has been defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claim for himself/herself by the line others assume he/she has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman, 1955, p. 213). Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes (Goffman, 1955, 1959; Ho, 1976). Ting-Toomey (1988) views conflict as a face-negotiation process in which the "faces" or the situated identities of the conflict parties are being threatened and called into question. People attempt to maintain "face" in nearly all interactions. However, how we manage face and how we negotiate "face loss" and "face gain" in a conflict episode differs from one culture to the next (Ting-Toomey, 1994).

Among interdependents, the stress is not so much upon the individual and his/her interests, but on the maintenance of the collectivity and the continuation of "harmonious" relationships. In general, conflict is viewed as damaging to social face and relational harmony and should be avoided as much as possible (Ting-Toomey, 1994). These ideas, as applied to face maintenance dimensions, would mean that individuals with an interdependent self-view have, as an overall goal, the desire to avoid loss of face and to be accepted by in-group members, which strengthens their preference for *other-face needs* for achieving conflict goals. The requirement is to "read" the other's mind and thus to know what the other is thinking or feeling (Kim, Sharkey, & Singelis et al., 1994).

On the other hand, the independent self-image places a higher priority on

maintaining independence and asserting individual needs and goals. The independents' communicative actions will tend to be more self-focused, and more self-expressive (Kim, 1993, 1994, 1995; Kim & Sharkey, 1995; Kim & Wilson, 1994). It is the individual's responsibility to "say what's on her/his mind" if she/he expects to be attended to or understood (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In general, conflict among high independents is viewed as functional when it provides an open opportunity for solving problematic issues. On the other hand, high interdependents view conflict as primarily dysfunctional, interpersonally embarrassing, and distressing, and a forum for potential humiliation and loss of face (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Thus, for a person oriented towards the independent construal of self, the general tone of social interaction may be more concerned with expressing one's own needs and rights. Therefore, independent self-construal may systematically increase the importance of the *self-face need* in guiding choices of conflict strategies. On the other hand, those with highly developed interdependent self-construal see themselves connected to the others, and therefore, put importance on the *other-face need* in conflict.

The relationship between face-maintenance dimensions and preferences for conflict styles

Among high interdependents with heightened sense of the other's face concern, there will be efforts to minimize antagonisms that unsettle the groups or that place the individual in confrontation with his/her group. Overall, the other-face need seems to be expressed through the use of nonforcing strategies (obliging, avoiding, compromising, and integrating styles) of conflict interaction. Obliging and avoiding styles reflect the need for satisfying other-concern and other face-needs. These values are reflective of collectivistic culture communication styles. Regarding integrative style, it emphasizes the importance of a mutual face-needs and the creative search for a possible conflict solution that will be acceptable to both parties. Therefore, as the mutual-face maintenance dimension, the integrating style is also more likely to be affected by other-face need. The compromising style involves give-and-take or sharing to seek a mutually acceptable resolution. Unlike an integrating person, a compromising party may not try to completely satisfy both his or her own and the other's needs. Even though a compromising person may express issues more directly than an avoiding person, it still have the flavor of cooperation rather than competition.

In contrast with dominating style, avoiding, compromising, obliging, and integrating styles may serve to work to dilute antagonisms that might otherwise

surface in the immediate situation. The assumption that forcing cognitively takes on an isolated position in relation to the other styles of conflict management, is furthermore based on the (de-) escalation model (Van de Vliert, 1984). A central issue within this model is that avoiding, compromising, negotiating and accomodating all have a short-term de-escalating effect, in which the frustrations of the parties involved do not increase. Forcing, on the other hand, has a short-term escalating effect, in which the frustrations actually do increase. The fear of shame as a result of damaging or ruffling the social fabric or damaging someone else's face would also lead interdependents to avoid assertive or direct styles of handling conflicts. These arguments all suggest a likely preference among high interdependents for saving the other's face in conflict management by using the cooperative styles conflict styles, such as avoiding, compromising, problem solving and accomodating.

To summarize, we expect those with interdependent selves to be more attentive and sensitive to others' face needs than those with independent selves. In conflict encounters, the concern for the other's face will be more important considerations when individuals have more interdependent views of self. This, in turn, should result in a relatively greater preference for nonforcing conflict styles (avoiding, integrating, obliging, and compromising styles). On the other hand, we expect those with independent selves to be more attentive and sensitive to self-face needs than those with interdependent selves. Furthermore, the concern for self-face need may be the immediate antecedent for choosing dominating (forcing) conflict styles.
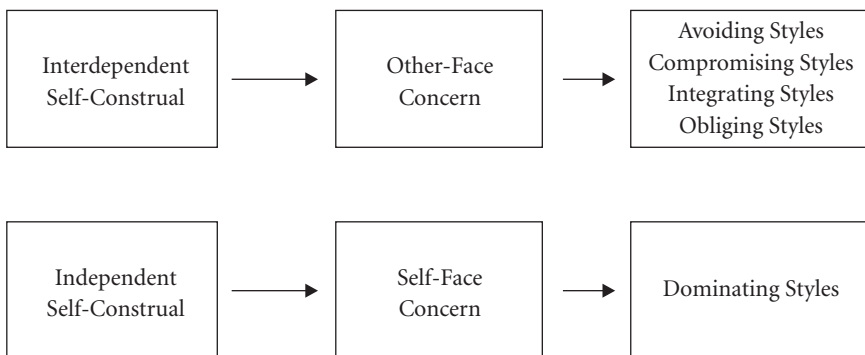

Figure 1. Theoretical path model: Relationships among the individual-level culture dimensions, face maintenance, and conflict styles.

This discussion of self-construals, face-maintenance dimensions, and conflict styles suggests the existence of processes underlying preferences for different conflict styles. Figure 1 shows arrows from each of the self-construals to face-dimensions, which in turn leads to the different preferences for conflict styles. Thus, according to this path model, self-construals are causal antecedents to face-maintenance dimensions. In our model, it was predicted that the greater the individual's construal of self as independent, the higher the perceived importance of self-face maintenance, which, in turn, leads to the higher preference for dominating (forcing) conflict styles. It was also predicted that the greater the individual's construal of self as interdependent, the higher the perceived importance of other-face maintenance, which, in turn, leads to the higher preference for nonforcing (obliging, avoiding, integrating, and compromising) conflict styles.

Method

Participants

A total of 203 undergraduate students, studying in Hawai'i, participated in the study. We selected the Hawai'i student sample because it offers great variance in respondents' attributes. The diverse ethnic and cultural make-up of the Hawai'i sample is exemplified by the following ethnic backgrounds of participants: Japanese (31.5%), Caucasian (11.8%), Chinese (20.2%), Filipino (10.3%), Part Hawaiian (6.4%), Mixed-no Hawaiian (8.4%), Korean (4.4%), Samoan (3.0%), Other (3.0%), and one percent did not indicate their ethnic background. Hawai'i sample seems to offer a wide variation of cultural orientations, such as high versus low context (Hall, 1976) and collectivism versus individualism (Hofstede, 1980). Respondents included 120 females (59.1%) and 81 males (39.9%) and 2 individuals who did not report their sex. The mean age of subjects was 20.80 years.

The first author delivered instructions and distributed questionnaires to students who completed them during class time. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Students received extra credit for participation.

Conflict situations

A conflict is brought about between two or more parties when they perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference in achieving the goals (e.g.,

Folger & Poole, 1984). To ensure generality, three scenarios involving conflicts among parties with different kinds of relationships (friends, superior-subordinate, and classmates) were used for the study as follows. These situations were adopted with minor modifications from Wilson, Kim and Meischke's (1991/1992) study (see Appendix A for a complete account of the situations provided to the participants):

S1: You are in conflict with a roommate who makes noise during the weekdays.

S2: You are in conflict with your co-worker/friend who comes back late from lunch whenever you are in charge of the office.

S3: You, as a group leader, are in conflict with a group member who doesn't do his/her share of the group project.

Conflict styles

To assess conflict styles, this study uses Ting-Toomey et al.'s (1991) modified version of the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II, Form A, Rahim, 1983).[1] The scale measures the following five styles of managing interpersonal conflicts: dominating, integrating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising. First, each participant was provided with descriptions of one of the three conflict situations. After reading a hypothetical conflict situation, participants were asked to fill out the ROCI-II scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (adapted appropriately for different situations). Appendix B presents an example of the conflict style inventory, which is illustrated by means of the situational context, "Office Manager situation".

Face maintenance dimensions

Face maintenance was operationalized using the modified version of Baxter's (1984) positive and negative politeness strategies (see Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). The self-face maintenance factor consisted of six items, which appear to threaten the other person's face and represent a high concern for self-face preservation. The second factor, other-face need, attempts to reduce face threat of the other party. Appendix C presents the face maintenance dimension items, which are illustrated by means of the situational context, "Office Manager situation".

Independence and interdependence of self-construals

In this research, we adopted Markus and Kitayama's (1991) conceptualization of self-construals. In addition, we took Independence and Interdependence to be two orthogonal dimensions of the self-concept (see Cross & Markus, 1991; Kim et al., 1994; Kim, Hunter, Miyahara, Horvath, Bresnahan, & Yoon, 1996; Singelis, 1994). Items from the Ego-Task Analysis scale (see Breckler, Greenwald, & Wiggins, 1986; Cross & Markus, 1991) were used to measure the independent and interdependent dimensions of the self-construals. Responses to the items were measured on 7-point items (1 = not at all important, 7 = very important).

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

First of all, confirmatory factor analysis (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982) was used to confirm the factor structure of all scales. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with the CFA subroutine of the PACKAGE computer program (Hunter & Lim, 1987), for scales measuring each of the face maintenance dimensions, conflict styles, and self-construals. The internal consistency of the CFA program is tested applying a simple product rule. The predicted correlation between any two items measuring the same trait is the product of their factor loadings (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). If all the items in a cluster measure the same factor, then the correlations between the items will satisfy a "product rule for internal consistency". That is, the correlation between two items in the same cluster should be the product of their correlations with the underlying trait.

To test the fit of the measurement model to the data, the observed correlations among items within a category must conform to the product rules of internal consistency (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). In the initial tests of internal consistency, there was not a single significant deviation for dominating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising styles, each forming an internally consistent scale. There was only one deviation in integrating conflict style scale out of 21 possible combinations. The self-face maintenance scale and the other-face maintenance scale also had only one deviation each (out of 15 possible combinations). There were three deviations in the interdependent construal scale (out of 36 possible combinations), and three deviations for the independent construal scale (out of 28 possible combinations). Since the number of deviations as well as the magnitude of the deviations were relatively small, no

further test of the internal consistency was done. The items in each scale form internally consistent scales with acceptable alpha levels (.72 for self-face maintenance, .67 for other-face maintenance, .79 for dominating, .89 for integrating, .77 for obliging, .76 for compromising, .66 for interdependence, and .65 for independence), except avoiding styles (.53). Further attempt to increase the reliability for the avoiding style (by dropping some items) was unsuccessful. The relatively low alpha level for avoiding style shows that the items in those categories may not be strongly related, even though all the items correlated with each other in a similar way.

We also conducted Flatness tests (Deviation from Mean R), and found some deviations. However, the Strong-Weak Grediant Test showed that most deviations found in the Flatness test were a matter of item strength. The re-ordered matrices in terms of communality showed that the average Unfit Ratio (total number of unfits divided by total comparison) was .33.

The second statistical test for unidimensionality is the test for external consistency or parallelism (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). The parallelism test assesses whether all of the items correlate in the same way with relevant outside factors. The tests for external consistency yielded more deviations between the actual and predicted correlations than would be expected by chance. Attempts to revise the factor structures were not successful. Thus, claims about the potential unidimensionality of each strategy category should be treated with caution.

Test of a model of cultural conflict styles

We conducted formal path analyses involving three sets of variables (two culture-level dimensions, two face-maintenance dimensions, and five conflict management styles). Specifically, it was predicted that the greater the individual's construal of self as independent, the higher the importance of self-face maintenance, which, in turn, leads to the higher preference for dominating conflict styles. It was also predicted that the greater the individual's construal of self as interdependent, the higher the importance of other-face maintenance, which, in turn, leads to the higher preference for obliging, avoidance, integrating, and compromising conflict styles. The predictions were tested by analyzing a theoretical path model proposed. The path analysis corrects for underestimation of coefficients. Thus, it provides us with an accurate picture of the relationship among the variables.

The correlation matrices were obtained by collapsing across the three scenarios, since patterns of relationships were fairly consistent across situations.

Then the correlations were corrected for attenuation due to measurement error.[2] Table 1 presents these correlations corrected and uncorrected for measurement error.

Inspection of the matrix deviations revealed that the addition of one direct path (from independence to dominating styles) would reduce the size of these deviations and provide a better fit of the model. Also, we found that integrating and compromising styles are highly correlated with each other ($r=.85$). Similarly, there was a high correlation between obliging and avoiding styles ($r=.85$). Given the high correlations between the measured compromising and integrating styles on the one hand, and obliging and avoiding styles on the other, we re-factor the scales and ran a new path-analysis. The revised model, with path coefficients, is presented in Figure 2.

Table 1. Zero-order correlations among the variables

	Inter	Indep	SF	OF	Dom	Inte	Obl	Avo	Com
Inter	–	.07	.04	.13	.02	.17	.18	.18	.21
Indep	.11	–	.04	−.02	.20	.10	−.15	−.08	−.04
SF	.06	.06	–	.17	.42	−.13	−.07	−.06	−.09
OF	.20	−.03	.24	–	−.06	.40	.50	.33	.44
Dom	.03	.28	.55	−.08	–	−.17	−.15	−.08	−.26
Inte	.22	.13	−.16	.52	−.20	–	.40	.38	.70
Obl	.25	−.21	−.09	.69	−.19	.48	–	.55	.52
Avo	.31	−.14	−.10	.55	−.12	.55	.86	–	.43
Com	.30	−.06	−.12	.62	−.34	.85	.68	.67	–

Note. (1) INTER: Interdependent self-construal; (2) INDEP: independent self-construal; (3) SF: self-face maintenance; (4) OF: other-face maintenance; (5) DOM: dominating conflict style; (6) INTE: integrating style; (7) OBL: obliging style; (8) AVO: avoiding style; (9) COM: compromising style

Correlations below the diagonal are corrected for attenuation due to error in measurement. The corrected correlations were used for path analysis.

Independent self-construal (Individual-level individualism) was not significantly linked to self-face concern ($r=.06$, NS). However, there was a significant direct link between independence and dominating conflict styles ($r=.25$, $p<.05$). Expectedly, self-face concern directly influenced dominating style ($r=.54$, $p<.05$). That is, "self-face concern" goes with dominating style ($r=.55$) though the two are NOT entirely parallel.

The path coefficient for the link between interdependence and other-face concern was statistically significant ($r=.20$, $p<.05$). The "other-face concern" goes with the two new factors (i.e., obliging/avoiding, $r=.58$; and integrating/
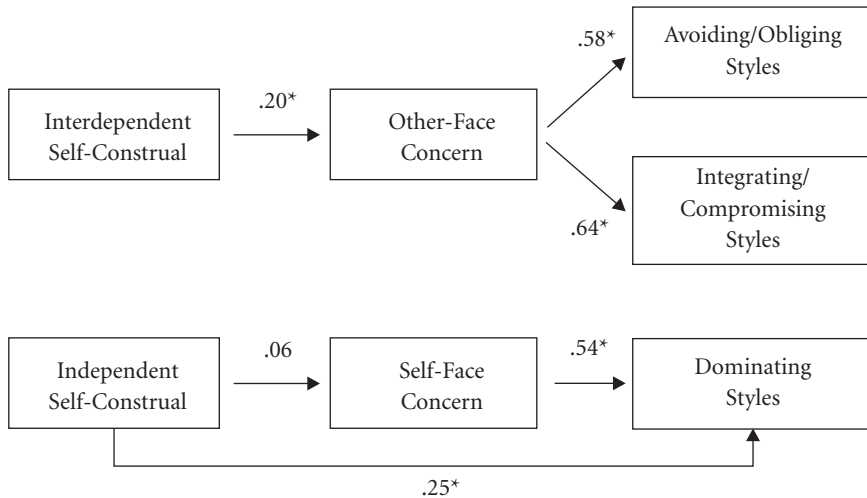
Figure 2. Revised theoretical path model with path coefficients: Relationships among the individual-level culture dimensions, face maintenance, and conflict styles.

compromising $r=.64$). The two new factors are parallel with each other but NOT perfectly parallel with "other face". Overall, the data seem to fit this model. The sum of squared deviations for correlations reproduced from this model was .34. The overall Chi-square goodness of fit test yielded a non-significant chi-square value (20.06, $df=14$, $p<.128$).

Consequently, the chi-square value indicates a good fit of the model to the data. To interpret the revised model, interdependence was a strong predictor of other-face concern, which, in turn, predicted nonconfrontational (obliging/avoiding) and solution-oriented (integrating/compromising) styles. While independence did not seem to affect self-face maintenance, it did directly affect the preference for dominating styles.

Finally, since many researchers have claimed gender differences in verbal styles (e.g., power, politeness, directness), we investigated the potential effects of gender on the ratings of self-construals, face dimensions and conflict styles, through a series of t-tests. The results showed that participants' biological gender did not have any significant main effect on the self-construals, face dimensions and any of the five conflict management styles (all Fs < 2.16). (see Kim & Bresnahan, 1996, for similar non-significant gender effects on conversational constraints). This may be due to the fact that many of our assumptions about male/female language differences are based on introspection and personal observation (Eakins & Eakins, 1978), rather than empirical studies. According

to Pearson (1985), because we live in an environment which stresses differences, rather than similarities, between women and men, we tend to exaggerate perceived differences in the verbal styles of women and men.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to test a process model of cultural conflict styles, focusing on individual-level culture dimensions (i.e., independent and interdependent self-construals). The general pattern of results that emerged are mostly supportive of a model in which individual-level culture dimensions have an impact on preference for conflict styles (through the impact on other-face dimension in the case of interdependence). One of the most striking aspects of this research was the degree to which conflict styles were predicted from face-maintenance dimensions.

It is also important to note that independence did not have the hypothesized effect on self-face dimensions, even though independence directly and significantly affected the preference for dominating styles. There seems to be at least one plausible explanation for this. It is possible that the theoretical construct of independent self-construal emphasizes self-orientation, focusing on one's own needs and desires. On the other hand, the operational measures of the self-face dimension seems to be concerned with winning a competitive edge over the other person. Supposing that there are two independent reasons for preferring dominating conflicts (either "self-orientation" measured by independent self-construal, or "competition with the other person" measured by self-face dimension), it is not surprising that the two variables may not be related to each other while independently affecting the greater preferences for dominating styles. Also, the self-face measure was phrased in a rather negative way, which could have biased the results.

This paper attempts to disentangle the psychological aspects of cultural conflict styles. In intercultural communication research, there is a bias towards preferring to use "culture" as the only unit of analysis. Most studies tend to *assume* an individual-level approach and focus on the culture-level analysis. The problem stems from the fact that we rely on cultural differences as an antecedent variable, without knowing for certain that cultural differences correspond to individual-level differences. One might claim that an individual-level approach is best suited to the psychological rather than to cultural phenomena. However, many theoretical approaches in intercultural communication invoke

some individual-level factors, such as self-conception and values. A universally applicable theory should concern itself with individual-level as well as cultural-level issues (see Kim, 1995; Kim et al., 1994). The nature of divergent self-systems permits us to better specify the precise role of the self in mediating and regulating communication behavior.

The findings of our study also clarify the issues regarding conceptualizations of conflict styles. According to our findings, only three discrete dimensions of conflict styles emerged: compromising/integrating, obliging/avoiding, and dominating. The similarity between compromising and integrating styles may stem from the fact that both styles aim for an acceptable solution; in compromising approach the conflicting parties settle for the middle ground, and in the integrating approach the parties focus on an integrative or creative solution (see Putnam & Wilson, 1982). The reason why the obliging and avoiding styles formed one factor may stem from the fact that both strategies partly involve "giving in" to the other's wishes. Conceptually, the three factors resemble Horney's (1945) typology of moving away from (nonconfrontation), moving toward (solution-orientation), and moving against (control) the opposing party, as well as Putnam and Wilson's (1982) empirically derived three factors (nonconfrontation/smoothing, solution-orientation/compromise, and control/forcing). Repeated testing with the Putman and Wilson's (1982) conflict management typology (OCCI) among Euro-American participants revealed a three-factor instead of a five-factor structure among Euro-American participants. Our study, using individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, seems to be consistent with the Putman and Wilson's (1982) conflict management typology, which consists of three significant strategies — nonconfrontational (indirect communication, avoiding and obliging behavior), solution-orientation (integration and compromising behavior), and control (dominating and competing behavior).

The more important implications of our findings relate to the underlying dimensions of conflict styles. In the past, self-face maintenance is predicted to be associated strongly with the dominating and integrating styles. Furthermore, members of individualistic cultures was predicted to typically prefer dominating and integrating (solution-oriented) styles. While the finding on the use of competitive, controlling styles by individualists has been consistently supported by the past cross-cultural conflict studies, no clear evidence was found concerning the integrating and compromising styles in the past research. Overall, this study lends strong support for the relationship between "integrating/compromising" styles and "avoiding/obliging" styles on the one hand, and other-face

maintenance on the other. Even though both integrating and compromising style in the context of Rahim's scale reflects both high self-concern and high other-concern, both styles seem to be strongly associated with other-face concern. Furthermore, while past literature in interpersonal and organizational conflict tend to conceptualize the avoidance style as reflective of both low concern for self and other, we found that the avoiding styles was strongly associated with other-face concern.

In sum, this study of conflict styles implies the necessity of reformulating theories in this and related areas. Errors in conceptualization and interpretation of results have been engendered by the individualistic bias of work in this area. It has been argued that when people use integrative conflict strategies, constructive outcomes result, while use of avoidance strategies result in destructive outcomes (see Comstock & Buller, 1991). As our findings suggest, interdependents' tendency to avoid conflict can be explained by their desire to preserve relational harmony and their motivation to save other's face. Thus, the individualistic assumption that overt conflict resolution is more desirable than covert conflict has led to the discovery of only certain facts about conflict resolution, and has resulted in ignorance or misinterpretation of others' conflict management styles.

Through an examination of past literature, this paper tested a cultural model of conflict styles, which attempted to explain systematically why individuals of different cultural identity tend to approach and manage conflict situations differently. Our cultural model of conflict management behavior highlights possible logical flaws in existing taxonomic structures of conflict strategy styles. This model will allow a richer insight into conflict behavior on which intercultural theory building may progress.

According to Roloff (1987), conflict suppression or avoidance provides necessary stability for individual and coordinated action, even though it may also have negative effects. As Roloff (1987) rightly points out, minimal research has focused this seemingly necessary balance between conflict avoidance and confrontation. A number of researchers also argued for the value and importance of avoidance in effective conflict management (Bergman & Volkma, 1989; Morrill & Thomas, 1992). Researchers, therefore, need to reconceptualize the notion of conflict, and refine measures of it.

Limitations

Overall, this study lends strong evidence to the strength of the relationship between individual-level cultural dimensions, face dimensions, and conflict

styles. However, future theoretical development should focus on investigating the combined effect of context and individual-level cultural dimensions. According to Ting-Toomey (1989), context includes components such as situational and relational context (relational context refers to the influence of family or friendship networks.). One's self-system depends heavily on the context in which the encounter takes place. How one constructs and presents a "self" in a relationship is, to a large degree, situation-dependent (see Ting-Toomey, 1989; Triandis, 1989). Putnam and Wilson (1982) suggest that situational constraints — nature of the conflict, relationship between participants — may influence choice of conflict style. Given the findings that an individual's choice of behavior hinges upon a variety of situational variables (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979), we need to further develop theoretical assumption or reasons why some situational contingencies (e.g., social status and gender) may affect one's conflict management styles.

Another limitation of our theoretical framework is that it focuses on preferences rather than on actual strategy choices. Clearly, people may sometimes be unable to make strategy choices based solely on their preferences. On the other hand, knowledge helps performance; the current theory focuses on how preferences for conflict styles may differ across different self-systems associated with various dimensions of culture.

Our paper focuses on culture-general aspects of conflict styles (and by pooling procedures among person of different cultural ancestry), thus may not do justice to the emic associations among the items. We certainly recognize the ideal nature of combining both emic and etic aspects of constructs. Given the importance, but also the complexity, of both universal and idiosyncratic understanding of conflict management styles, we see a need for research to establish on an empirical basis the types of interactional principles that contribute to the understanding of both culture-general and culture-specific variables.

Finally, the choice of participants exclusively from a university environment in each culture restricts the external validity of the findings. A wider variety of populations with differing linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds should be investigated. Theories on cross-cultural conflict styles are still in their infancy. Continuous conceptual refinement and diverse means of testing theories should yield the further understanding of the cross-cultural conflict communication processes. We hope that the ideas and data presented here are sufficiently thought-provoking to stimulate related research by other scholars.

Notes

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1. In this study, we used the modified version (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991) of Rahim's (1983) Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II). We ruled out the other scales for different reasons. First of all, we rejected scales using a set of culture-specific proverbs (e.g., Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Burke, 1970), since we consider the unworkable among diverse ethnic groups. Second, we ruled out many of the measures which ignore the role of communication as a way to handling disagreement (e.g., Sternberg & Soriano, 1984), or measures using only a single item for each style (Blake & Mouton, 1964), or measures using forced-choice questionnaire (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Even a few instruments developed from communication-based items were not situationally based (e.g., Brown et al., 1981), or exclusively focused on organizational setting (e.g., Putnam & Wilson, 1982).

2. One of the most important uses of the reliability coefficient is in estimating the extent to which obtained correlations between variables are attenuated by measurement error. There is some controversy about when the correction for attenuation should be applied. One could argue that the correction for attenuation provides a way to fooling oneself into believing that a "better" correlation has been found than that actually evidence in the available data. If, however, good estimates of reliability are available, the corrected correlation between two variables is an estimate of how much two traits correlate. By definition, correlation measures the systematic covariance of two variables. Measurement error usually, with rare chance exceptions, reduces systematic covariance and lowers the correlation coefficient. This lowering is called attenuation. Since correlations are attenuated by measurement error, it should be obvious that ignoring measurement error in variables may seriously underestimate the value of the true correlation.

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Appendix A: Text of the three Hypothetical Conflict Situations

Situation 1 (Roommate):
Imagine you moved into an off-campus house with three other friends, each of whom you have known for two years. You and your roommates each have a private bedroom, while you all share a living room and kitchen. Since your personal computer is in your bedroom you do a good deal of studying there. Sometimes you or your roommates have people over for parties on weekends, but you have an informal agreement to limit entertaining during the week so people can study. However, over the past two months Chris, one of your roommates, frequently has had friends over and played music loudly during the week. Talking to

your other roommates, you found that Chris also has had noisy weeknight parties when they were at home. Chris certainly has been noisier than your other roommates on weeknights. Suppose it is a Tuesday evening, and you are in your bedroom writing a term paper that is due tomorrow. A few minutes ago Chris came home with several friends and turned on the stereo loudly. You don't want to leave, since you are writing your paper on your computer. You decide to talk to Chris about the situation.

Situation 2 (Office Manager):
Suppose that after graduation you were hired as an assistant manager. The manager often leaves you in charge of the office where you work. Imagine that a friend of yours, Pat, also is an employee at this office. Pat's work is satisfactory in most respects, but Pat constantly has been five to ten minutes late returning from lunch when you are left in charge. Moreover, Pat rarely is late when the manager is present. The other employees nearly always return from lunch on time, regardless of whether you or the manager are in charge. In sum, the other employees manage to be punctual, yet Pat repeatedly is tardy when the manager is gone and you are in charge. Today Pat returned from lunch thirty minutes late. You feel obligated to talk with Pat, since the manager recently mentioned the importance of employees being on time.

Situation 3 (Group Project):
Imagine that you have been assigned to a group project in one of your classes. The class is in your major and it is important that you get a good grade in this class. The final grade will depend to a great extent on how well the group project turns out. You were designated by the course instructor to be the leader of the group. One group member, Dale, has been causing some problems. From the start of the group project, Dale has seldom made it to group meetings on time and entirely skipped one meeting without ever calling anyone. Talking to people who have been in courses with Dale in prior terms, you found that Dale sometimes skipped class meetings in the past. Among the members of your group, Dale is the only person who is creating this problem. Suppose the group project is due in two weeks. Dale again skipped today's meeting in which the group planned to put together the final draft of its report next week. As group leader you decide to talk to Dale about the situation.

Appendix B: Items measuring the five Conflict Management Styles

(Dominating Conflict Styles)
1. I would use my influence as a manager to get my ideas across.
2. I would use my authority as a manager to make a decision in my favor.
3. I would use my expertise to make a decision in my favor.
4. I would be firm in pursuing my side of the issue.
5. I would use my power as manager to win a competitive situation.

(Integrating Conflict Styles)
1. I would investigate the problem with the person and find a solution acceptable to both of us.
2. I would integrate my ideas with the person or come up with a decision jointly.
3. I would try to work with the person to find the solution to a problem which satisfies our expectations.

4.   I would exchange accurate information with the person to solve the problem together.
5.   I would try to bring all our concerns out so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way.
6.   I would collaborate with the person to come up with decisions acceptable to both of us.
7.   I would try to work with the person for a proper understanding of the problem.

(Obliging Conflict Styles)
1.   I would in general try to satisfy the needs or desires of the person.
2.   I would give in to the wishes of the person.
3.   I would allow concessions to the person.
4.   I would try to satisfy the expectations of the person.

(Avoiding Conflict Styles)
1.   I would attempt to avoid being "put on the spot" and try to keep the disagreement with the person to myself.
2.   I would accommodate the wishes of the person.
3.   I would try to keep my disagreement with the person to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
4.   I would try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the person.

(Compromising Conflict Styles)
1.   I would try to find a middle course to resolve this problem.
2.   I would propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.
3.   I would negotiate with the person so that a compromise can be reached.

Note: Adapted from Ting-Toomey et al. (1991). Questionnaire items are illustrated by means of the situational context, "Office Manager".

Appendix C: Items measuring the Face Maintenance Dimensions

(Self-Face Maintenance Dimension)
1.   I would indicate that I have done my fair share of the work on a managerial role or that s/he owes it to me to reciprocate.
2.   I would tell him/her that only an irresponsible person would fail to return from lunch on time.
3.   I would state the negative consequences if the person continues to be tardy.
4.   I would not be very friendly to the person until s/he gets the hint that I am not very pleased with the person returning late from lunch.
5.   I would simply inform the other person that s/he has no choice but to return from lunch on time.
6.   I would tell the person how upset the rest of the employees will be if s/he doesn't return from lunch on time.

(Other-Face Maintenance Dimension)
1.   I would ask the other person how busy his/her schedule is before mentioning the request.
2.   I would promise any assistance I can contribute if the other person agrees to return from lunch on time.

3.   Before mentioning the request, I would ask the other person's reason for not returning from lunch on time.
4.   I would show that I understand the kind of time pressure or demand that the other person faces.
5.   I would try to get on "common ground" with the other person by showing how alike I am on things before mentioning the request.
6.   I would tell the other person that s/he will feel better about her/himself if s/he return from lunch on time.

Note: Questionnaire items are illustrated by means of the situational context, "Office Manager".

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