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# The role of culture and personality in choice of conflict management strategy ☆

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**Abstract**

Globalization has led to an increased emphasis on cultural diversity and its influences on personal, social, and organizational practices. As the world becomes a smaller place, the potential for conflict in our daily interactions is increasing. Research investigating the influence of culture on conflict management and resolution behaviors has demonstrated that individualism and collectivism do indeed influence a person's style of conflict resolution behavior. However, these findings have not been linked to the related constructs of vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism [as defined by Triandis, H.C. (1994) *Culture and social behavior*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill] which introduce the concept of accepting authority within a focus on the self versus the group. A strong parallel exists between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism and power distance. The salience of this power variable may differ from one culture to the next, and influences not only the nature of the conflict process itself, but also the conflict resolution strategies adopted. In addition, studies exploring the influence of various dispositional measures such as self-monitoring and emotional intelligence have linked them to both cultural variables and styles of conflict resolution. Although each finding that links a single personality or cultural variable with a particular style of conflict resolution is indeed useful, it is also limiting. This study explored the relationships among culture, power, personality, and styles of conflict resolution. Relevance of the findings and

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their implications with respect to conflict management and resolution issues across cultures are discussed.


*Keywords:* Conflict; Conflict style; Conflict strategy; Conflict management; Conflict resolution; Culture, diversity; Cultural values; Cultural beliefs; Cultural cognitions; Personality; Individual differences; Self-monitoring; Emotional intelligence

## 1. Introduction

Greater globalization has led to increased attention being paid to cultural diversity and its influences on personal, social, and organizational practices. As the world becomes a smaller place, the potential for conflict across cultural boundaries in our daily interactions is increasing. Research investigating the influence of culture on conflict management and resolution behaviors has demonstrated that cultural factors such as individualism and collectivism and power distance (as defined by Hofstede, 1980) do indeed influence a person's style of conflict resolution behavior (as originally defined by Blake and Mouton (1964) and later reinterpreted by Rahim, 1992). Cultural factors also interact with personality (Triandis, 1994), however, and this interaction needs to be taken into account when examining choices of responses to conflict as well. Accordingly, this study explored the relationships among styles of conflict resolution, culture, power, and personality. The aims of this study were to explore the influence of cultural (values and beliefs) and personality variables (self-monitoring and emotional intelligence (EQ)) on choice of conflict resolution strategy. Specifically, the extent to personality factors predicted conflict resolution strategy over and above that predicted by cultural factors was explored.

### *1.1. Conflict*

Conflict is a common facet of our everyday lives. Seen as a perceived incompatibility of interests, conflict is often caused by a misalignment of goals, motivations, or actions between two parties that can be real or only perceived to exist (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Whether it occurs in the form of a difference of opinion, harsh words, or a form of direct action taken to resolve competing goals, it has the potential to exist in the many domains of our lives. Over the year, busier lifestyles have translated into less time for ourselves and the people around us, leaving a precarious balance between work, family, and everything in between. This increased sense of time urgency has left many scrambling, not having the time to speak with family members, friends, and co-workers in order to maintain personal needs and the needs of others nor to clarify the motivations and intentions behind any behavior, thus increasing the potential for misperception and miscommunication, some of the negative aspects of conflict.

Although often seen in a negative light, conflict can be both positive and negative. More often than not, it is perceived as the root of disagreements, negative emotions, and maladaptive behavior, even though it is just as likely to foster needed change through creativity and innovation. With the hope of being able to maximize the positive aspects of conflict, it is important to work toward minimizing its negative aspects and thus minimizing its dangerous implications within the family, school, and work environments (interpersonal) as well as the global community as a whole (intergroup).

At the interpersonal level, conflict researchers have identified a number of resolution strategies that can be utilized in conflict situations. The number of potential strategies identified ranges from 17 (Sternberg & Dobson, 1987) to five (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Outlining a set of strategies that are used to resolve conflict, Sternberg and Dobson (1987) have identified economic action, physical force, wait and see, acceptance, stepping down, third party, undermining esteem, withholding, bargain/compromise, avoidance, giving in, manipulation, verbal force, prior history, confrontational discussion, mutual discussion, and separation as 17 specific conflict resolution strategies that people engage in when dealing with conflict. Similarly, Rahim and Bonoma (1979) have outlined five styles of dealing with conflict (obliging, integrating, avoiding, dominating, and compromising), each ranging on a set of dimensions that either emphasize a concern for personal needs or the needs of others. These conflict resolution styles are based on the distinctions first introduced by Blake and Mouton (1964) outlining different styles of handling conflict. The authors are credited with expanding on the original theory, identifying each conflict resolution strategy as a function of the degree of concern for self and the degree of concern for others. Although these strategies are usually applied to organizational settings, it is possible to generalize them to any settings involving interpersonal interactions.

Just as conflict can occur at both the intergroup and interpersonal levels, the reasons for conflict may range from social to personal. At the social level, the effects of cultural variables may influence the way a person approaches a social interaction, how s/he perceives the situation, and the manner in which s/he chooses to resolve this situation. The same scenario may result in entirely different reactions in one society than another. For example, disagreeing with a parent may be entirely acceptable in Canada and not at all condoned in Africa. At the same time, individual difference variables may also play a role in how a person responds to a conflict. Whether a person is more or less assertive, self-conscious, or empathetic will no doubt influence any interpersonal interaction s/he engages in. For example, even within Africa, a child who is more assertive will respond differently when arguing with a sibling who is more docile in nature. Thus, in predicting conflict behavior, it is important to acknowledge both group-level (cultural) and individual-level (personality) processes.

### *1.2. Cultural variables*

The conflict process is greatly influenced by social culture. A number of researchers have explored the influences of social culture on the different ways of handling interpersonal interactions (Leung & Fan, 1997; Leung & Wu, 1990; Leung et al., 2002; Rahim, 1992; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Kwok Leung and his colleagues have looked at the roles of procedural justice, fairness, trait attributions as well as responsibility attributions in determining choice of conflict strategy. For example, in their comparison of preferred conflict management strategies between Hong Kong and the US, Leung and Lind (1986) found that Americans demonstrated a preference for adversarial techniques over non-adversarial techniques whereas people from China did not. Along similar lines, Leung and his colleagues moved beyond the simple East–West comparison by comparing individualistic and collectivistic cultures with similar cultures to determine that the former prefer confrontational approaches to conflict management and the latter prefer strategies that are harmony-inducing (Leung, Au, Fernandez-Dols, & Iwawaki, 1992). A person's cultural background will influence every aspect of the conflict process, ranging from the

goals that are considered incompatible, why they are seen as so, what one chooses to do about it, and whether the outcome is considered to be satisfactory or not. As such, the nature of conflict itself is seen very differently across cultures. Where it may be emphasized in one culture, it may be swept under the rug in another.

### *1.2.1. Values*

Whether one's priority is a personal or a group goal can often determine a person's strategy for dealing with conflict. For example, people from individualistic cultures are more likely to resolve conflicts using a dominating or obliging style, whereas those from collectivistic cultures are more likely to do so using an integrating or avoiding style (Rahim, 1992). Similarly, Leung (1987) demonstrated a relationship between collectivism and dispute processing such that collectivistic cultures like China preferred to engage in conflict management strategies that worked to reduce the animosity between parties moreso than individualistic cultures like the US. These findings, however, have not been linked to the constructs of vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism (as defined by Triandis, 1994), which expand on the original definitions by introducing the concept of accepting authority within a focus on the self versus the group. A strong parallel exists between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism and the cultural factor of power distance. To some extent, every interpersonal interaction (at home, at school, at work) can contain some element of power within the relationship. The salience of this power variable may differ from one culture to the next, and influences not only the nature of the conflict process itself, but also the conflict resolution strategies that will be adopted. For example, Kramer (1989) has demonstrated that centralized, or autocratic, decision-making leads to more assertive and less accommodative styles of dealing with conflict.

Hofstede's (1980) cultural taxonomy has added to the conflict literature when exploring the many different ways that conflict may be influenced by culture. Each of the five dimensions included in Hofstede's (1980) framework (individualism–collectivism, power distance, masculinity–femininity, short- and long-term orientation, and uncertainty avoidance) has been explored in an effort to relate it to conflict behavior. Of these dimensions, the constructs of individualism–collectivism (the extent to which an emphasis is placed on the self versus the group) and power distance (the extent to which an emphasis is placed on hierarchy) have demonstrated the most promise in linking conflict behavior with culture. Studies have shown that people from collectivistic cultures such as Japan are more likely to utilize the avoidance conflict management strategy with the goal of maintaining a positive relationship (Ohbuchi, Shizuka, & Tedeschi, 1999).

The relationship between conflict and power distance is not as clear, although research has demonstrated that collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize hierarchy (high power distance) more so than individualistic cultures, which tend to place less of an emphasis on hierarchy (low power distance; Triandis, 1994). In their study exploring the effects of nationality, individualism–collectivism, and power distance on conflict management behavior, Ohbuchi et al. (1999) demonstrated that their American participants (who scored higher on the power distance dimension) were more likely to use assertive tactics in conflict resolution, opting more often for third-party involvement than the Japanese (low power distance). However, these findings also demonstrated that even though the two cultures used in the study exhibited differing conflict resolution strategies depending on their orientation toward hierarchy, they were still both relatively high on the power distance

dimension (Ohbuchi et al., 1999). This inconsistency might be explained by the fact that it is possible for cultures that are individualistic to be rated as both low and high on the power distance dimension. In this respect, the constructs of vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism as introduced by Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand (1995) might be a more appropriate alternative to the power distance dimension. Although the scale itself has not been widely used in the literature due to its recent development, it seems to be a more appropriate way to measure individualism–collectivism and power distance, while at the same time acknowledging the relationship between the variables. This conceptualization of vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism was further developed by Triandis and Gelfand (1998), who explored the implied emphasis or de-emphasis on hierarchy in certain cultures and demonstrated that it is possible for the four dimensions to exist in different contexts, even those considered Western and non-Western. Finding links between these constructs and those of the vertical/horizontal self (Fiske, 1992; Rokeach, 1973), these researchers provided evidence for convergent and divergent validity and thus offered a more complete picture of the individualism and collectivism dimensions (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

When considering the potential relationship between the newer concepts of vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism and conflict resolution strategy, it becomes apparent that the 'concern for self' and 'concern for others' dimensions are applicable to both constructs of cultural values and conflict resolution styles. This overlap may in fact help us to understand the nature of this relationship and allow for more specific predictions to be made. A high score on the vertical collectivism dimension implies that even within a 'group-oriented' culture, there is still an awareness of individual needs. This apparent paradox is reflective of a high concern for the self within a group orientation and may be more likely to result in a dominating or integrating conflict resolution strategy. On the other hand, scoring higher on the dimension of vertical individualism would suggest a strong focus on the individual. This combination reflects a low concern for the other over and above a high concern for the self and may be more likely to elicit a dominating or avoiding conflict resolution style. A similar examination of the horizontal individualism and collectivism constructs reveal a high concern for the other and a low concern for the self, respectively, as the former is indicative of a strong emphasis on the collective and the latter suggests a focus on the group beyond that of the individual. Thus, the former would be more likely to result in an integrating or obliging strategy of conflict resolution, whereas the latter would more often lead to avoiding or obliging. Overall, it seems that a collectivistic orientation is associated with the group taking priority over all else (even in the case of vertical collectivism); however, with an individualistic orientation, there is room for a higher concern for the self as well as the group. This is perhaps reflective of a higher freedom to choose one's values, be they self- or group-oriented, within individualistic versus collectivistic societies.

### *1.2.2. Beliefs/cognitions*

A recent avenue of research examining the ways that culture affects individual behavior focuses on beliefs or cognitions rather than values. Values have an evaluative component to them, determining that something is either good or bad, whereas beliefs incorporate information about antecedents and consequences as well as the 'causes and cures of psychological problems' (Leung & Bond, 2004, p. 131). Beliefs and cognitions are 'the

things people perceive and know' and the 'shared beliefs' that make up different social and organizational cultures (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984). Leung et al. (2002) suggest that, because of the emphasis on cognitions rather than values, this approach may be expected to have more functional utility in predicting human behavior than values. Cognitions are more concrete and more comprehensive than values, and this may result in individuals accessing cognitions as a guide to behavior more readily than accessing values (Singelis, Hubbard, Her, & An, 2003).

Since these beliefs are learned through experiences and socialization, the context in which an individual develops these beliefs is important (Bond, Leung, Au, Tong, & Chemonges-Nielson, 2004; Bond et al., 2004). Specifically, cultural context provides the setting in which individuals view the consequences of specific actions or attitudes and formulate their understanding of the world and how contingencies operate. Culture therefore has a strong effect on individuals' understanding of what the results may be of a given choice of action, and it may be through this route that culture affects choices of conflict style management. Leung et al. (2002) developed the Social Axiom Scale (SAS) to measure culturally learned beliefs. This measure is made up of five factors (cynicism, social complexity, reward for application, spirituality, and fate control). It has been suggested that the use of beliefs may provide greater explanatory power for social behaviors when used in addition to values (Bond et al., 2004). Comprised of theory-based and empirically derived categorizations, the SAS is intended as a pan-cultural measure of culture-based beliefs. The SAS has been used in research studies which have shown that these factors are able to predict particular behaviors, such as interpersonal trust, volunteerism, superstitious practices, and vocational choice (Leung et al., 2002; Singelis et al., 2003). This measure has also been used within a Canadian context (Kuo, Kwantes, & Towson, 2005; Kwantes, Karam, Kuo, & Towson, 2005; Kwantes, Towson, & Kuo, 2004).

Previous research has established that culturally taught values and beliefs are related to conflict behaviors. Bond et al. (2004) examined the extent to which social beliefs, as measured by the Social Axioms Survey, could add predictive power to a set of values, as measured by the revised Schwartz' Value Survey (1992), in explaining social behaviors including choice of conflict management strategy. They concluded that assessing the contribution of both beliefs and values in a predictive model may provide more predictive power than the values alone. With respect to the social axioms, they found that reward for application was associated with an accommodative approach to conflict management, while spirituality was associated with both an accommodative and a competitive approach. Social cynicism was related to both compromising and collaboration efforts to manage conflict, as was social complexity.

When exploring the relationship between beliefs or cognitions and styles of conflict resolution, some theoretical connections do exist between the two sets of constructs that may help to explain this relationship and allow for certain predictions to be made. Allowing us to better understand the nature of this relationship, these connections relate certain cultural beliefs and cognitions and the motivations behind them to the set of conflict management styles. Reflecting a sense of mistrust, social cynicism can be linked to a low concern for others and thus may result in a dominating or avoiding conflict resolution strategy. Social flexibility implies that the world is a complicated place with multiple ways to achieve the same end and, as such, individuals scoring high on social flexibility may be more likely to engage in an integrating or compromising strategy of

conflict resolution. Reward for application is associated with a sense of fairness in which people desire to please both themselves as well as those around them in a manner that is satisfactory to all interacting parties. This may be more likely to elicit an integrating or compromising strategy. A belief in spirituality is rooted in a 'do good for others' approach, which can be linked with a high concern for others and thus may more often result in integrating or obliging. Fate control is associated with a belief that our lives are predetermined and, as a result, reduced efforts are made to please others. As such, a high score on fate control may be linked with a dominating or avoiding conflict resolution strategy. Lastly, a belief in interpersonal harmony is clearly reflective of an increased concern for others and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships, and may result in integrating, obliging, or compromising as a conflict resolution strategy. Table 1 includes an overview of the hypothesized connections between cultural variables and styles of conflict resolution.

### *1.3. Personality variables*

Just as the conflict process may be influenced by a group-level variable such as culture, it may also be influenced by variables that operate at the level of the individual. Personality variables such as self-monitoring and EQ may also influence the social interactions that take place on a daily basis, including those that are categorized as conflict-based.

#### *1.3.1. Self-monitoring*

Developed by Snyder (1974), the concept of self-monitoring outlines the susceptibility of an individual's behavior to internal versus external cues. The focus of this theory is placed on the stability or flexibility of one's persona across situations. Whether one chooses to alter behavior in order to maintain a positive impression in the interests of image management depends on the individual. High self-monitors are usually the chameleons of the world, readily changing their behavior according to the specific environment in which they are placed. According to Snyder (1974), three characteristics of an individual scoring high on self-monitoring are: (1) a concern for behaving in an appropriate manner, (2) a sensitivity to cues in the environment, and (3) a change in behavior according to what the environment demands. These characteristics are linked to the ability and motivation behind reading situational cues and gearing one's actions in such a way as to maximize the likelihood of a positive outcome (Snyder, 1974).

High self-monitoring has been linked to more favorable outcomes at work, as those individuals who are more likely to alter their behavior based on the particular scenario in which they find themselves are also more likely to resolve conflict by engaging in collaboration and compromise (Warech, Smither, Reilly, Millsap, & Reilly, 1998). These findings are not restricted to the organizational setting, however, as high self-monitoring has been linked to better interpersonal effectiveness in general (Warech et al., 1998).

Relating self-monitoring ability and choice of conflict resolution strategy, a number of specific predictions can be made. Individuals considered to be high self-monitors are more likely to adapt according to the situation and, as such, meet their own needs as well as those of others in an attempt at maintaining a good image. In this way, high self-monitors are more likely to engage in an integrating or compromising strategy of conflict resolution. In contrast, the behavior of low self-monitors is more likely to

Table 1
Hypothesized connections between conflict style and cultural variables

| Conflict style (Rahim, 1992) | Vertical collectivism | Vertical individualism | Horizontal collectivism | Horizontal individualism | Social cynicism | Social flexibility | Reward for application | Spirituality | Fate control | Interpersonal harmony |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | High concern for self | Low concern for others | Low concern for self | High concern for others | Mistrust of others | Many ways to do things | Fairness | Do good for others | Less efforts to please others | High concern for others |
| Dominate | + | + | | | + | | | | + | |
| Avoid | | + | + | | + | | | | + | |
| Integrate | + | | | + | | + | + | + | | + |
| Oblige | | | + | + | | | | + | | + |
| Compromise | | | | | | + | + | | | + |

*Note*: A '+' sign denotes a hypothesized positive relationship.

remain stable across situations, thus demonstrating less of a concern for the needs or opinions of others and more often eliciting a dominating, avoiding, or obliging conflict resolution strategy.

### 1.3.2. Emotional intelligence

Simply put, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) conceptualized EQ as the interaction between intelligence and emotion. More specifically, Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined EQ as 'the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth' (p. 10). This conceptualization elaborates on the idea that some people are more skilled at understanding the feelings of others and responding to them in a manner that is characterized by empathy and compassion. Emotionally intelligent individuals make better friends, better partners, better co-workers, and better leaders. Research has demonstrated that EQ fosters positive interpersonal interactions (Herkenhoff, 2004).

Taken in sum, these studies exploring the influence of personality variables have linked them to both cultural variables and styles of conflict resolution. This body of research suggests that high self-monitors and those who have higher levels of EQ are more likely to use a contingency-based style of managing interpersonal conflict as well as more likely to have positive conflict outcomes.

Linking the concepts of EQ and strategies of conflict resolution, a set of specific predictions can be made based on these theoretical connections. Scoring high on self-emotions appraisal indicates an increased ability to understand how one is feeling within a particular situation, which is reflected in an increased awareness and concern for the self. Individuals scoring high on this subscale will be more likely to engage in a dominating or integrating strategy of conflict resolution. A high score on the others-emotions appraisal subscale indicates heightened awareness and concern for the feelings of others and individuals that are more likely to engage in integrating or obliging. An increased ability to use and regulate emotions is associated with the effective monitoring of emotions within specific situations and involves acting in accordance with the needs of both interacting parties, thus reflecting a high concern for the self and for others. As such, individuals scoring high on both subscales will more often engage in integrating or compromising as a conflict resolution strategy. Table 2 includes an overview of the hypothesized connections between personality variables and styles of conflict resolution.

## 1.4. Research goals

Although each finding that links a single personality or cultural variable with a particular style of conflict resolution is useful, it is also limiting. An expanded approach that explores cultural values, social beliefs, self-monitoring, and EQ all within a single study would contribute to our understanding of the relative contribution of each in predicting conflict styles. Therefore, the goal of this research was to expand on earlier work and investigate the relationship among conflict resolution behavior, culture, and personality variables. Specifically, this study explored the predictive power of personality over and above cultural variables in determining a person's choice of conflict resolution strategies.

Table 2
Hypothesized connections between conflict style and personality variables

| Conflict style (Rahim, 1992) | Low self-monitoring | High self-monitoring | Self-emotions appraisal | Others-emotions appraisal | Use of emotion | Regulation of emotion |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Relatively stable | Beh. meets the needs of both parties | High concern for self | High concern for others | Beh. meets the needs of both parties | Beh. meets the needs of both parties |
| Dominating | + | | + | | | |
| Avoiding | + | | | | | |
| Integrating | | + | + | + | + | + |
| Obliging | + | | | + | | |
| Compromising | | + | | | + | + |

*Note*: A '+' sign denotes a hypothesized positive relationship.

### 1.5. Hypotheses

Several specific hypotheses follow from each of the theoretical connections made between the cultural (values and beliefs/cognitions) and personality variables (self-monitoring and EQ) and Rahim's (1992) styles of conflict resolution.

It is expected that cultural values and beliefs will significantly predict individuals' choice of conflict resolution strategy. Specifically:

H1A: Vertical collectivism will be positively related to the dominating and integrating strategies of conflict resolution.

H1B: Vertical individualism will be positively related to dominating and avoiding.

H1C: Horizontal individualism will be positively related to integrating and obliging.

H1D: Horizontal collectivism will be positively related to avoiding and obliging.

H2A: Social cynicism will be positively related to dominating and avoiding.

H2B: Social flexibility will be positively related to integrating and compromising.

H2C: Reward for application will be positively related to integrating and compromising.

H2D: Spirituality will be positively related to integrating and obliging.

H2E: Fate control will be positively related to dominating and avoiding.

H2F: Interpersonal harmony will be positively related to integrating, obliging, and compromising.

It is also expected that EQ and self-monitoring will significantly predict individuals' choice of conflict resolution strategy over and above the predictive power of cultural values and beliefs. Specifically:

H3A: High self-monitoring will be positively related to integrating and compromising.

H3B: Low self-monitoring will be positively related to dominating, avoiding, and obliging.

H4A: Self-emotions appraisal will be positively related to dominating and integrating.
H4B: Others-emotions appraisal will positively related to integrating and obliging.
H4C: Use of emotions will be positively related to integrating and compromising.
H4D: Regulation of emotions will be positively related to integrating and compromising.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

One hundred and nine undergraduates (23 males and 86 females) from a university in Southern Ontario participated in this study in exchange for course credit. The mean age of participants was 21.32 years of age, ranging from 18 to 55 years. Participants were asked to self-identify their ethnic background. Thirteen categories emerged, with Caucasian being the modal response (44%) followed by English Canadian (12%), French Canadian (7%), and West Asian (6%).

### 2.2. Procedure

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that included scales to measure conflict resolution strategies, horizontal and vertical individualism–collectivism, social beliefs, self-monitoring, EQ and cultural intelligence. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and given an information form.

### 2.3. Conflict resolution strategies

Conflict behavior was assessed using the protocol developed by Sternberg and Dobson (1987) asking participants to describe their actual and ideal reactions to a conflict which had occurred in the past year in which they were involved. After providing each description, they were asked to rate the extent to which they made use of each of 17 methods of conflict resolution (economic action, physical force, wait and see, acceptance, stepping down, third party, undermining esteem, withholding, bargain/compromise, avoidance, giving in, manipulation, verbal force, prior history, confrontational discussion, mutual discussion, and separation). These ratings were provided on a nine-point scale (1 = not what I did; 9 = exactly what I did). Coefficient alphas for the scale (Self-monitoring: Motivation Subscale and Self-monitoring: Ability Subscale) were .84 and .83, respectively. Both subscales are related to Snyder's (1974) self-monitoring scale (with correlation coefficient values of .52 and .65, respectively) and are unrelated to other broad personality traits.

### 2.4. Horizontal and vertical individualism–collectivism

Participants were also asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with 32 statements that characterized vertical individualism (being independent with an acceptance of inequality between people), vertical collectivism (being part of an in-group with members of differing status), horizontal individualism (being part of an in-group with members of equal status) and horizontal collectivism (being interdependent as part of an in-group;

Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis, 1995). These ratings were provided on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree). Cronbach alphas for the four dimensions comprising this measure were found to range from .67 to .74. Each of these dimensions is related to the Singelis Self-Construal Scale for Independence (1994), Interdependence (1994) as well as the individualism and collectivism items on the Sinha Scale (Sinha & Verma, 1994; Cronbach alphas of .70, .71, .42, .53, respectively).

### 2.5. Social beliefs

Participants were also given 82 items from the SAS (SAS, as developed by Leung et al., 2002). They were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements that represented the factors of social cynicism (a mistrust of people), reward for application (a belief that effort will lead to positive results), social flexibility (acceptance that there are numerous ways to do the same thing), fate control (a belief that our lives are predetermined), spirituality (faith in a supreme being), and interpersonal harmony (a focus on positive relations between people). These ratings were provided on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Reliability coefficients for the items associated with the six social beliefs have demonstrated a range from .52 to .97; goodness of fit and comparative fit indices have demonstrated a range from .92 to .97.

### 2.6. Self-monitoring

The extent to which participants were sensitive to situational cues was measured using 16 self-monitoring items adapted by Warech et al. (1998). Participants were asked to indicate whether they thought statements measuring both motivation and ability to self-monitor were true or false. Reliability, as demonstrated by the consistency of styles across varying interpersonal relationships (parent, instructor, roommate or romantic partner), ranged in correlation from .67 to .90. A positive association was demonstrated between this scale and that developed by Sternberg and Soriano (1984). The items from this scale were also found to be unrelated to personality traits and intellectual ability.

### 2.7. Emotional intelligence

EQ was measured using 16 items from the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, 2002). Developed using Mayer and Salovey's (1997) definition of EQ, the WLEIS conceptualizes EQ as composed of four distinct dimensions, namely emotional appraisal of the self, emotional appraisal of others, regulation of emotion, and use of emotion (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements that measured their ability to recognize their own emotions, the emotions of others, how to use their emotions, and how to regulate them. These rating were provided on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Coefficient alphas for the four subscales comprising this measure were found to range from .84 to .93. All four subscales are related to the BarOn EQ-i measure of EQ (with a correlation coefficient value of .63) and are unrelated to other broad dimensions of personality.

### 2.8. Analysis of data

The first step in examining the data was a content analysis on the responses to an open-ended question asking participants to describe a conflict situation they had actually been involved in. This information was used to gain a greater understanding of the types of conflict that participants had been involved with in terms of who they had the conflict with and the extent to which they were pleased with the way they had handled the situation. In order to test the hypotheses, a factor analysis was performed on the conflict management styles. This initial step provided categories of conflict management styles, and was used in examining the predictive power of cultural values, cultural beliefs, and personality variables. Hierarchical regression was used, as the question of interest was whether or not personality variables that have been reported to be related to conflict management choices (Baum & Shnit, 2003; Nicotera & DeWine, 1991), yet are conceptually unrelated to culture, can still provide an explanation of variance accounted for after the effects of culturally learned values and beliefs are taken into account. Thus, three categories of variables were entered into the equation. First, culturally transmitted values (horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism) were entered into each equation, second to be entered were culturally learned beliefs (SAS), and in the final step, personality variables that are not theoretically linked to culture.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Content analysis

Comparing participants' responses to the question asking for a conflict description, 21.1% involved family, 28.4% described a conflict with a friend or a roommate, 17.4% involved a romantic partner, and 20.2% concerned a school or work situation.

For each description, participants were asked to identify both the way in which they actually responded to the conflict as well as the way in which they wished they had responded to it. After all, what an individual would do in a hypothetical situation does not always match what they actually do in any given situation. These questions were added in order to test the consistency of participants' responses, and thus support the generalizability of the results. After providing both descriptions, they rated the extent to which they ideally would have engaged in 17 specific strategies of conflict resolution. Comparisons of the actual and ideal responses for the conflict situations described by the participants exhibited a great deal of variation. Responses ranged from 'Ideally, I would not have done anything differently' to 'If I could go back, I would have handled the situation very differently'. There did not appear to be a relation between the type of conflict scenario described (friend, romantic partner, peer/co-worker) and whether or not the actual and ideal conflict resolution strategies were congruent.

### 3.2. Factor analysis

A factor analysis of the items from Sternberg and Dobson's (1987) measure of conflict resolution strategies indicated that the 17 items loaded onto five or six factors. The method for extraction was based on principal components analysis using varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. Based on the scree plots and the interpretability of the factors,

a five-factor solution was chosen as most suitable (see Table 3 for factor loadings for each scale item). These five factors are somewhat consistent with the 'concern for self' and 'concern for others' distinction as originally described by Blake and Mouton (1964) and later reinterpreted by Rahim (1992). Four of the factors can be mapped onto a specific style of conflict resolution. Factor 1 can be labelled 'high concern for self/low concern for others' and parallels Rahim's (1992) dominating style of conflict resolution. Factor 2 can be labelled 'low concern for self/low concern for others' and is similar to the avoiding style of conflict resolution. Factor 3 can be labelled 'high concern for self/high concern for others' and mimics the integrating conflict resolution style. Factor 4 can be labelled 'low concern for self/high concern for others' and resembles the obliging conflict resolution strategy. Interestingly, the fifth factor was not consistent with the compromising style of conflict resolution (involving a 'moderate concern for self and others') did not emerge. Rather, the fifth factor was comprised of two items, one of which indicated a withholding response to conflict, and the other indicating that any strategy selected would be heavily dependent on prior experiences. Based on these loadings, this factor was termed a 'contingency-based' approach to conflict management. The variance accounted for by these five factors is 6.4%, 14.0%, 22.6%, 7.9%, and 9.9%, respectively.

### 3.3. Hypothesis testing

The predictive power of each of the culture and personality variables (horizontal and vertical individualism–collectivism, social beliefs, self-monitoring, and EQ) was then tested using the five strategies of conflict resolution obtained from the factor analysis (see Table 4 for ranges, means, and standard deviations for all variables).

#### 3.3.1. Step one

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted, with the first two steps providing the basis for testing Hypothesis 1, that cultural values and beliefs would significantly predict conflict management choices. In order to explore the effects of horizontal and vertical individualism–collectivism, social beliefs, and the two personality factors on conflict resolution strategy, this approach provided the best method by which to see if personality variables added to the explanatory power of the cultural variables. Cultural value variables were added in as a block in the first step, and accounted for between 1% (contingency) and 19% (dominating) of the variance of conflict management strategy. At this step, values were able to predict the dominating, avoiding, and obliging strategies of conflict management. Vertical individualism and vertical collectivism provided an independent contribution to explaining the dominating style (see Table 5), while vertical collectivism alone predicted the obliging strategy (see Table 6). The avoiding style of conflict management was predicted positively by vertical individualism and collectivism, and negatively by horizontal individualism (see Table 7).

#### 3.3.2. Step two

Regardless of significance at the first step, cultural beliefs were added into each regression equation, following the suggestion by Bond et al. (2004) to assess whether or not cultural beliefs added any additional predictive power. Therefore, each of the dimensions of the SAS was added in as a block in this step. Adding cultural beliefs into the equation

Table 3
Five-factor solution for the 17 items in the Sternberg and Dobson (1987) Scale

| Item | Factor 1 Dominating | Factor 2 Avoiding | Factor 3 Integrating | Factor 4 Obliging | Factor 5 Contingency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Economic action | .776 | | | | |
| Physical force | .848 | | | | |
| Undermine esteem | .730 | | | | |
| Manipulate | .680 | | | | |
| Verbal force | .590 | | | | |
| Accept | | .714 | | | |
| Step down | | .575 | | | |
| Avoid | | .645 | | | |
| Give in | | .698 | | | |
| Bargain/compromise | | | .639 | | |
| Mutual discussion | | | .715 | | |
| Separation | | | −.756 | | |
| Confrontational discussion | | | | .497 | |
| Third party | | | | .805 | |
| Wait and see | | | | .616 | |
| Withhold | | | | | .468 |
| Prior history | | | | | .721 |

Table 4
Means and standard deviations for the personality, culture, and conflict variables

| Variable | *M* | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Vertical/horizontal individualism–collectivism | | |
| Vertical individualism | 4.17 | .82 |
| Vertical collectivism | 4.57 | .87 |
| Horizontal individualism | 5.57 | .67 |
| Horizontal collectivism | 5.60 | .64 |
| Social axioms | | |
| Social cynicism | 3.65 | .91 |
| Reward for application | 5.17 | .65 |
| Social flexibility | 4.86 | .47 |
| Fate control | 3.29 | 1.07 |
| Spirituality | 4.29 | .79 |
| Interpersonal harmony | 5.30 | .56 |
| Emotional intelligence | | |
| Self-emotions appraisal | 5.61 | .80 |
| Others-emotions appraisal | 5.54 | .77 |
| Use of emotion | 5.36 | 1.00 |
| Regulation of emotion | 4.92 | 1.16 |
| Cultural intelligence | | |
| Meta-cognitive CQ | 5.17 | .94 |
| Cognitive CQ | 3.63 | 1.20 |
| Motivational CQ | 5.13 | 1.06 |
| Behavioral CQ | 4.53 | 1.16 |

did not allow it to significantly predict either the contingency-based (see Table 8) or integrating strategies (see Table 9).

Incremental predictive ability was found for the dominating ($F_{\text{change}} = 3.04$, $p < .01$), obliging ($F_{\text{change}} = 2.86$, $p < .05$), and avoiding ($F_{\text{change}} = 4.19$, $p < .01$) strategies. Social cynicism was the only variable that provided an independent contribution to explaining the dominating style of conflict management over and above the cultural values in the model. For the obliging strategy, social cynicism provided an independent, positive contribution, while fate control provided a negative contribution. Social cynicism and social flexibility were positively, and spirituality negatively related to the avoiding style of conflict management.

The first hypothesis was partially supported, therefore, as cultural values and beliefs did provide predictive ability for three of the five conflict management factors.

### *3.3.3. Step three*

The second hypothesis was tested at the third step of the hierarchical regression, where the personality variables of self-monitoring and EQ were added in as a block to assess the extent to which they predicted conflict strategy choices independently of cultural values and beliefs. This was done regardless of the significance of the second equation. Contrary to expectations, it was found that these personality variables did not add in any predictive power for any of the conflict management styles over and above the cultural variables. The equation with these variables added still significantly predicted the avoiding and obliging

Table 5
Summary of regressions predicting a dominating conflict resolution strategy

| | *B* | SE | *β* | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Step one* | | | | .190*** | |
| Horizontal individualism | .191 | .249 | .079 | | |
| Vertical individualism | .473 | .202 | .235* | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | −.410 | .265 | −.159 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .578 | .187 | .307*** | | |
| *Step two* | | | | .320*** | .130*** |
| Horizontal individualism | .156 | .260 | .064 | | |
| Vertical individualism | .233 | .205 | .116 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | −.233 | .285 | −.090 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .290 | .209 | .154 | | |
| Social cynicism | .458 | .210 | .254* | | |
| Reward for application | −.158 | .308 | −.062 | | |
| Social flexibility | .322 | .402 | .090 | | |
| Fate control | .359 | .184 | .233 | | |
| Spirituality | .030 | .233 | .154 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | −.403 | .315 | −.135 | | |
| *Step three* | | | | .355*** | .035* |
| Horizontal individualism | .257 | .259 | .105 | | |
| Vertical individualism | .184 | .202 | .091 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | −.117 | .284 | −.046 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .294 | .204 | .156 | | |
| Social cynicism | .383 | .208 | .213 | | |
| Reward for application | −.079 | .304 | −.031 | | |
| Social flexibility | .321 | .394 | .090 | | |
| Fate control | .348 | .180 | .226 | | |
| Spirituality | .146 | .234 | .070 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | −.426 | .309 | −.143 | | |
| Emotional intelligence | −.495 | .221 | −.212* | | |
| Self-monitoring | .124 | .357 | .030 | | |

*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

strategies, although the personality variables did not add any unique contribution to either equation. On the other hand, the equation predicting the dominating strategy remained significant, and EQ was found to significantly and negatively predict this strategy. Thus, with respect to the second hypothesis, the results demonstrated only an isolated instance of personality variables influencing conflict management choices beyond the influence of cultural values and beliefs.

## 4. Discussion

In this study, participants were asked to describe a conflict that they have experienced, how they handled it, and how they would like to have handled it at the time. The breakdown of conflict type into family, friend-, relationship-, and school- or work-oriented conflicts (21.1%, 28.4%, 17.4%, and 20.2%, respectively) seems typical of an undergraduate sample. With increased exposure to new people comes an increased friend

Table 6
Summary of regressions predicting an obliging conflict resolution strategy

| | *B* | SE | *β* | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Step one* | | | | .134** | |
| Horizontal individualism | −.494 | .317 | −.165 | | |
| Vertical individualism | .505 | .257 | .204 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .009 | .337 | .003 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .682 | .237 | .295** | | |
| *Step two* | | | | .236** | .133* |
| Horizontal individualism | −.922 | .332 | −.307** | | |
| Vertical individualism | .413 | .261 | .167 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .248 | .364 | .078 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .422 | .266 | .182 | | |
| Social cynicism | .611 | .268 | .276* | | |
| Reward for application | .628 | .394 | .086 | | |
| Social flexibility | .370 | .514 | .084 | | |
| Fate control | −.514 | .235 | −.272* | | |
| Spirituality | .291 | .297 | .114 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | .486 | .402 | .133 | | |
| *Step three* | | | | .289*** | .022 |
| Horizontal individualism | −.822 | .334 | −.274** | | |
| Vertical individualism | .365 | .260 | .147 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .362 | .366 | .114 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .425 | .264 | .184 | | |
| Social cynicism | .538 | .269 | .243* | | |
| Reward for application | .345 | .392 | .110 | | |
| Social flexibility | .369 | .509 | .084 | | |
| Fate control | −.525 | .233 | −.277* | | |
| Spirituality | .405 | .302 | .158 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | .463 | .398 | .126 | | |
| Emotional intelligence | −.488 | .286 | −.170 | | |
| Self-monitoring | −.060 | .461 | −.012 | | |

*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

group, it is no wonder that the majority of conflicts with this group tend to occur between friends.

Factor analysis of the Sternberg and Dobson (1987) conflict resolution strategy scale demonstrated a factor structure somewhat similar to Rahim's (1992) styles of conflict resolution, providing support for the fact that Rahim's styles can be applied beyond the organizational context. The fact that the extracted factor structure mapped so well onto Rahim's 'concern for self/concern for others' dimensions provides support for the convergent validity of these styles of conflict resolution, leading us to believe that most of our possible reactions to conflict situations can be categorized as avoiding, obliging, dominating, or integrating. It is interesting that the fifth factor that emerged in the analysis was not entirely consistent with a compromising style of conflict resolution. Several explanations for this finding are possible. First, sample size may have played a role in that a larger sample may have allowed for clearer distinctions between the factors, thus allowing for the fifth factor to emerge. Second, the sample itself was comprised of

Table 7
Summary of regressions predicting an avoiding conflict resolution strategy

| | *B* | SE | *β* | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Step one* | | | | .186*** | |
| Horizontal individualism | −.814 | .333 | −.250* | | |
| Vertical individualism | .739 | .271 | .275** | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .222 | .355 | .065 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .735 | .250 | .300** | | |
| *Step two* | | | | .356*** | .170*** |
| Horizontal individualism | −1.243 | .338 | −.382*** | | |
| Vertical individualism | .379 | .266 | .141 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .080 | .370 | .023 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .530 | .271 | .211 | | |
| Social cynicism | .595 | .273 | .248* | | |
| Reward for application | .822 | .400 | .242* | | |
| Social flexibility | 1.357 | .523 | .285* | | |
| Fate control | .054 | .239 | .026 | | |
| Spirituality | −.601 | .302 | −.216* | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | −.475 | .409 | −.120 | | |
| *Step three* | | | | .375*** | .019 |
| Horizontal individualism | −1.148 | .340 | −.353** | | |
| Vertical individualism | −.333 | .265 | .124 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .188 | .373 | .055 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .533 | .269 | .212 | | |
| Social cynicism | .526 | .274 | .219 | | |
| Reward for application | .895 | .400 | .264* | | |
| Social flexibility | 1.356 | .518 | .284* | | |
| Fate control | .043 | .237 | .021 | | |
| Spirituality | −.493 | .307 | −.177 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | −.497 | .406 | −.125 | | |
| Emotional intelligence | −.464 | .291 | −.149 | | |
| Self-monitoring | .262 | .469 | .047 | | |

*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

university students, and age, socioeconomic status, and the effects of being emerged in a higher education setting may result in compromising having less appeal. Indeed, a lower use of compromise as a conflict management strategy has been found in other research (for example, Owens, 2005).

Studies that have explored the effects of cultural variables on Rahim's styles of conflict resolution in the workplace have demonstrated that individuals from the US were more likely to use a dominating style of conflict resolution than those from Japan or Korea and that people from China or Taiwan tended to make use of the obliging and avoiding styles more often than people from the US (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Thus, culture does play a role in determining a person's choice of conflict resolution strategy. The findings from the present study support what has been established in the literature to date, as regression analyses demonstrated that culture accounted for between 1% (contingency) and 19% (dominating) of the variance in choice of conflict resolution strategy.

Specifically, the 'high concern for self/low concern for others' (dominating) factor was found to be positively associated with both vertical individualism and vertical collectivism. Both of

Table 8
Summary of regressions predicting a contingency-based conflict resolution strategy

| | *B* | SE | *β* | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Step one* | | | | .010 | |
| Horizontal individualism | .011 | .390 | .003 | | |
| Vertical individualism | −.198 | .317 | −.069 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | −.290 | .416 | −.079 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | −.011 | .292 | −.004 | | |
| *Step two* | | | | .119 | .109 |
| Horizontal individualism | −.052 | .419 | −.015 | | |
| Vertical individualism | −.238 | .330 | −.084 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | −.698 | .459 | −.191 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .009 | .336 | −.003 | | |
| Social cynicism | −.258 | .338 | −.101 | | |
| Reward for application | .290 | .497 | .080 | | |
| Social flexibility | .378 | .649 | .075 | | |
| Fate control | −.132 | .297 | −.060 | | |
| Spirituality | −.367 | .375 | −.124 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | 1.354 | .507 | .321** | | |
| *Step three* | | | | .128 | .009 |
| Horizontal individualism | .016 | .426 | .005 | | |
| Vertical individualism | −.271 | .332 | −.095 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | −.620 | .467 | −.170 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .011 | .336 | .004 | | |
| Social cynicism | −.308 | .343 | −.121 | | |
| Reward for application | .342 | .501 | .095 | | |
| Social flexibility | .378 | .649 | .075 | | |
| Fate control | −.139 | .297 | −.064 | | |
| Spirituality | −.289 | .385 | −.098 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | −1.338 | .508 | .318* | | |
| Emotional intelligence | −.331 | .365 | −.100 | | |
| Self-monitoring | .199 | .588 | .034 | | |

*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

these cultural variables place an emphasis on the individual and a concern for the self (even if it is within a group), and it is this focus that most likely encourages the individual to choose a dominating style of conflict resolution. In contrast, it seems that the positive association between the 'low concern for self/high concern for others' (obliging) factor and vertical collectivism is rooted in the group-based identity of collectivism. Both vertical individualism and vertical collectivism were positively associated with the 'low concern for self/low concern for others' (avoiding) factor; whereas, this factor was negatively associated with horizontal individualism. The latter part of this statement seems to make a lot more sense than the former, as horizontal individualism places less of an emphasis on the individual as well as the group. Overall, it seems that the concern for self-concern for others dimension overlaps with the individualism–collectivism dimension, and that the power dimension that is introduced through the vertical and horizontal dimensions are interacting with the IC distinction in determining a person's choice of conflict resolution strategy.

Despite the extant literature on strategies of conflict resolution, most studies investigating the effects of culture and personality do so separately. To date, most of

Table 9
Summary of regressions predicting an integrating conflict resolution strategy

| | *B* | SE | *β* | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Step one* | | | | .013 | |
| Horizontal individualism | .199 | .343 | .065 | | |
| Vertical individualism | .087 | .279 | .034 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .112 | .366 | .035 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | .089 | .257 | .038 | | |
| *Step two* | | | | .125 | .112 |
| Horizontal individualism | −.077 | .368 | −.025 | | |
| Vertical individualism | −.101 | .290 | −.040 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .380 | .404 | .118 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | −.265 | .296 | −.112 | | |
| Social cynicism | .481 | .298 | .214 | | |
| Reward for application | .626 | .437 | .197 | | |
| Social flexibility | .313 | .570 | .070 | | |
| Fate control | .103 | .261 | .053 | | |
| Spirituality | .252 | .330 | .097 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | −1.123 | .446 | −.302* | | |
| *Step three* | | | | .152 | .027 |
| Horizontal individualism | .035 | .370 | .011 | | |
| Vertical individualism | −.156 | .289 | −.062 | | |
| Horizontal collectivism | .507 | .406 | .158 | | |
| Vertical collectivism | −.261 | .293 | −.111 | | |
| Social cynicism | .398 | .298 | .177 | | |
| Reward for application | .712 | .435 | .224 | | |
| Social flexibility | .312 | .565 | .070 | | |
| Fate control | .091 | .258 | .047 | | |
| Spirituality | .380 | .335 | .146 | | |
| Interpersonal harmony | −1.149 | .442 | −.309* | | |
| Emotional intelligence | −.545 | .317 | −.187 | | |
| Self monitoring | .041 | .511 | .008 | | |

*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

the work examining the impact of culture on conflict resolution styles has been done using the standard cultural variables of individualism–collectivism, power distance, masculinity–femininity, and short term-long term orientation as outlined by Hofstede (1983). The current study has used the construct of vertical/horizontal individualism–collectivism (as developed by Singelis et al., 1995) as a better alternative to the individualism–collectivism dimension. Although its development was relatively recent, use of the vertical/horizontal distinction better accounts for the differences within groups as well as those between groups, making it possible for a person to be individualistic within a group setting and collectivistic while still retaining an individual identity. Although these constructs have been 'theoretically defined and empirically supported' by the researchers that worked to develop them (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998, p. 118), much of the research to date has not used the vertical/horizontal distinction. As such, one of the goals of this study is to encourage the use of this construct in future research.

Research investigating the influence of social beliefs on choice of conflict resolution strategy is sparse. Of the few studies that do exist, social belief factors such as social

cynicism, spirituality, reward for application, and social flexibility have been demonstrated to predict interpersonal styles of conflict resolution (Li-Na & Jian-Xin, 2004). In the present study, regression analyses demonstrated that social beliefs accounted for up to 17% of the variance in choice of conflict resolution strategy. Specifically, social cynicism played a role in the 'high concern for self/low concern for others' (dominating) factor. The positive association between the two variables may be rooted in the fact that both are characterized by a very pessimistic view of society accompanied by a lack of ethical standards reflected in a person's behavior. If hurting another person's feelings does not make you feel guilty, you will probably be more likely to engage in such behavior on a regular basis. Social cynicism was also positively associated with the 'low concern for self/high concern for others' (obliging) factor; whereas, fate control was negatively associated with this factor. This latter finding might be explained by the fact that a fatalistic view of life may cause a person to worry much less about making an effort to please others. If a person believes that life events are predetermined, then any efforts made to please others, do good, or achieve a certain end are futile. The 'low concern for self/low concern for other' (avoiding) factor was shown to be positively associated with social cynicism and social flexibility, but negatively associated with spirituality. The less trusting one is, the more likely s/he will be to avoid people. Also, the more religious a person is, the more s/he might want to deal with problem issues right away, as clearing the air would be the 'right' thing to do.

Thus, both cultural values and social beliefs play an important role in predicting a person's choice of conflict resolution strategy. Similar findings are evident in the conflict literature, providing additional support for the idea that culture influences the conflict process in a subtle yet significant way.

Studies exploring the relationship between self-monitoring and choice of conflict resolution strategy have demonstrated that high self-monitors are better at dealing with interpersonal problems and are more likely to engage in strategies of collaboration or compromise to manage conflict (Warech et al., 1998). Thus, it was surprising that this study found no such effects. Evidencing no predictive power over and above that of culture, self-monitoring could not be linked to any of the five styles of conflict resolution. Though these results are indeed interesting, further investigation of this relationship is necessary in order to clarify the role of self-monitoring within the conflict process. It might be useful for such an investigation to administer a larger measure of self-monitoring which includes more items than the original 16 adapted by Warech et al. (1998).

Within the conflict literature, most studies have explored the role of EQ in team dynamics, leadership, and collective problem-solving; however, only a few studies have directly investigated the relationship between EQ and conflict resolution strategies. Jordan and Troth (2004) have demonstrated a positive relation between EQ and collaborative methods of conflict resolution. In the present study, regression analyses demonstrated that EQ did not account for any additional variance in choice of conflict resolution strategy beyond that which was accounted for by the cultural variables. In fact, the only scenario in which EQ was found to exert any effects was in the case of the dominating strategy of conflict resolution, which was found to be negatively related to EQ. Though unexpected, this finding is almost intuitive, as people who are highly aware of others' emotions will no doubt be more sensitive to them and less likely to focus on their own needs before those of others. Of particular

interest in the study findings is the lack of a relationship found between EQ and the integrating style of conflict resolution, which would seem to be utilized more often by individuals characterized as emotionally intelligent. As this strategy balances a person's own needs with those of others, it would make sense that individuals with a higher EQ would be better at maintaining this balance within their interpersonal interactions, especially those that involved conflict. As is the case with self-monitoring, further investigation is needed before determining the role of EQ within the conflict process and a larger measure of EQ which includes more items than the original 16 by Wong and Law (2002) might be a good first step.

### *4.1. Limitations and new directions*

There are several limitations of the present study that need to be discussed. First, using an undergraduate sample of participants may have influenced the results in a way that reduces the generalizability of the findings to the general population. Both personality and cultural characteristics specific to the student sample used as well as the student population in general could have influenced their responses, specifically with respect to the use of a contingency-based response to conflict. Second, this study assessed behavioral intent as opposed to actual behaviors, a distinction that may have led to issues concerning self-reporting and social desirability. Third, although study participants were asked to report their ethnicity, they did not identify their citizenship or immigration status, which may have provided some additional insight into the nature of the sample. Had the study obtained more demographic information about the sample, analyses of variables such as level of acculturation may have informed the results. Fourth, a clearer mapping of the seventeen conflict resolution methods used in this study onto Rahim's five factors would have been desirable. Perhaps including both the Sternberg and Dobson (1987) and Rahim (1983) conflict inventories would have allowed for a clearer comparison between the two.

Overall, this study examined the predictive power of cultural and personality variables on strategies of conflict resolution. No previous study has simultaneously investigated the effects of vertical and horizontal individualism–collectivism, social beliefs, self-monitoring, and EQ on conflict resolution styles. The findings of the present study have demonstrated that cultural values and social beliefs do predict a person's choice of conflict resolution strategy but EQ and self-monitoring do not. Although these findings have shed some light on the influence of both cultural and personality variables on conflict resolution, more research is needed in order to fully understand the role of both in conflict behavior. As such, there is a need to adopt an interactional approach to conflict management and resolution, and future research would do well to explore both the individual and combined roles of personality and cultural variables to gain more insight into the conflict process.

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