

Conflict patterns among Greek couples: The role of values, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction

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Abstract

This study tested the assumption that self- and spouse reports on values, self-disclosure and satisfaction could predict conflict patterns, as proposed by Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn's (1982) Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect typology. Participants were 133 married Greek couples. Results were generally consistent with expectations: Self- and spouse reports on satisfaction, self-disclosure and values were significant predictors of the use of the four conflict resolution strategies, to an extent that varied across conflict type, informant (self vs. spouse) and gender. Overall, husbands were more satisfied than wives. No differences were found at the mean level of self-disclosure, or in the frequency and type of the conflict strategies used by husbands and wives. Values that promoted positive social relationships (e.g., Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity) were positively related to constructive conflict strategies (Voice, Loyalty), and negatively related to destructive conflict strategies (Exit, Neglect). The opposite pattern of relationships was found for values that promoted self-interest at the expense of couple goals (Power). Values promoting gratification of personal needs without necessarily threatening social relations (e.g., Hedonism, Stimulation) differentially contributed to the prediction of conflict resolution strategies in husbands and wives. Finally, passive conflict strategies (Loyalty, Neglect) were negatively related to values, emphasizing the active pursuit of problem solving (Self-direction and Achievement). Findings are discussed in the light of literature on cultural and gender differences in conflict resolution strategies in intimate relationships.

Key-words: conflict resolution strategies, values, self-disclosure, satisfaction, intimate relationships

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Marriage dissolution is becoming very common, especially in the western world (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). As Erich Fromm (1956, cf. Dwyer, 2000) pointed out, there is hardly any activity or enterprise that starts with such tremendous hopes and expectations and yet fails so frequently as love does. Peterson (1983, cf. Dwyer, 2000) defined an interpersonal conflict as a situation where the actions of one person interfere with the actions of another. The process by which partners deal with the conflict they experience is crucial for relationship outcomes, as ineffective conflict resolution can result in greater relationship distress and negative relationship outcomes (Dwyer, 2000). In what concerns Greece, statistics reveal an increase in divorce rates, even though it is only slight when compared with the standards of fellow countries in the European Union (Symeonidou & Mitsopoulos, 2003). Research on conflict patterns among Greek couples is scarce.

This study aims to extend previous findings by simultaneously assessing both cultural context (Values) and relational variables (Self-disclosure, Satisfaction) as possible predictors of the choice of different conflict strategies in intimate relationships. This is consistent with calls to incorporate cultural context along with relational variables in the study of conflict patterns (Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991). Although values have been successfully used to predict behavior in different fields such as voting, political activism and environment protection (Schwartz, 1992), to our knowledge they have not been studied with regard to the choice of conflict resolution strategies in intimate relationships. The adoption of Schwartz's pan-cultural hierarchy of values enables the researcher to formulate more precise predictions regarding the preference for each of the four conflict strategies based on the distinct underlying motives each value promotes, rather than the more general predictions based on the individualism-collectivism dimension previously used in the study of conflict resolution in intimate relationships.

This study also aims to examine whether partners' values, level of self-disclosure and satisfaction can have an impact on an individual's use of certain conflict strategies by including both self- and spouse reports. Results will be discussed in the light of literature examining cultural and gender influences on conflict resolution in intimate relationships as well as on the basis of the relative position of Greece in different value systems, e.g., individualism-collectivism (Georgas, 1989, 1991), Hofstede's values (Hofstede, 1980), social axioms (Bond et al., 2004), and personality factors (Schmitt, Allik, McCrae, & Benet-Martínez, 2007).

Conflict patterns in intimate relationships

The theory of couple patterns of problem solving has suggested four primary reactions to relationship problems, namely, Voice, Loyalty, Exit, and Neglect (Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). Voice is defined as expressing one's dissatisfaction actively and constructively with the intention of improving the relationship, Loyalty as waiting passively but optimistically for conditions to improve, Exit as threatening to end or leaving the relationship, and Neglect as passively allowing one's relationship to deteriorate. Voice and Loyalty are considered constructive responses to relationship problems, while Exit and Neglect are characterized as destructive responses. These strategies could further be defined as active (i.e., Exit, Voice) or passive (i.e., Loyalty, Neglect). In comparison to models describing simple responses, this typology presents a range of possible reactions to relationship problems and could be applied to relationships at any stage of their evolution (Sinclair & Fehr, 2004).

Previous research suggests that women are more likely to use Voice than men (Rusbult et al., 1982). In general, studies examining gender differences in conflict resolution within heterosexual intimate relationships in western countries indicate a typical "demand-withdrawal" pattern, wherein a wife complains or makes demands to which her husband responds by withdrawing or other passive behavior (Cingöz-Ulu & Lalonde, 2007). However, recent findings, which are based on the advanced marital structure hypothesis, challenge the notion that demanding and withdrawing behaviors are inherently male or female by suggesting

that this pattern can be altered through contextual factors, such as gender power differences and acculturation, particularly in traditional marriages (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2006).

Culture and conflict resolution strategies

Culture influences the way how people perceive conflicts, as well as the conflict process itself, since a person's cultural background dictates the goals that are considered incompatible, the reasons why they are seen as such, the choice of appropriate conflict management, as well as the evaluation of the conflict outcome (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006). Other scholars also note that individuals in various societies value conflict very differently. Individuals in western cultures view conflict as a part (perhaps even a beneficial one) of life, while people from cultures such as Korea or Japan feel that conflict is, by definition, bad and should be avoided. Therefore, they are less apt to initiate conflict (Wall & Callister, 1995).

Previous research has mainly explored the influence of the individualism-collectivism dimension on different ways of handling interpersonal problems. In general, the most stable finding coming from these studies as well as a recent meta-analysis examining conflict resolution strategies is that individualistic cultures promote open, direct and assertive communication patterns and choose forcing as a conflict style more often than collectivistic cultures. At the same time, the latter promote more indirect and reserved communication patterns and prefer the styles of withdrawing, compromising, and problem solving more than individualistic cultures (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995, cf. Fitzpatrick et al., 2001; Leung & Chan, 1999; Holt & DeVore, 2005).

However, the above patterns stem from research in organizational settings and may not apply when conflict management is contextualized within specific types of close relationships. For example, in a study comparing the preferred strategies deployed by people from individualistic Canada and collectivistic Turkey in managing conflict in close relationships, it was discovered that Turks seemed to be acting more directly, assertively or persuasively while managing conflict within their friendships and romantic relationships when compared to the styles they adopted with non-intimate others. Canadians, on the contrary, adopted a more compromising and complying manner and utilized third-party help more often within these close relationships compared to their more generic confrontational styles of managing conflict (Cingoz-Ulu & Lalonde, 2007). In another study, active conflict strategies were also positively related to socially oriented values, while they were unrelated to individualism among both heterosexual and homosexual relationships (Gaines et al., 2005).

Some scholars have argued that constructs such as individualism-collectivism constitute multidimensional "meta-concepts" or cultural syndromes that are not sufficiently specific for differentiating specific cultural style differences during disagreements (Hammer, 2005). Schwartz (1990) suggested that the individualism-collectivism dichotomy can obscure meaningful group differences since this dichotomy overlooks values that inherently serve both individual and collective interests and ignores values that foster the goals of collectivities other than the in-group and promotes the mistaken assumption that individualistic and collective values each form coherent syndromes that are in polar opposition.

Schwartz (1992) described ten motivationally distinct values, postulated to be present in all cultures, namely, Self-direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition, Benevolence, and Universalism. Empirical research in 56 nations has shown that beyond the striking differences in the value priorities of groups, there is a widespread consensus regarding the hierarchical order of values (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Pan-cultural hierarchy is explained by its adaptive functions in meeting basic requirements of human existence, namely: (a) the development of commitment to positive relations, identification with the group, and loyalty to its members, (b) motivation to invest the time and the physical and intellectual effort needed to perform productive work, to solve problems that arise during task performance, and to generate new ideas and technical solutions, and finally (c) gratification of the self-oriented needs and desires of group members (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). According to

Schwartz (2006), many studies have demonstrated the strong relationship of values with every day behavior. However, there is a dearth of research connecting values to behaviors that are critical to relationship outcomes, such as problem solving and conflict management.

Individual differences in the importance attributed to values reflect individuals' unique needs, temperaments, and social experiences, and that these differences can have behavioral and attitudinal consequences (Schwartz, 2006). Different basic social structural characteristics can also alter value priorities (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). According to Schwartz & Rubel (2005), various theories of gender difference lead researchers to postulate that men emphasize agentic-instrumental values like Power and Achievement, while women emphasize expressive-communal values like Benevolence and Universalism. These researchers suggest that empirical findings support the above notion, as for eight values gender differences are consistent, statistically significant, and small. However, differences for Conformity and Tradition values are inconsistent.

Relational variables and conflict resolution strategies

The broader context provided by culture interacts dynamically with the more specific context provided by the type of relationship to shape the conceptions and the preferred conflict management strategies (Cingöz-Ulu & Lalonde, 2006). Many studies examining interpersonal and organizational conflict have addressed the importance of relational variables and context pertaining to conflict styles (Trubisky et al., 1991). This study aims to examine the influence of two relational variables, namely self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction, in the adoption of each of the four conflict strategies.

Self-disclosure and conflict resolution strategies

Previous findings suggest that females with a communication style that is characterized by low self-disclosure and low disclosure of positive and negative emotions in romantic relationships receive lower support and experience greater conflict, which in turn leads to relationship distress and an increased risk for depression (Cuming & Rapee, 2010). Findings also suggest that individuals are less willing to self-disclose when they wish to leave the relationship (Baxter, 1979), suggesting a possible negative relationship between self-disclosure and Exit conflict strategy. An interesting question would be to investigate to what extent self-disclosure predicts each of the four conflict strategies.

According to Hinde's (1997) brief review of the literature regarding gender differences in self-disclosure, results are mixed. According to this review, some studies have found that women self-disclose more than men and that wives self-disclose more than husbands. Other studies have found that both men and women tend to self-disclose more to females than to males, while others suggest that there are gender differences in the content but not in the frequency of self-disclosure. Some researchers, however, reported little or no differences in self-disclosure between men and women (Hinde, 1997).

Relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution strategies

Findings suggest that couples tend to use more constructive and less destructive conflict strategies. The more satisfied a couple is with their relationship prior to the emergence of problems, the greater the magnitude of the individual's investment of resources in the relationship and the less attractive the available alternatives to the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1982). Moreover, when prior satisfaction was high, individuals were more probable to use Voice and Loyalty, and less probable to use Exit and Neglect (Rusbult et al., 1982). Those who experienced greater need fulfillment also enjoyed better post-disagreement relationship quality. This is primarily because of their tendency to have more intrinsic or autonomous reasons for being in their relationship (Heather, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). In the few studies that

revealed gender differences in satisfaction, husbands tend to be more satisfied in comparison to wives (Hinde, 1997).

Partners' attributes and individual choice of conflict resolution strategies

Previous studies have discovered that adopting the partner's perspective in occasions where a partner acts in a potentially destructive way resulted in more positive emotional reactions and more relationship-enhancing attributions. It also enhanced inclinations towards constructive responding. Moreover, less negative emotional reactions, less partner-blaming attributions, and reduced inclinations towards destructive responding were also observed under the same conditions (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998). A reciprocity effect has also been detected, which showed that the more individuals perceived their partner's use of destructive vs. constructive conflict strategies, the greater the couple's distress was. Moreover, the couple's health decreased when individuals failed to respond constructively to a partner who was using destructive conflict strategies (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986). Findings also suggest that people project their own felt communal responsiveness onto partners, thus perceiving partners to be just as caring and supportive as they themselves are (Lemay & Clark, 2008).

Dindia (2000) suggested that studies should include both partners' perceptions of their own and of their partner's maintenance strategies. This is, because a potential moderator in the connection between maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction could be whose perspective is measured. This study aims to extend previous research on maintenance strategies since not only self-reports but also spouse's reports are included. This way, it is possible to examine whether a partner's actual behavior can have an impact on an individual's use of certain maintenance behaviors.

Research questions

1. Are there differences between husbands and wives in their conflict strategies, personal values, degree of self-disclosure, and level of satisfaction? Based on previous findings, wives are expected to use more active strategies, and especially Voice, in comparison to husbands. On the other hand, no specific hypothesis can be formulated regarding the relative frequency of use of each of the conflict strategies by Greek husbands and wives due to the lack of previous empirical findings, thus leaving this research question an open one to explore. Small or even no differences are expected to be found between husbands and wives in the level of self-disclosure. Husbands are expected to score higher on agentic-instrumental values, while wives are expected to have higher scores on expressive-communal values. Husbands are also expected to be more satisfied than wives, although this difference is not expected to be pronounced.

2. To what extent can self-disclosure, personal values, and level of satisfaction predict the use of positive and negative conflict resolution strategies in Greek married couples after controlling for demographic variables? Are these predictors the same for husbands and for wives? Self-disclosure and satisfaction are expected to be positively related to the use of constructive conflict strategies, and negatively related to the use of destructive conflict strategies. On account of the basic requirements each value serves, the following predictions can be made regarding the relationship of different values and the four conflict strategies: Values that promote positive social relationships (e.g., Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity) are expected to be positively related to constructive conflict strategies, and negatively related to destructive conflict strategies. A relationship of opposite direction is expected for values that promote self-interest at the expense of optimal attainment of group goals, such as Power. However, no clear predictions can be made regarding values that promote gratification of personal needs without necessarily threatening social relations (e.g., Hedonism, Stimulation). Finally, passive conflict strategies are expected to be negatively related to values that emphasize active pursuit of problem solving (e.g., Self-direction, Achievement).

3. Can individual preference for a specific conflict strategy be predicted from the partner's reports on self-disclosure, personal values, and level of satisfaction after controlling for self-reports on the respective variables and demographic characteristics? Also, are there any differences between husbands and wives in the above pattern of relationships? It is expected that spouse reports on each of the above variables have an influence on the type of conflict resolution strategy that each individual chooses. The direction of the relationships is not expected to be different from that predicted in the case of self-reports. By way of explanation, the greater the extent of a partner's self-disclosure and the greater his/her satisfaction, the more it is expected that they use constructive conflict resolution strategies, not destructive ones. Moreover, a partner's values are expected to be related to the use of the same conflict resolution strategies that were predicted in the case of self-reports.

Method

Participants

One hundred and thirty-three couples living in Greece participated in our study. The mean length of marriage was 19.6 years ($SD = 11.40$, $min = 1$, $max = 55$). Husbands' mean age was 48.8 years ($SD = 10.48$), most of them had completed secondary or higher education and worked as clerks (e.g., public servants, employees in private settings). Wives' mean age was 44.3 years ($SD = 9.78$), most of them had completed secondary or higher education and were working as clerks or household keepers.

Measures

The Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect Scale (Rusbult et al., 1982) assessing two constructive conflict strategies and two destructive conflict strategies. The constructive ones are Voice (e.g., "When my partner says or does things I do not like, I talk to him/her about what is upsetting me") and Loyalty (e.g., "When I am upset about something in our relationship, I wait awhile before saying anything to see if things will improve on their own"). The destructive ones are Exit (e.g., "When I am angry at my partner, I talk to him/her about breaking up") and Neglect (e.g., "When I am upset with my partner, I ignore him/her for a while"). A 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "never" to 7 = "always" was used to assess the frequency of each behavior during marital disagreements. These measures proved to be quite stable (see alpha reliabilities in Table 1).

An abbreviated version of the Schwartz Value Survey (Schwartz, 1992) was used, measuring eight out of ten dimensions of values, i.e., Self-direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Conformity, Tradition and Benevolence. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which each of the above values was a guiding principle in their life in a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "not at all important" to 7 = "extremely important." The internal consistency of the subscales ranged from acceptable to high (see Table 1).

Participants also filled out an abbreviated version of the Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958), which consisted of 18 of the original 60 items. The original SDQ was composed of 60 items that measure disclosure on six main topics (attitudes, tastes, work, money, personality, body). This study utilized the shortened version adapted by Fitzpatrick et al. (2001), containing three items for each domain. Respondents indicated on a 7-point Likert scale the degree to which they had disclosed about each item to their spouses in a range from 1 = "nothing" to 7 = "full detail." Items were averaged to produce an overall self-disclosure score for each respondent. The internal consistency of this measure was quite high (see Table 1).

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, & Obiorah, 1986) consists of three items. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "extremely dissatisfied" to 7 = "extremely satisfied." The average score of marital satisfaction was calculated, which proved to be a very reliable measure (see Table 1).

The method of back translation (English-Greek-English) by two independent bilingual speakers was implemented for all tools used.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via undergraduate psychology students, who were asked to introduce a couple they knew and to invite them to take part in a study on values and marital satisfaction. The research assistants then contacted these couples and, after they had received their consent, arranged an appointment in order to administer the questionnaires. Less than 10% of the contacted couples refused to participate. Data completion took place on a private basis, i.e., independently for each partner. Questionnaires were returned in separate sealed envelopes. Participants were informed about the anonymity of their answers. No payment or other benefits were offered.

Results

All questionnaires were scored based on the authors' instructions. In the case of the Schwartz Values Survey, items were centered within individuals prior to producing averaged scores by following procedures suggested by Schwartz (1992, and personal communication) in order to correct for bias in response style. The resulting scores indicate the relative importance of a specific value within the value system of each respondent. According to Schwartz (1992), failure to make the necessary scale use correction typically leads to mistaken conclusions.

Relative preference of the conflict resolution strategies

In order to examine differences at the mean level of use of the four conflict strategies, we ran two repeated-measures MANOVAs, separately for the two partners. Results revealed significant differences for husbands, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.28$, $F(3, 130) = 113.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .72$, and for wives, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.24$, $F(3, 130) = 141.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .77$. In subsequent Bonferroni pair-wise comparisons of means, Exit was found to be the least preferred strategy for the two spouses, followed by Neglect. Voice and, to a lesser extent, Loyalty were the most preferred strategies, the difference between them being significant among wives but not among husbands. The mean scores of the four conflict strategies for each of the two partners can be found in Table 1.

Differences between husbands and wives

A series of paired-sample t-tests of scores on conflict strategies, personal values, self-disclosure, and marital satisfaction were performed in order to test for respective differences between husbands and wives at the mean level (see Table 1). Significant findings emerged in Satisfaction, $t(132) = 3.13$, $p = .002$, with husbands scoring higher than wives. The two spouses also differed significantly in five out of eight dimensions of personal values, i.e., Stimulation, $t(132) = 2.91$, $p = .004$; Achievement, $t(132) = 3.54$, $p = .001$; Power, $t(132) = 3.76$, $p < .001$; Conformity, $t(132) = -2.05$, $p = .042$; Benevolence, $t(132) = -2.11$, $p = .037$. A closer inspection of the mean differences revealed that husbands valued Stimulation, Achievement, and Power to a greater extent than wives did. Wives, on the other hand, valued Conformity and Benevolence more than husbands. The two spouses did not differ in the frequency with which they self-disclosed or in the frequency of use of each of the four conflict strategies.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Reliabilities and T-Tests of Conflict Strategies, Values, Self-Disclosure, and Marital Satisfaction of Husbands and Wives

	Husbands			Wives			t-value
	Mean	SD	alpha	Mean	SD	alpha	
<i>Conflict strategies</i>							
Exit	2.07	1.20	.85	2.16	1.22	.83	-0.62
Voice	4.68	1.05	.73	4.85	1.04	.67	-1.57
Loyalty	4.53	0.86	.46	4.44	0.96	.52	0.92
Neglect	3.34	1.27	.75	3.42	1.24	.68	-0.66
<i>Values (centered scores)</i>							
Self-direction	.24	.55	.56	.19	.57	.62	0.94
Stimulation	-.65	1.05	.77	-.96	1.10	.66	2.92**
Hedonism	.09	.96	.39 ^a	.14	1.02	.40 ^a	-0.42
Achievement	-.09	.66	.64	-.38	.62	.57	4.06***
Power	-1.01	.98	.64	-1.42	1.00	.67	3.81***
Conformity	.42	.58	.65	.64	.64	.72	-3.15***
Tradition	-.41	.87	.69	-.33	.95	.74	-0.92
Benevolence	.44	.60	.73	.64	.56	.73	-3.35***
Self-disclosure	5.27	1.07	.91	5.28	1.17	.91	-0.05
Satisfaction	6.00	.99	.92	5.72	1.15	.91	3.13**

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

^a Pearson correlation between 2 items.

Prediction of conflict resolution strategies from self-reports

To examine possible links of conflict strategies with values, self-disclosure, and satisfaction, Pearson product-moment coefficients were calculated. Only significant correlations at $\alpha \leq .01$ are reported below. Self-disclosure correlated positively to the use of Voice for both spouses (husbands: $r = .39$; wives: $r = .38$), and the use of Loyalty only for husbands ($r = .35$). Moreover, the more satisfied the two spouses were, the more they tended to use Voice (husbands: $r = .41$; wives: $r = .27$) and Loyalty (husbands: $r = .35$; wives: $r = .23$), and the less they used Exit (husbands: $r = -.48$; wives: $r = -.38$) and Neglect (husbands: $r = -.28$; wives: $r = -.20$, $p < .05$). Concerning the relationship between conflict strategies and values, significant coefficients emerged for wives as follows: Loyalty was negatively related to Hedonism ($r = -.24$) and Achievement ($r = -.24$), while it was positively related to Conformity ($r = .23$) and Tradition ($r = .38$). Wives who valued Tradition also tended to use Exit less ($r = -.26$), while Benevolence was negatively related to both Exit ($r = -.33$) and Neglect ($r = -.31$). On the contrary, Power was positively related to Exit ($r = .25$). In the case of husbands, the use of Exit conflict tactic was positively related to Stimulation ($r = .26$) and negatively related to Conformity ($r = -.25$). Finally, the more husbands valued Self-direction as a guiding principle to their lives, the less they tended to use Loyalty as a conflict tactic ($r = -.28$).

To test whether values, self-disclosure, and level of satisfaction were able to predict the use of conflict strategies after controlling for demographic characteristics, a series of hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted separately for husbands and wives. Prior to these analyses, we set out to examine which dimensions of values significantly predicted the use of the four conflict strategies in order to decide which values to include in the final model. For this purpose, separate regressions were run with entry order as follows: step 1 comprises self-reports on Self-direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Conformity, Tradition, and Benevolence; step 2 comprises spouse reports on the respective variables. A stepwise method was used within each step. Results revealed that the use of Exit conflict tactic was predicted from Stimulation for husbands ($B = .30$, $p < .01$) and from Benevolence ($B = -.62$, $p < .001$)

and Tradition ($B = -.24, p < .05$) for wives. Voice conflict tactic was predicted from self-reports on Self-direction ($B = -.36, p < .05$) and Power ($B = -.16, p < .10$) and from spouse reports on Hedonism ($B = -.22, p < .05$) in the case of husbands, while in the case of wives Voice was predicted from self-reports on Stimulation ($B = .22, p < .01$) and Power ($B = -.15, p < .10$), and spouse reports on Tradition ($B = .32, p < .01$). Self-reports of husbands on Self-direction predicted their use of Loyalty ($B = -.44, p < .01$), this conflict tactic was predicted from self-reports of Tradition ($B = .39, p < .01$) for wives. Finally, the use of Neglect was predicted from self-reports on Stimulation ($B = .25, p < .05$) in the case of husbands, while self-reports on Benevolence ($B = -.79, p < .01$) and Hedonism ($B = -.30, p < .01$) predicted the use of Neglect in the case of wives.

A series of hierarchical regressions followed. In these analyses, step 1 included marriage length, age, and education level of each partner in order to partial out the effect of these demographic factors, and step 2 included self-reports on self-disclosure, level of satisfaction, and those dimensions of values which had predicted a significant amount of variance of conflict strategies in the preliminary analyses presented above. These findings are presented in Tables 2 and 3 for husbands and wives, respectively.

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analyses for the Prediction of Conflict Tactics of Husbands from Demographics, Self-Reports, and Spouse Reports

Predictors at step 3	Conflict tactics of husbands			
	Exit	Neglect	Voice	Loyalty
	B	B	B	B
Demographics (adjusted ΔR^2)	.09**	.00	.03	.06*
Length of marriage	-.00	.00	.00	.00
Age self	.02	.02	-.03	-.02
Age spouse	.03	-.01	.03	.00
Education self	-.01	-.06	-.12	-.14**
Education spouse	-.03	-.00	.07	.06
Self-reports (adjusted ΔR^2)	.12***	.09**	.20***	.17***
Self-disclosure	.01	-.05	.30***	.20**
Satisfaction	-.53***	-.14	.28*	.15
Self-direction ^{SVS}	--	--	-.23	-.38**
Stimulation ^{SVS}	.21*	.22*	--	--
Power ^{SVS}	--	--	-.02	--
Spouse reports (adjusted ΔR^2)	.01	.04*	.02	.00
Self-disclosure	-.06	.08	-.14	.07
Satisfaction	.19	-.35**	.04	-.08
Hedonism ^{SVS}	--	--	-.10	--
Adjusted Total R^2	.22***	.13**	.25***	.23***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. SVS: Schwartz Values Survey.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analyses for the Prediction of Conflict Tactics of Wives from Demographics, Self-Reports, and Spouse Reports

Predictors at step 3	Conflict tactics of wives			
	Exit	Neglect	Voice	Loyalty
	B	B	B	B
Demographics (adjusted ΔR^2)	.00	.09**	.00	.13***
Length of marriage	-.00	-.00	.00	.00
Age self	.04	-.02	-.03	-.01
Age spouse	-.00	.06*	.00	.02
Education self	.03	-.00	.01	-.13*
Education spouse	-.02	-.12	-.00	.12
Self-reports (adjusted ΔR^2)	.20***	.10***	.20***	.10***
Self-disclosure	.11	-.08	.28***	.05
Satisfaction	-.42***	-.11	.15	.24**
Stimulation ^{SVS}	--	--	.21**	--
Hedonism ^{SVS}	--	-.24*	--	--
Power ^{SVS}	--	--	-.16*	--
Tradition ^{SVS}	-.21	--	--	.32***
Benevolence ^{SVS}	-.54**	-.66***	--	--
Spouse reports (adjusted ΔR^2)	.00	.00	.08**	.04*
Self-disclosure	-.06	-.02	-.13	.08
Satisfaction	.18	.09	.11	-.29**
Tradition ^{SVS}	--	--	.37***	--
Adjusted Total R^2	.20***	.19***	.28***	.27***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. SVS: Schwartz Values Survey.

In what concerns the effect of demographic variables, it was found that the more educated husbands and wives were, the less they tended to use Loyalty. Moreover, wives who were married to older husbands tended to use Neglect more frequently. Overall, demographics at step 1 explained 9%³ of Exit for husbands, 9% of Neglect for wives, and 6% and 13% of Loyalty for husbands and wives, respectively. However, the relative importance of demographic factors decreased considerably when psychological variables were included in the model.

After demographics were controlled for, Self-disclosure was positively related to the use of Voice (for both husbands and wives) and Loyalty (only for husbands). Moreover, both husbands and wives tended to use Exit less often, the more satisfied they were in their relationships. Increased male satisfaction also positively predicted Voice, while increased female satisfaction positively predicted Loyalty. In what concerns values, higher scores of husbands in Stimulation were related to more frequent use of Exit and Neglect. On the contrary, the more wives valued Stimulation, the more they reported using Voice when facing relationship problems. Findings also reveal that wives used Neglect less, the more they valued Hedonism. Power, however, was negatively related to the use of Voice from the wives' part. The more wives valued Benevolence as a guiding principle, the less they used Exit and Neglect tactics. Finally, the more value wives assigned to Tradition, the more they used Loyalty as a conflict tactic.

Overall, the above predictors based on self-report data explained a significant amount of variance of the use of conflict strategies which ranged from 9% (for the prediction of Neglect) to 20% (for the prediction of Voice) for husbands, and from 10% (for the prediction of Loyalty) to 20% (for the prediction of Voice and Exit) for wives.

Prediction of individual conflict resolution strategies from spouse reports

To examine the relation between spouse reports on self-disclosure, satisfaction, and values on the one hand, and self-reports on conflict strategies on the other, the Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. Only significant correlations at $\alpha \leq .01$ are reported below. Results revealed that husbands tended to use Voice ($r = .26$) more frequently and Neglect

³ All proportions of explained variance in hierarchical regression analyses are based on adjusted R^2 values.

($r = -.38$) less frequently, the more satisfied their wives tended to be. Moreover, the more wives valued Hedonism, the less their husbands tended to use Voice as a problem solving tactic ($r = -.23$). Wives tended to use Voice less, the more their husbands valued Achievement as a guiding principle to their lives ($r = -.24$). On the contrary, wives tended to use Voice ($r = .26$) and Loyalty ($r = .26$) more frequently, the more their husbands valued Tradition.

To test whether spouse reports on self-disclosure, level of satisfaction, and values make a significant contribution to the use of different conflict strategies after controlling for self-reports and demographics, these variables were included in a separate (third) step in the hierarchical multiple regressions presented above. As in the case of self-reports, only those dimensions of spouse's values were used that had been found to significantly predict conflict strategies in preliminary analyses.

Results at step 3 showed that, after controlling for self-reports and demographics, spouse reports explained an additional 4% of variance of the use of Neglect by husbands, and an additional 8% and 4% of the use of Voice and Loyalty, respectively, by wives. Specifically, husbands reported less frequent use of Neglect, the more satisfied their wives were; wives tended to use Voice to a greater extent, the more their partner valued Tradition as a guiding principle to his life. Wives' Loyalty was negatively associated to their husbands' level of satisfaction. Spouse reports failed to further predict Exit, Voice, and Loyalty conflict strategies of husbands, or Exit and Neglect strategies of wives.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore conflict patterns among married couples in Greece and to investigate factors associated with the adoption of the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect typology responses to conflict (Rusbult et al., 1982). Results were generally consistent with expectations: self- and spouse reports on satisfaction, self-disclosure, and values were significant predictors of the use of conflict strategies to an extent that varied across conflict type, informant (self vs. spouse), and gender (husbands vs. wives).

Preferred conflict resolution strategies

Greek husbands and wives tended to use positive strategies significantly more frequently than negative strategies. Exit in particular was the strategy least frequently used by both husbands and wives. A possible explanation for these findings could be that cultures with a high value dimension of uncertainty avoidance, such as Greece (Hofstede, 1983), display a readiness to avoid ambiguous, uncertain situations (Ting-Toomey, 1991). In France, another country that is high in uncertainty avoidance, this was also associated with low levels of interpersonal conflict (Ting-Toomey, 1991). Moreover, in a study examining the geographical distribution of the Big Five personality traits, Greece was rather high in Neuroticism, a characteristic associated to uncertainty avoidance (Schmitt et al., 2007). Moreover, Greece scored rather high in a dimension of social axioms called societal cynicism (Bond & et al., 2004), suggesting distrust in laws and the social system, possibly leading to a higher investment in close relationships as a counterbalance. The greater the desire to avoid uncertainty and maintain harmonious intimate relationships in a culture, the less frequent conflict resolution strategies, in general, and negative conflict resolution strategies, in particular, are expected. Finally, the finding that husbands and wives employ both active (Voice) and passive (Loyalty) strategies could in part be explained by the fact that although Greeks have made a transition from collectivistic to individualistic values, there is evidence that traditional values about relationships continue to affect family organization and relational health in this country (Georgas, 1989, 1991).

Differences between husbands and wives

In comparison with their spouses, Greek husbands tended to be more satisfied, as expected. Moreover, in accordance to our predictions, husbands valued Stimulation, Achievement, and Power more, while wives valued Benevolence and Conformity to a greater

extent. These findings are in line with two previous studies – both including Greece, namely, the European Social Survey, conducted in 19 countries, and a 67-countries study (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005) – suggesting that men attribute consistently more importance to Power, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, and Self-direction than women, while the latter attribute more importance to Benevolence and Universalism. However, in previous studies no gender differences were found in Conformity, though results regarding gender differences in this value are generally inconsistent. These findings extend previous literature regarding differences between husbands and wives in values by testing whether the same gender differences could be detected using a different instrument, namely, the Schwartz Value Survey rather than the Portrait Values Questionnaire. Additionally, they could also be generalized to a different population, namely, individuals of a wider age range and occupation in comparison to student samples (with a restricted age range of 18-24 years). Findings regarding Conformity also add to previous inconclusive results. Moreover, the inclusion of couples in this study has enabled us to explore the possibility that differences in values between partners might be smaller than those seen in the general population, since selection of an intimate partner is often based on the accordance in values, and partners are also expected to influence each other's value system.

The finding that Greek husbands and wives did not differ at the mean self-disclosure level or in the frequency of use of the four conflict strategies is also in line with previous cross-cultural findings regarding gender differences. According to Hofstede (1980), countries that are relatively high in femininity emphasize fluid gender boundaries, fluid gender expectations, and androgynous ideals of behaviors, while masculine cultures emphasize clear gender segregation values, different gender expectations, and different gender behavior patterns with males in the assertive role and females in the nurturing role. An inspection of Hofstede's masculinity-femininity scores indicated that Greece is positioned 18th among 50 countries (Hofstede, 1983). The agreement between husbands and wives in self-disclosure and relative use of conflict strategies is also in line with previous studies of traditional family values, where Greeks seemed to reject the hierarchical roles of father and mother. According to those, the father is the head of the family, acts in an authoritarian manner, and has control over the family's financial issues, while the mother is usually a housewife and tends to be submissive, conciliatory, compromising, caring for the children, and accepting the father's decisions (Georgas, 1989, 1991; Mylonas, Gari, Giotsa, Pavlopoulos, & Panagiotopoulou, 2006). Leung and Chan (1999) also suggested that cultural differences in power distance are likely to influence conflict resolution. Greece is positioned around the mean of power distance compared to 50 countries (Hofstede, 1983), thus further explaining the absence of difference between Greek husbands and wives in the type of conflict strategies they use to resolve conflict.

Prediction of conflict strategies from self-reports

As expected, partners tended to use more constructive conflict strategies the more satisfied they were, while dissatisfaction with the relationship was positively associated with the use of negative conflict strategies. The finding showed that increased male satisfaction was related to the use of Voice, while increased female satisfaction was related to the use of Loyalty. This is in line with previous findings, suggesting that men are thought to construct and maintain an independent self-construal (i.e., representations of others are separate from self), whereas women are thought to construct and maintain an interdependent self-construal (i.e., others are considered part of the self) (Cross & Madson, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Findings suggest that individuals with a more independent self-construal use Voice when dealing with relationship dissatisfaction, while individuals with an interdependent self-construal use Loyalty under the same conditions (Sinclair & Fehr, 2004).

In a broader sense, Voice and Loyalty are considered maintenance behaviors when partners are faced with relationship dissatisfaction. The relationship between maintenance strategies and satisfaction has been established in many studies. According to Bell et al. (1987, cf. Dindia, 2000), when wives were satisfied with their marriages, they tended to believe that maintenance strategies were important to both themselves and their husbands; moreover, the

more frequently they perceived that those behaviors were employed by both themselves and their partners, the greater their satisfaction tended to be.

The finding that self-disclosure was positively related not only to Voice, but to Loyalty as well, is also in line with previous findings suggesting that self-disclosure can be multidimensional (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993), i.e., one may use it to express independence, self-assertion, and directness, as well as harmony, connectedness, and solidarity. Furthermore, Fitzpatrick et al. (2001) argued that marriage is considered a particularly intimate relationship to both individualistic and collectivistic cultures; therefore, partners' disclosure is tied to values in a way that is not apparent to other relationships. These researchers have found, for example, that self-disclosure was unrelated to individualism, while it was positively related to collectivism. The authors conclude that since marriage may be considered an in-group, marital disclosure could be a way to create unique interactions with spouses, thus further delineating in-group/out-group boundaries. Kito (2005) also found that self-disclosure was higher in romantic relationships than in friendships among both American and Japanese students.

A pattern of relationships between personal values and the four conflict resolution strategies was found in this study, and could be explained by the functions of each value in meeting one or more of the three basic requirements of human existence (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001).

Overall, wives who valued Power reported using Exit to a greater extent, while at the same time they tended to use Voice less frequently. This finding is not surprising given the fact that Power values emphasize dominance over people and resources. Moreover, their pursuit often entails harming or exploiting others, thereby disrupting and damaging social relations. Loyalty was negatively related to Achievement and Self-direction in wives and husbands, respectively. A possible explanation for this finding could be the strong motivation of people who greatly value Achievement and Self-direction to invest time and physical and intellectual effort in order to solve problems. This is in direct contrast with the essence of Loyalty, according to which one passively but optimistically hopes that problems will be solved as time goes by.

On the other hand, Tradition and Conformity were positively related to the use of Loyalty in wives. Conformity was also negatively related to the use of Exit in husbands. Wives who valued Tradition also tended to use Exit less, while Benevolence was negatively related to destructive conflict strategies in wives. These findings were also expected, since accepting and acting on Tradition, Conformity and Benevolence values promotes the requirement for cooperative social relationships.

The values of Hedonism and Stimulation, however, proved to differentially influence behavior in husbands and wives. More precisely, in the case of husbands, Stimulation was positively related to both Exit and Neglect. On the contrary, the greater wives valued Stimulation as a guiding principle in their lives, the more they tended to use Voice during conflict resolution. Moreover, in wives, Hedonism was negatively related to the use of Neglect. Both Stimulation and Hedonism are social transformations of the needs of the individual, as a biological organism, for physical gratification and optimal arousal. However, in contrast to Power values, these values do not necessarily threaten positive social relations. Thus, when gratification of these needs can be more easily accomplished in the context of the relationship – or when gratification of these needs outside of the context of the relationship is not even permissible – the pursuit of these values is more possibly to lead to relationship maintaining conflict strategies. On the contrary, if gratification of these needs is permissible or perhaps easier outside the relationship, destructive conflict resolution strategies are expected to be more frequent.

Findings of this study regarding the differential behavioral consequences of Hedonism and Stimulation in husbands and wives suggest possible gender differences in the way they gratify their needs, which could at least in part be explained by culturally defined gender roles. According to self-silencing theory (Jack, 1999, cf. Cuming & Rapee, 2010), women's and men's

early experiences provide a basis for forming beliefs about how one “should” behave in order to build and maintain intimate relationships or images of relatedness. Women are more likely to adopt images of relatedness based on “selflessness.” In other words, they may believe that in order to maintain relationships they must put others’ needs first or remove critical aspects of themselves, such as thoughts and feelings, from dialogue (self-silencing). Thus, women are less likely to use destructive conflict resolution strategies, even when gratification of personal needs is greatly valued. Moreover, women are more likely to define themselves in terms of their relationships or adopt a relationally interdependent self-construal (Lydon, Menzies-Toman, Burton, & Bell, 2008). As a result, pursuit of self-interest goals coincides with pursuit of collective couple goals, rendering constructive conflict resolution strategies as the most appropriate means to satisfy both sets of goals.

Prediction of individual conflict strategies from spouse reports

Spouse reports had less impact on preference for each of the four conflict strategies as compared to self-reports. This is not surprising, as the effect of self-reports was partialled out before testing for the effect of spouse reports. Both partners tended to use less passive conflict strategies (i.e., Neglect, Loyalty), the more satisfied their partners were with their relationships. It seems possible that a high level of partner’s satisfaction creates a positive emotional environment encouraging the expressing of an individual’s feelings and thoughts. In addition, correlational analyses showed that the more satisfied wives tended to be, the more their husbands used Voice and the less they used Neglect as a conflict resolution strategy. Previous research has shown that an individual’s perception of his/her partner’s maintenance strategies is positively associated with the individual’s own level of satisfaction (Dindia, 2000). Our findings suggest that, apart from self-perceptions of one’s own and one’s partner’s maintenance strategies, significant links also exist between an individual’s own and his/her partner’s actual maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction.

The hierarchical regression results suggested that wives’ values do not have an influence on the choice of the conflict resolution strategy that husbands tend to use. However, correlational analyses revealed that husbands tended to use Voice less, the more their wives valued Hedonism as a guiding principle in their lives. When husbands perceive that gratification of personal needs is very important to their partners, it seems that they may feel less “safe” to voice their concerns and thoughts loudly. This is in line with the finding that the more their husbands valued tradition, the more wives tended to use Voice. Moreover, correlation analyses revealed that wives used Voice less, the more their husbands valued Achievement. A possible explanation for these findings might be that tradition is considered as a conservation value that emphasizes order, self-restriction, preservation of the past, and resistance to change. When a spouse possesses the above characteristics, the threat for relationship dissolution is decreased. Therefore, individuals might feel safer to voice their worries and thoughts. On the contrary, Achievement is considered a self-enhancement value that emphasizes the pursuit of one’s own interests and relative success as well as dominance over others. Husbands who possess these attributes may seem selfish and dominant, which could have a negative effect on wives’ willingness to behave in constructive ways when facing relationship problems.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study collected information from both spouses in order to examine conflict resolution strategies and their relationship to personal values, self-disclosure, and satisfaction. However, it relied exclusively on participants’ perceptions, as reflected in self-reported questionnaire data. An interesting addition to the research design would be to ask participants to recall real conflict incidents and their actual reactions towards their partners. It would also be enlightening to directly observe couples during actual disagreements in experimental conditions. Another limitation of this study was that a small number of couples were excluded from the final sample because one member, in most cases the husband, did not return the questionnaires. Since no further information is available for these couples, generalization of our findings should be made with caution. Furthermore, the present study included only married couples. The extension of

the project to alternative forms of intimate relationships, such as cohabiting or homosexual couples, will broaden our knowledge. Finally, since values did have an influence on the choice of conflict strategies and since values are expected to vary cross-culturally, it would be potentially enlightening to compare couples from different cultures.

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