The Conflict Psychology of Nonbinary People

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Abstract

This research examines how gender identity is connected to interpersonal conflict style. This appears to be the first study examining the relationship between gender and interpersonal conflict style, including nonbinary gender identities. Interpersonal conflict is a serious daily stressor, contributing to mood and overall well-being (Bolger et al., 1989). The conflict mode survey used in this study is based on the Thomas- Kilmann conflict 'MODE' instrument (TKI) (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). By sorting individuals into one or more of five possible conflict styles, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, competing, and compromising, participants are assessed on other-regarding and self-regarding behavior. 128 individuals participated in the study and 106 responses were analyzed (N = 106). The distribution of participants across conflict styles was analyzed using a chi-square test and significant non-random stratification was found in all groups except the 'man' gender identity group. Significance was found in the sample at large (p < 0.001), the 'women' gender group (p < 0.001), and the 'nonbinary' gender group (p < 0.001). These results suggest that women and, nonbinary people could have a conflict mode distribution that is significantly different than expected, and therefore that previous models of interpersonal conflict behavior may not work as designed for women and nonbinary people. This appears to be the first study on interpersonal conflict behavior that includes nonbinary people, and this result indicates that future research is necessary. Only one of the five conflict modes (competing) had acceptable internal reliability (α = 0.75) and when a logistic regression was conducted on this subscale, no differences were found between genders in the probability of displaying a 'competing' conflict mode.

The Conflict Psychology of Nonbinary People

Science has historically been a white, male profession and the people that have traditionally been included in scientific samples are similarly homogenous. Marginalized people, including people of color, women, queer folks, and those who identify as nonbinary have been severely underrepresented. Traditional interpersonal conflict literature is built on the shoulders of heterosexual, cisgender, white, upper-middle-class men. According to Khun, "scientific revolutions involve a revision to existing scientific belief or practice" (Bird, 2022; Kuhn, 1996), and shifting scientific sampling practices has the potential to trigger scientific revolutions across disciplines. Exclusion from research has very real consequences on the lives of the excluded. The underrepresentation of nonbinary and queer people in psychological research has resulted in the pathologizing of homosexuality and gender diversity as well as medical discrimination against people within the LGBTQ+ community. Exclusion from scientific research, psychological and otherwise, has contributed to decreased physical and psychological well-being in the queer community (Sharp & Hahn, 2011).

According to the American Psychological Association, interpersonal conflict is defined as a "disagreement or discord between people with respect to goals, values, or attitudes" (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*). Conflict is often thought of as inherently physical or violent but that is not always the case, especially concerning interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflict can escalate to physical violence, but oftentimes it does not. It can be as common as a disagreement over what to have for dinner and is inherent in human existence, regardless of identity. In the existing interpersonal conflict literature, gender identities outside of the binary are seldom included. Interpersonal conflict "has been established as one of the strongest contributors to daily stress" (Wickham et al., 2016) and it is therefore vital to understand what effects it is having on nonbinary as well as cisgender people.

History of Nonbinary Gender Identities

Binary gender refers to the idea that the only two genders are male and female. Many people find themselves fitting comfortably within one category or the other, typically it is congruent with the sex that

they were assigned at birth based on the appearance of external genitalia[1]. Gender identity, however, is a social construct, independent of biological sex; it is defined as "an individual's internal sense of their gender, and [is] separated from behaviors deemed masculine or feminine" (McNabb, 2018, p. 5). A growing portion of the American population is now identifying as a gender that differs from what they were assigned at birth (Brown, 2023), and many do not identify as either male or female.

The language that the nonbinary community uses to describe itself is diverse and fluid, and there are as many ways to be nonbinary as there are nonbinary people[2]. Gender theorists, including Judith Butler, argue that gender is a performance that is closely entwined with the way that individuals elect to express themselves daily. Genders outside of the male-female binary are less fixed and "multiple and coexisting identifications produce conflicts, convergences, and innovative dissonances within gender configurations which contest the fixity of masculine and feminine" (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 91).

For this paper, "nonbinary" is being used as an umbrella term to include all people who have gender identities that are incongruous with the sex assigned at birth, including those who identify as transgender as well as individuals who identify within the gender binary, but have socially and/or physically transitioned. Nonbinary gender identities and the language surrounding them are somewhat fluid and this definition may include those who do not self-identify as nonbinary. This definition uses 'nonbinary' as the umbrella term to include all members of this community, rather than the more common use of 'trans' or 'transgender' as the umbrella term. The use of 'nonbinary' instead of 'transgender' is intended to better recognize people who identify as a binary man or woman but were not assigned such at birth.

Cultures all over the world and throughout human history have recognized genders outside of the male-female binary. The modern language and conceptualization of nonbinary genders have evolved, but

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[1] External genitalia can appear ambiguous and are not always indicative of an individual's internal sex organs or sex chromosomes. Individuals born with ambiguous genitalia are known as intersex. There are multiple genetic and environmental conditions that result can result in ambiguity in the appearance and function of both internal and external sex organs. For a more in-depth review of intersex conditions, see the paper titled *Disorders of sex developments* (Campbell & Woodward, 2022) which can be found in the references.

[2] Nonbinary gender identities include agender, bigender, genderfluid, queergender, Two Spirit, demigender and many more.

the phenomenon of genders outside of the male-female binary is anything but novel. Though recognition

of nonbinary gender identities in Western culture is growing (Brown, 2023), non-western cultures

explicitly recognize genders outside of the binary and India is perhaps the most well-known. The

preferred term for this third gender is known as *Kinnar* and they fulfill an important cultural role in

weddings, childbirth, and religious ceremonies (McNabb, 2018, p.46). Additionally, several Southeast

Asian countries officially recognize nonbinary individuals, each region having its name for these gender

identities (McNabb, 2018, p.47). Evidence of nonbinary genders dates to the Middle Ages and "many

early Christians understood the Genesis creation story to be about "primal androgyny," (Murray, 2023).

Throughout American history, there have been ample examples of those who do not fit into the rigid

gender binary of Anglo-European culture. Nineteenth-century anthropologists examined gender variance

in First Nations and Native American cultures and coined the term "berdache" to describe the

phenomenon. This term is outdated and considered to be an offensive ethnocentric term. Due to colonial

violence against Native American and First Nations communities, it is inappropriate to use Westernized

labels to describe gender variance in these populations. The preferred umbrella term for nonbinary

genders among First Nations and Native Americans is Two-Spirit or two-spirit. Within this umbrella

term, many tribes have more specific language to describe their gender variance. (McNabb, 2018, p. 8,

34-43)

In the 1950s, a transgender woman by the name of Louise Lawrence began working with American

sexologist and founder of the Kinsey Institute[3], Dr. Alfred Kinsey, to gather data on the histories and

needs of transgender people (McNabb, 2018, p. 14). Up until that point, scientific literature almost

exclusively considered physiological sex, but not gender. This was one of the first instances of gender

being recognized in the literature as separate from sex (*The Transgender Community Builder Who

Educated Doctors—Including Kinsey*, 2019). Inclusion in the scientific literature was an important step

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[3] The Kinsey institute was known as The Kinsey Institute for Sex Research until the name was shortened in 2016.
(*Kinsey History*) The institute has been researching sex, gender, and reproduction since its founding in 1947 (*Dr. Alfred c. Kinsey*)

towards building understanding and equal treatment of the nonbinary community. At the same time the actions of the nonbinary community, especially transgender women, were being criminalized. Starting in the late 1850s, cities across the United States implemented anti-crossdressing laws, which criminalized a person wearing "dress not belonging to his or her sex." Arrests were made under these laws as recently as 1974 (Tagawa, 2015). Years of police brutality and discrimination came to a head during the Stonewall Riot. The Stonewall Inn was a primarily Black and Latinx gay bar in Greenwich Village. On June 28, 1969, the Stonewall Riot took place and initiated the organization of numerous trans rights advocacy groups. The riot is regarded as the beginning of the modern gay rights movement (McNabb, 2018, p.16; Harper & Schneider, 2003).

In the almost 54 years since the Stonewall Riot, American culture has slowly become more inclusive and gender identities that fall outside of the binary are becoming more common, but nonbinary individuals still face systemic discrimination. As recently as April 2013, the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)* pathologized nonbinary gender as a "gender identity disorder" (American Psychiatric Association, 1998, pp. 532–534). In May 2013, the DSM-V was published, and the language changed to "gender dysphoria" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 495), emphasizing the experience of noncongruent gender perception rather than pathologizing the identity itself (Güldenring, 2015). For many nonbinary people, obtaining a diagnosis is a difficult and lengthy process that is a prerequisite to receiving appropriate medical care and assistance in transitioning[4].

According to a Pew Research study published in January of 2023, 1.6% of American adults identify as a gender that is different from what they were assigned at birth. When considering only adults between the ages of 18-29, that figure jumps to 5% (Brown, 2023). Accurate representation of the nonbinary

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[4] Some nonbinary people will choose to surgically and/or medically transition so that their bodies better match their gender identity. Others elect not to surgically or medically transition but will transition socially by adopting a new name, pronouns, hairstyles, or clothing. Individuals will transition (or not) as they see fit, and there is no "correct" way to transition.

community is "complicated by the diversity within the community concerning language and subcultures" but the proportion of the population that identifies as nonbinary is expected to continue to grow as cultural shifts continue to make people feel more comfortable identifying as outside of the traditional gender binary (Meerwijk and Sevelius, 2017). As the proportion of the population that identifies as nonbinary continues to grow it is more vital than ever for scientific literature to contain the appropriate representation and inclusion.

Gender and Conflict

The preconception that women are more peace inclined than men is well-established in traditional Western gender roles. Much of Western history has treated women as natural caregivers because of their capacity to bear children. The cultural expectation is that, as mothers, women have a more intimate relationship with the cost of life than men, and therefore they must be more peace inclined (Wishnia, 1991, p. 84). Throughout history, these stereotypes have shaped the way that women engage in peace movements and politics (Hunt & Wairimu Nderitu, 2018, pp. 76–87). Indeed, feminist groups have been integral in anti-war movements since the mid-nineteenth century (Goldstein, 2006, pp. 322–329). Men are not exempt from cultural expectations about how they should behave in conflict. Many cultures socialize men to be "warriors by attaching to 'manhood' or 'masculinity' those qualities that make good warriors," (Goldstein, 2006, pp. 252). The cultural expectations for men and women in conflict apply to violent and interpersonal conflicts. Many gender theorists argue that, because sex and gender are separate, gender expression is socially constructed, and "the mechanism of construction is social learning" (Mikkola, 2023). Judith Butler goes so far as to argue that gender is a performance and that the body is "understood in relation to another culturally instituted fantasy, one which claims the place of the 'literal' and the 'real,'" (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 96). Gender is a performance based on a view of one's self that can be influenced by societal expectations of how people of different genders should behave in conflict.

Studying how gender is related to conflict behavior is complicated by the intersectionality of different facets of identity (Kolb, 2009). Gender can be examined as individual characteristics or as "cultural and institutional mechanisms that create inequities, some of them around gender," (Kolb, 2009). Negotiation and conflict management fields serve as a good example of why gender differences in interpersonal conflict styles are important to understand. We know that women are less likely than men to negotiate for higher pay and more prestigious positions (Laschever & Babcock, 2021), and that this behavior is related to workplace interpersonal conflict dynamics (Kolb, 2012). These differences in workplace behavior disadvantage women, contributing to pay and achievement gaps. Understanding these dynamics is vital for equal pay and equal treatment both in the workplace and in the world at large.

One important measure of interpersonal conflict style is the "Management-of-Differences-Exercise" or the MODE[5] (also known as the TKI), developed by Ralph Kilmann and Kenneth Thomas in 1977. The TKI examined gender through the lens of what gender norms were at the time of its construction. When the TKI was initially designed, it was based on data from men and women but did not include any people outside of the gender binary. Kilmann and Thomas found that men displayed competing behavior significantly more than women and that women displayed significantly more compromising behavior than men (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977, p. 320). Though both men and women were considered in the development of the TKI, the differences found between them were viewed exclusively through the lens of sex differences. The original scale does not incorporate gender identity in any capacity and did not sample anyone outside of the male-female binary.

Kilmann and Thomas based the TKI on a "five-category scheme for classifying interpersonal conflict-handling modes" (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977) first designed several years prior by Blake and Mounton (Burke, 2017). This measure is based on two dimensions of conflict; cooperation and assertiveness. For this paper, 'cooperation' is referred to as 'other-regarding behavior' and assertiveness is referred to as 'self-regarding behavior'. Self-regarding behavior refers to fulfilling one's own res and

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[5] For more information about the TKI please see the 'Measures' section of this paper.

other-regarding behavior refers to the interest in fulfilling the desires of the other party (or parties) in a conflict.

By assessing an individual's tendencies for self and other-regarding behavior, the TKI sorts them into one or more of five categories of behavior. Other-regarding behavior is action to fulfill the needs or interests of others and self-regarding behavior is an individual's actions to fulfill their own needs or interests. These kinds of behaviors exist across all dimensions of interaction, but for this paper, we will focus on their role in conflict behavior. Those who are low in self and other-regarding behavior are considered to have an 'avoidance' conflict mode and will not seek to fulfill either party's interests. Those who are low in self-regarding behavior and high in other-regarding behavior have an 'accommodation' mode. Individuals with an accommodation conflict style are more concerned with the other party's desires than with their own. Those high in self-regarding behavior and low in other-regarding behavior are classified as competitive, seeking to fulfill their own needs over another's. Individuals who rank highly in both self and other-regarding have a collaborative conflict mode, meaning that they are highly interested in fulfilling the needs of all parties in conflict. Individuals that are in the mid-range in both dimensions have a compromising conflict mode. This conflict style indicated that the individual would like to fulfill the needs of all parties but expects all sides to be willing to make concessions. A visualization of the five conflict styles can be seen in *Figure 1*.
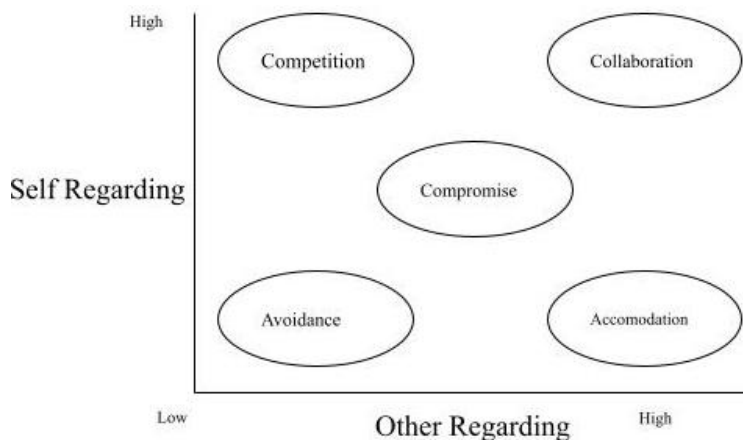
Figure 1: Conflict Mode, visualized over Self and Other-Regarding behavioral dimensions.

The TKI is still regularly used in interpersonal conflict research and is particularly useful in the management of interpersonal conflict in professional and educational settings (Trippe & Baumoel, 2015; Waithaka et al., 2015; Koley & Rao, 2018; Efrat, 2021; Delak & Širok, 2022; Savchenko et al., 2022;). Despite the longevity and continued use of the TKI, the scale has low reliability in four of the five subscales. The competing subscale is the only one to have an acceptable Cronbach's alpha score of 0.71. All other subscales have a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.65 or lower, which are all below the standard cutoff value at which a scale is considered to have acceptable internal reliability. These values are listed in the 1977 publication by Kilmann and Thomas that initially presented and defended the TKI scale (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). Despite the known issues with the TKI's reliability, it has been a pillar of interpersonal conflict research since its publication. Due to its regular appearance in the literature, there is still value in using it in research to gauge how well findings fit into or challenge existing literature.

All the studies mentioned in the previous paragraph examine gender as one of the variables impacting conflict style, and there exists a "significant three-way interaction between interpersonal conflict, emotional intelligence, and gender" (Kundi & Badar, 2021). However, none of these studies include genders other than "male" and "female". In the most recent update of the TKI technical brief, there were "significant gender differences for all of the modes except collaborating" (Schaubhut, 2007, p. 4). The brief considered self-identified 'male' and 'female' individuals and did not include any nonbinary people.

Peace and Conflict Psychology

Peace and Conflict psychology is a field of study that examines how the interdisciplinary nature of conflict impacts human psychology and mental state. According to the APA, peace and conflict psychology encourages "research, education and training on issues concerning peace, nonviolent conflict resolution, reconciliation and the causes, consequences and prevention of violence and destructive conflict" (*Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict and Violence*, n.d.). This field of study examines conflicts at every scale, from interpersonal conflict to international violence and war. For this paper, we will refer only to the conflict literature regarding nonviolent interpersonal conflict.

Interpersonal conflict behavior falls under social behavior's umbrella and can significantly impact mental health and well-being. In studies on the stressors contributing to negative affect, daily stress accounted for 20% of mood variance. Interpersonal conflict was found to be the most upsetting of the common stressors and the only one that was unlikely to be attenuated by the next day (Bolger et al., 1989). This study shows that the methods an individual uses to participate in interpersonal conflict are closely tied to mental health and long-term well-being. Individuals with more constructive conflict behaviors "averaged fewer depressive symptoms in their later adulthood". This was also linked to "their spouse's depressive symptoms" (Lee et al., 2020). Additionally, interpersonal conflict is linked to an increased rate of suicidal ideation, illness, and panic ((Black et al., 2019), showing that interpersonal conflict behavior is linked to the well-being of an individual, as well as that of the people around them.

Interpersonal conflict research is often conducted in the workplace and examined as a workplace stressor, even though it impacts many different facets of life. As a workplace stressor, "interpersonal conflict influenced employees' intraindividual fluctuations in negative affect" (Ilies et al., 2011) and can negatively influence productivity and well-being in the workplace. Workplace interpersonal conflict studies tend to focus on how people negotiate for higher pay or promotions (Kolb, 2012).

In gender studies, gender is not simply an issue of identity and "includes the social beliefs, norms, and stereotypes about the behavior, cognitions, and emotions associated with each gender" (Neilson et al., 2020). What it means to be feminine, masculine, or a combination thereof is socially constructed and can therefore change with cultural changes. Some argue that in the "contemporary social climate" traditional masculine gender roles are toxic and damage "men's behaviors, relationships, and health," (Rivera & Scholar, 2020). Contemporary Western culture has defined masculine traits as more aggressive and assertive. Including "strength, independence, ambition, authoritative leadership, and rationality" (Neilson et al., 2020). Feminine traits include "care, sensitivity, dependence, and emotion" (Neilson et al., 2020). Cultural expectations about how individuals should behave in interpersonal conflict can impact relationships and well-being throughout a lifetime and it is therefore vital to understand. Gender norms are well studied in men and women, but little literature exists discussing nonbinary gender roles and norms and it is unknown how nonbinary gender roles may be related to interpersonal conflict behavior.

Gendered differences in conflict behavior are well-established between men and women. In a systematic review of gender differences in conflict resolution behavior by Dildar & Amjad (2017), the same five interpersonal conflict styles used in the TKI were analyzed in multiple settings. This study found significant gender differences in conflict mode generally as well as in the home and work. In general, the women in the sample were "intermediately cooperative and assertive considering their own as well other's needs" and the men were "highly assertive and uncooperative considering their own needs only indicating the dominating CRS [conflict resolution style]" (Dildar & Amjad, 2017). People in conflict settings experience "disempowerment as a result of transgressions" (Donnoli & Wertheim, 2012) related to the conflict style of the opposing party. The issue of gender differences in interpersonal conflict style is therefore potentially linked to the empowerment (and disempowerment) of vulnerable populations.

Building knowledge and emphasizing inclusion in scientific literature underscores the humanity of marginalized groups and helps lay foundations for acceptance. On a societal level, it is valuable to

understand the demographic trends in conflict approach for different groups so that it is easier to resolve conflict within them. The gendered differences in conflict mode that have been established between male and female people set the precedent for a difference to exist between nonbinary individuals as well. This paper examines the stratification of conflict mode based on the TKI scale between men, women, and nonbinary people.

Method

Design

This study used an online questionnaire to examine the relationship between gender and interpersonal conflict behavior. To analyze the data in this study, the participant data was divided into one of three categories based on gender identity. Those who identified as either a cisgender woman or a woman, were combined into one group, referred to as women. Seventeen women were removed from the analysis because they scored equally in two or more conflict modes and the number of women in the analysis was 58 (n = 58). Those who identified as either a cisgender man or a man were combined into a second group referred to as men (n = 22). The third group combined the data from those who identified their gender identity in the survey as 'transgender man', 'transgender women', 'nonbinary', 'gender-fluid', 'agender', 'queergender', and 'unlabeled'. This third group is referred to as nonbinary (n = 28). One nonbinary person was removed from the analysis because they scored equally in two conflict modes and the final n was 29.

The survey used in this study was based on the TKI and shares the same format. The novel scale was directly on the original TKI so that the same ratio and order of questions assessing each of the five conflict modes would be maintained. A copy of the original TKI was used as a template for the novel scale so that the integrity of the questions would be maintained between scales. The rewrite of the TKI was necessary because, even though the TKI started as an academic tool, it is now copyrighted and marketed as a team-building tool in the workplace that can be purchased on a per-capita basis. More

information about the marketed edition of the TKI can be found at kilmanndiagnostics.com (kilmann, 2018).

Participants

This study was open to all adults over the age of 18, and 128 people responded to the survey. Of the 128 respondents, one person indicated that their age was under eighteen years and was subsequently prevented from completing the survey. One other participant was excluded from the analysis due to incomplete data and eighteen were excluded because they ranked equally in two or more conflict modes. The final sample size was 108 (n = 108). When participants were asked to indicate their current gender identity 22 participants identified as men, 75 as women, 5 as transgender men, 3 as transgender women, 14 identified as nonbinary, 3 as gender-fluid, 2 as agender, one as queergender and one participant self-described as "Unlabeled". For analysis, the participants were divided into three gender groups, women (n=58), men (n=22), and nonbinary people (n=28). The nonbinary gender group includes participants who identify as transgender men, transgender women, nonbinary, gender fluid, agender, queergender, and unlabeled participants. Ninety-two participants were between 18-24, eleven were between 25-34, one was between 35-44, fourteen were between 45-54, six were between 55-64, two were between 75-84 and one participant was over the age of 85. The participants were from multiple racial backgrounds. 5 participants were Asian, 1 was black or African American, 19 were white of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin, 96 were white *not* of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin, and 6 participants elected to self-identify. Demographic information is shown in *Table 1*. The rationale behind which races and ethnicities to list in the survey came from the University of Florida, Institutional Planning and research guide for Race and Ethnicity Surveys (*Race and Ethnicity Survey – Institutional Planning and Research*, n.d.).

Participants were recruited to participate in the study using a survey link that was distributed via social posters that were hung on public notice boards in the Psychology building at CU Boulder, and a QR code that was shown as an announcement at the beginning of several classes at CU Boulder. A copy

of the poster that was put up and shown to classes is included in the appendix section of this paper. Participants were free to distribute the link or QR code to others as they saw fit, but the investigator was prohibited from asking participants to share the link due to concerns from the Institutional Review Board over potential risks to participants. Participants received no incentive or compensation for the completion of the survey. The survey was open from December 8th, 2022, until February 13th, 2023, and participants were free to take the survey at any point during that window.

Nonbinary and LGBTQ+ people are a vulnerable population due to the long history of mistreatment and discrimination discussed above and specific protections were included in the survey as a result. To reduce the risk to the participants, all responses were kept anonymous and no identifying information was collected. All questions in the survey were formatted to present minimal risk to the participants and participants were free to leave them unanswered for any reason. Participants were reminded that participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from data collection at any time, for any reason.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Sample Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Men	22	20%
Women	58	55%
Nonbinary	26	25%
Age		
18 – 24 years	82	77%
25 – 34 years	9	8%
35 – 44 years	1	0.90 %

45 – 54 years	9	8%
55 – 64 years	3	3 %
75 – 84 years	2	2 %
85 years or older	1	0.90 %

Race

Asian	5	5%
Black or African American	1	0.90%
White, of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	18	17%
White, NOT of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	80	76%
Other / Prefer to self-describe	6	6%

Note N=106

Measures

The scale used in this survey includes thirty dual-choice questions. The participant is asked to select the option that is most characteristic of their behavior in conflict. Each answer indicates one of five conflict styles defined in the TKI. To determine the conflict mode of each individual, the number of answers in each category were summed and individuals were labeled in the mode they scored the highest in. In the event of equal scores in multiple modes, individuals were included in each count.

At the beginning of the TKI-based portion of the survey, participants were prompted to imagine how they would behave in interpersonal conflict. The prompt did not specify whom the participant should imagine that they were in conflict with, and the participant was free to picture anyone. An example of the question from the survey is shown below.

Please select the option that is the most characteristic of your behavior in conflict…

    1.   I try to avoid creating situations that will be unpleasant

2. I always try to win when in a conflict

A full copy of the questionnaire used in this study is included in the appendix section of this paper. The competing subscale consisted of 12 items ($\alpha = 0.75$); the accommodating subscale consisted of 11 items ($\alpha = 0.55$). The avoiding subscale consisted of 13 items ($\alpha = 0.49$), the collaboration ($\alpha = 0.38$), and compromising ($\alpha = 0.27$) scales of 12 items each. These values indicate that only the competing subscale had an acceptable level of reliability.
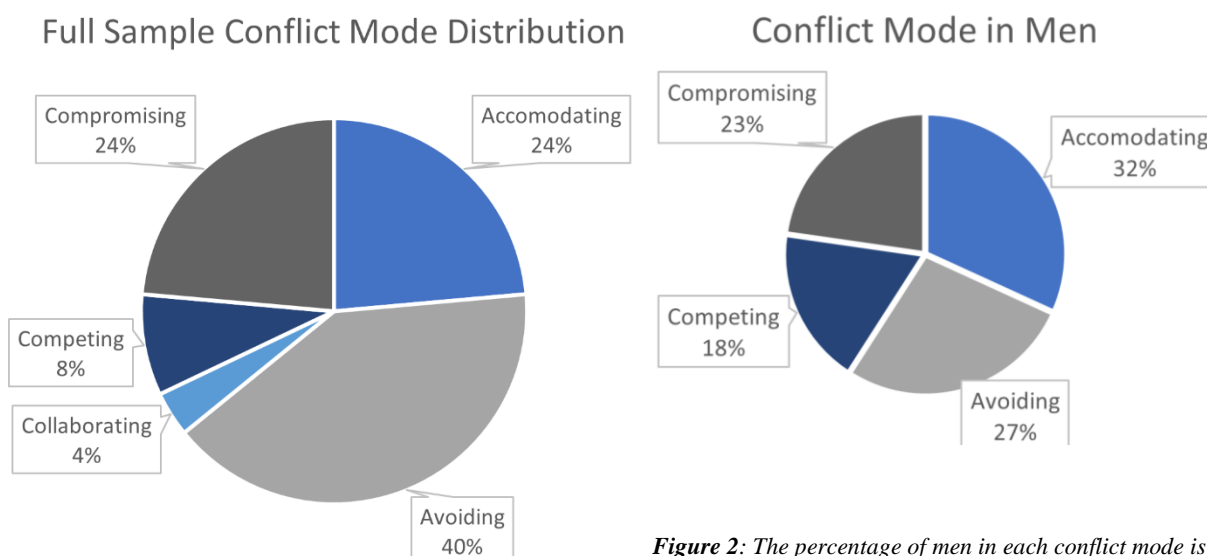
Procedure

To access the survey, participants were sent a link or scanned a QR code that directed them to the survey. The survey took between five and twelve minutes to complete. After agreeing to the informed consent, participants were asked to give their ages. If the participant indicated that their age was less than eighteen years, then they were redirected to the end of the survey and thanked for their time. A copy of the informed consent document used for this study is included in the appendix section of this paper. Participants are initially asked to imagine themselves taking part in a non-descript interpersonal conflict and are then prompted to answer questions about how they would behave. If the participant indicated that they were over eighteen, they were allowed to proceed to the next section of the survey. The second section of the survey consisted of thirty binary choice questions based on the TKI. Participants were initially asked to imagine themselves taking part in a non-descript interpersonal conflict and are then prompted to answer questions about how they would behave. In the final portion of the survey participants were asked to identify their race, current gender identity, and the gender that they were assigned at birth. Participants were then directed to the end of the survey where they were thanked for their time and responses. At this time participants were also provided with additional resources if they wished to learn more about the TKI scale. Survey questions were created and administered to participants via the online software, Qualtrics (http://www.qualtrics.com). Data were analyzed using R Studio and Excel.

Results

The number of participants in each conflict mode, split out by gender, is shown in *Table 2*. Chi-square and p-values are shown in *Table 3*. The data were analyzed both as a full sample and by each gender identity group (Man, Woman, Nonbinary). There were 128 individuals in the initial sample (N=128) and twenty-two were removed from the analysis (n = 106). Two participants did not fully complete the survey and were removed from the analysis for incomplete data. Twenty additional participants were removed from the analysis because they scored equally in two or more conflict modes.

The chi-square test assumes that is a normal distribution between all five conflict modes, or that approximately 20% of the sample would be sorted into each conflict style. As shown in *Figure 2*, 40% of the sample was categorized as avoiding, 24% as accommodating, and 24% as compromising. 8% of the sample was categorized as having a competing conflict mode and 5% as having a collaborating mode. There was a significant chi-square value in the full sample. This indicates that there is a non-random stratification of conflict modes ($p<0.0001$). The men in the sample (n=22) were sorted into four out of five categories. None of the men were categorized as collaborating but were fairly distributed across the


Figure 2: The percentage of the entire sample in each conflict mode is shown above. There is a significant stratification ($p<0.000001$)

Figure 2: The percentage of men in each conflict mode is shown above. Zero men in the sample had the collaborating conflict mode.

remaining four modes. As is shown in *Figure 3*, 32% of men in the sample were categorized as accommodating, 27% as avoiding, and 23% as compromising. The remaining 18% of men were categorized as having a competing conflict mode. There was no significant stratification in the conflict modes found in men ($p = 0.16$).

The women in the sample ($n = 58$) had conflict modes distributed across all five categories. There was a significant non-random stratification of the conflict modes of women ($p < 0.001$). As shown in *Figure 4*, 39% of women in the sample were categorized as avoiding, and 28% as compromising. 19% were categorized as accommodating, 7% as collaborating, and 7% as competing.

The nonbinary people in the sample ($n = 26$) had recorded conflict modes distributed across four of the five modes and statistical analysis was conducted using this value. There were zero nonbinary participants categorized as having a collaboration conflict mode. Across the other four modes, there was a non-random stratification of conflict modes of nonbinary people ($p < 0.001$). As shown in *Figure 5,* 55% of the sample was categorized as avoiding and 26% as accommodating. 15% were categorized as compromising and 4% as competing.
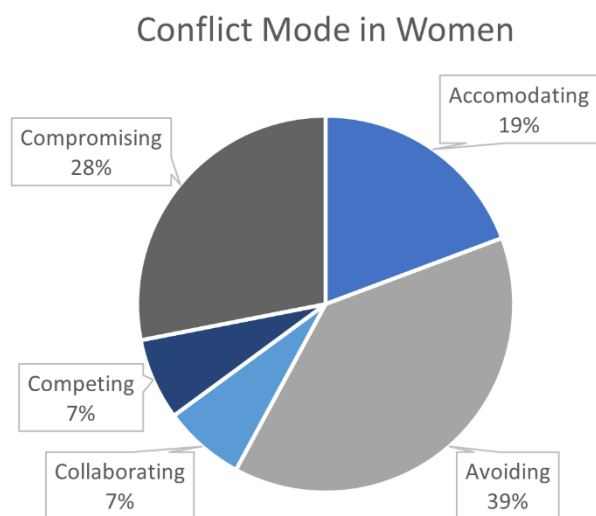
Figure 4: The percentage of women in each conflict mode is shown above. This distribution is significantly different than expected.
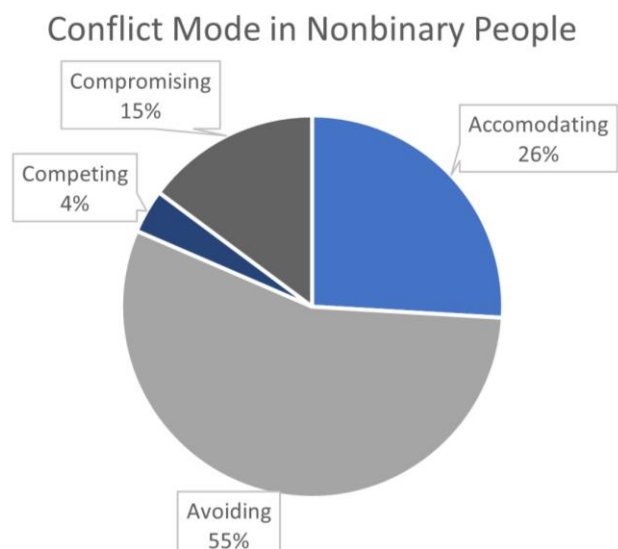
Figure 5: The percentage of nonbinary people in each conflict mode is shown above. Zero nonbinary people in the sample had the collaborating conflict mode. This distribution is significantly different than expected.

Table 2

Interpersonal Conflict Mode Across Genders

	IC Mode	Accommodating	Avoiding	Collaborating	Competing	Compromising
Gender						
	Women	11	22	4	4	16
	Men	7	6	0	4	5
	Nonbinary	7	15	0	1	4
Total		25	43	4	9	25
	Percent	24 %	40%	4%	8%	24%

N = 106

Table 3

Statistical Analysis

		Chi-Square Value ($\chi 2$)	p-value
Gender			
	Men	6.64	0.16
	Women	20.98	< 0.001*
	Nonbinary	20.41	< 0.001*
Full Sample		44.75	< 0.0001**

* Indicates statistical significance

The data from table two was used to complete a logistic regression for the competing subscale. Competing was the only subscale that had an acceptable internal validity ($\alpha=0.75$). The results of the

logistic regression, based on the equation shown below, show that there is no difference in the frequency of the competing conflict mode between gender identities.

$$\frac{e^{R_0+(R_1*MC)-(R_2*WC)-(R_3*NC)}}{1+e^{R_0+(R_1*MC)-(R_2*WC)-(R_3*NC)}}$$

Discussion

These results suggest that the distribution of conflict modes within the 'woman' and 'nonbinary' gender groups are distributed significantly different than expected. This could suggest that women and nonbinary people are less likely to exhibit self – regarding behavior as compared to men when in interpersonal conflict. 78% of nonbinary people and 56% of the women in the sample were categorized as having either an accommodating or avoiding interpersonal conflict style. The expected proportion of the women and nonbinary people categorized as accommodating or avoiding is 40% (20% per behavioral category). Both accommodating and avoiding conflict styles rank low in assertive, or self-regarding behavior. This finding suggests that women and nonbinary people are less likely than was expected to display self-advocating behavior. During interpersonal conflict, they will instead opt to fulfill the needs of others. This finding is noteworthy because this pattern of behavior can lead to the needs of women and nonbinary people not being met. When an individual's personal needs and interests remain unmet and unaddressed, the seeds of future conflicts are planted (*Understanding the Conflict Cycle*, n.d.).

Interpersonal conflicts have the largest impact on mood and "are overwhelmingly the most important kind of daily stress influencing psychological distress" (Bolger et al., 1989, p. 811) and can therefore have serious consequences for mental health, especially in women and nonbinary people. The significant difference in distribution found in women and nonbinary people could be indicative of a difference in what is socially acceptable interpersonal conflict behavior as compared to that in men.

The sample at large showed a significant difference in stratification of conflict mode than was expected. As was seen in the 'women' and 'nonbinary' gender groups, the proportion of the sample sorted into accommodating and avoiding conflict modes was significantly higher than expected. Additionally, fewer people were categorized as having a competing conflict style than was expected. This trend in the data is showing a shift away from self-regarding behavior towards other-regarding behavior. This could be evidence of a cultural shift in the kind of interpersonal conflict behaviors that are considered socially appropriate and acceptable. These shifting norms could impact the interpersonal conflict behavior of the entire population, not just women and nonbinary people.

When the probability of being designated as having a 'competing' conflict mode between genders was examined, no differences were found.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study did not control the interpersonal conflict scenarios that participants were asked to imagine while completing the survey. As a result of that, the intensity and emotional context of each participant varied. In future studies, this could be remedied by including a short description of the conflict the participants should imagine taking part in.

The scale used in this study was based on the TKI but has never been tested before. The actual TKI was not available for public use due to copyright issues. This preliminary use of the TKI-based scale showed acceptable internal reliability only in the competing style subscale (competing, $\alpha = 0.75$). However, the original TKI also showed acceptable internal reliability in one of the five subscales (competing, $\alpha = 0.71$) (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977, p. 316). This indicates that the new scale was an appropriate approximation of the original. The novel scale would need to be revised and updated for use in future studies to increase validity in four of the five subscales.

The sample in this survey may not be demographically representative of the American population in several different categories. The sample was predominantly white and the generalizability to more

racially diverse populations may be limited. The age range of the sample was similarly skewed. More than 70% of the sample was between 18-24. The large proportion of this age group in the sample could provide an alternative explanation for the large portion of the population that scored lowly in other-regarding behavior. Future research focusing on age as a variable in determining interpersonal conflict style would need to be conducted to confirm this.

For the purposes of statistical analysis, all nonbinary gender identities were analyzed as one group rather than many. This presents a limitation because the identities within the nonbinary community are diverse and fluid. The nonbinary community includes hundreds of different identities and is continuing to develop new terms for identification. It is therefore possible that there are differences in conflict behavior between different nonbinary gender identities that were overlooked by this study. In future studies, efforts should be made to obtain a larger and more diverse sample of nonbinary people so that any differences in gender identity that fall under that umbrella can be analyzed independently.

Conclusion

This study found a significant difference in the stratification of conflict styles within the women and nonbinary gender groups, as well as the sample as a whole. This suggests that the TKI may not be effective when categorizing the conflict behavior of nonbinary people and women. Additionally, the low internal reliability scores of four of the five scales indicate that the TKI is not an effective tool for categorizing interpersonal conflict behavior and should be revised for future use. Nonbinary people have not been included in previous interpersonal conflict research and this study provides evidence that the established construct of interpersonal conflict may not be generalizable to the nonbinary and female populations. As a result, female and nonbinary people may be disadvantaged when engaging in interpersonal conflicts.

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Appendix

<u>**Consent Document**</u>

Informed Consent Regarding Research Participation

Title of Research Study: The Conflict Psychology of Non-cisgendered People
IRB Protocol Number: 22-0523
Investigator: Katherine Bennett

Purpose of the Study:
      The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a difference between the conflict psychology of cisgendered people and non-cisgendered people. Current research that considers gender as a factor in conflict mode does not include any gender identity outside of male and female. This study aims to fill that gap in the literature. This research will advance the understanding of how non-cisgendered people behave in conflict, will create a foundation for further investigation and will push the field towards a higher level of inclusivity and equity among all people. This study is being conducted by Katherine L. Bennett as part of an honors thesis project for the department of Neuroscience and Psychology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. The thesis advisor for this project is Dr. Michael English, the director of the CU PACS program. Email: Michael.D.English@colorado.edu
We expect that this study will take 10-15 minutes to complete. We expect 250 total participants to complete the study.

Explanation of Procedures:
      The study will be completed in one session lasting approximately 10-15 minutes. The study will be completed online and is accessed via link or QR code. The survey that you will take is a thirty item questionnaire based on the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode questionnaire as well as several questions assessing gender identity and race. No follow up will be conducted and all data in this study will come from the results of survey

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:
      Whether or not you take part in this research is your choice. You can leace the research at any time and it will not be held against you. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then all data collected from you will be deleted and you will not be included in analysis. You will not ne asked to explain the reason for your withdrawal and no further information will be saught from you. No identifiable information will be collected at any point during the study. The primary investigator can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include incomplete data. If you are a CU Boulder student or employee, taking part in this research is not part of your class work or duties. You can refuse to enroll, or withdraw after enrolling at any time, with no effect on your class standing, grades, or job at CU Boulder. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research.

Confidentiality:

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Research information that identifies you may be shared with the University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of the Office for Human Research Protections. The information from this research may be published for scientific purposes; however, your identity will not be given out. The information collected in this study will be accessible only to the principal investigator. No identifying information will be collected. The data collected from you during the course of this research will not be used for future research by the Principal Investigator or shared with other investigators for future research.

Cost of Participation:

Taking part in this research study will have no cost to you.

Payment for Participation:

You will not be paid to be in this study.

Questions:

If you have questions, concerns, complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at Katherine.L.Bennett@Colorado.EDU.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB. You may talk to them at (303) 735-3702 or at irbadmin@colorado.edu if:
- Your questions, concerns or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

You are invited to participate in a research study about gender identity and conflict-handling mode. You will be asked to complete a brief survey regarding your conflict-handling preferences. You will also be asked to answer some questions about yourself and your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors. You do not have to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering, and you may quit the study at any time. This study will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The potential risk associated with this study is discomfort involved with answering questions about your gender identity and thoughts about conflict. To participate in this study you must be over 18 years of age. This study is completely anonymous, meaning your name will not in any way be associated with your answers. Please do not write your name anywhere on the questionnaire.

If you decide to participate, please click the "Yes, I will participate" box below to start the study. In completing this study, you should understand that your participation is totally voluntary, and that you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue your participation at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason.

If you have questions about the research or your rights as a research participant, please contact Katherine Bennett at Katherine.L.Bennett@Colorado.EDU.

Signatures:
Checking the box below documents your permission to take part in this research.

Questionnaire

Conflict questions

1.
I sometimes allow others to take charge of problem solving
I emphasize similarities rather than focusing on differences

2.
I attempt to reach a compromise when in conflict
I attempt to address the concerns of others as well as my own

3.
I tend to be firm in achieving my goals
I try to soothe the other party in order to preserve our relationship

4.
I attempt to reach a compromise when in conflict
I will sometimes fulfill the wishes of others at the expense of my own

5.
I find help from others to be useful when finding a solution
I do my best to avoid useless tension

6.
I try to avoid creating situations that will be unpleasant
I always try to win when in a conflict

7.
I prefer to fully think through the issue before I engage
I will make some concessions in order to get my way in other issues

8.
I tend to be firm in achieving my goals
I attempt to get all of my points out on the table right away

9.
I do not feel that differences should be the focus of conflict
I always at least try to get my way

10.
I tend to be firm in achieving my goals
I attempt to reach a compromise when in conflict

11.

I attempt to get all of my points out on the table right away

I try to sooth the other party in order to preserve our relationship

12.

I do not like to take positions that create controversy

I will let others have their way in some aspects if I can have mine in other positions

13.

I propose a solution that everyone can agree on

I always make sure my points are clear

14.

I explain my position and ask to hear the position of others

I do my best to explain the logic and thought behind my position

15.

I try to sooth the other party in order to preserve our relationship

I do my best to avoid useless tension

16.

I do my best not to offend others

I try to convince the other person that my position is better

17.

I tend to be firm in achieving my goals

I do my best to avoid useless tension

18.

To make the other party happy, I might let them have their way

I will let others have their way in some aspects if I can have mine in other positions

19.

I attempt to get all of my points out on the table right away

I prefer to fully think through the issue before I engage

20.

I try to work through our differences right away

I always try to find a fair solution

21.

I always try to consider the feelings of the other party

I prefer to directly discuss the problem

22.

I aim to reach a fair intermediate position between parties

I make my wishes clear

23.

I am focused on getting all of my wishes fulfilled

I sometimes allow others to take charge of problem solving

24.

If the position seems like it is very important to the other party then I will try to meet their wishes

I aim to get the other party to compromise

25.

I always try to show the other party the benefits and thoughts behind my point of view

I always try to be considerate of the wishes of the other party

26.

I propose a solution that everyone can agree on

I focus on satisfying all of my own needs

27.

I do not like to take positions that create controversy

To make the other party happy, I might let them have their way

28.

I tend to be firm in achieving my goals

I do not feel that differences should be the focus of conflict

29.

I propose a solution that everyone can agree on

I do not feel that differences should be the focus of conflict

30.

I do my best not to offend others

I always discuss the problem with the other party in order to reach a solution

Demographic Questions

What is your age in years?
- Text box with numerical answers only

What is your race?
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White, of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- White, NOT of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- Other / Prefer to self describe
    - Textbox option

What gender were you assigned at birth?
- Male
- Female
- Intersex
- Other / prefer to self describe
    - Textbox option

What is your current gender identity?
- Cisgender Male
- Cisgender Female
- Transgender Man
- Transgender Woman
- Nonbinary
- Genderfluid
- Agender
- Genderqueer
- Two Spirit
- Other / Prefer to self describe
    - Textbox option

<u>**Recruitment Document**</u>

Participants Needed
Study on Conflict Psychology and Gender

This study examines how gender impacts conflict style in adults using a brief survey that can be accessed via the QR code below. This study is being conducted by Katherine L. Bennett as a component of honors thesis research in the department of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of Colorado, Boulder. This survey is anonymous and no identifying information will be collected.

FAQs
Who is eligible?
- All adults 18+

How long will it take?
- The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete

How can I learn more?

The primary researcher is available to answer any questions and provide more information at **Katherine.L.Bennett@Colorado.EDU**

https://cuboulder.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4JdQnbSDTsDzWOa