Avoid or Fight Back? Cultural Differences in Responses to Conflict and the Role of Collectivism, Honor, and Enemy Perception

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Abstract
We investigated how responses to interpersonal conflict differed across Ghana, Turkey, and the northern United States. Due to low levels of interpersonal embeddedness, people from individualistic cultures (northern United States) have more freedom to prioritize individual goals and to choose competitive and confrontational responses to conflict compared with people from collectivistic cultures (Turkey, Ghana). Consistent with this idea, we found that northern American participants were less willing to avoid instigators but more willing to retaliate against them compared with other cultural groups. Moreover, in honor cultures like Turkey, there is strong concern for other people’s opinions, and insults are more threatening to personal and family reputation compared with non-honor cultures. Therefore, Turkish participants were less willing to engage in submissive behaviors such as yielding to the instigator. Finally, in Ghana, relationships are more obligatory and enemies are more prominent compared with other cultures. Consistent with our predictions, Ghanaian participants were less willing than Turkish or northern American participants to choose retaliation but more willing to yield to the instigator. Differences in response styles were consistent with dominant cultural values and the cultural nature of interpersonal relationships.

Keywords
cultural psychology, conflict management, collectivism, honor cultures, enemies

Your coworker reveals an embarrassing secret about you and people start making fun of you at work. You also find out that there have been other incidents in which the same coworker expressed that he or she does not like you and tried to sabotage your progress. How would you deal with

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this situation? Would you try to avoid your coworker as much as possible, would you openly express to him or her your thoughts and feelings about the situation, or would you try to embarrass him or her in turn? Depending on the circumstances in which the conflict occurs, different response styles may be adaptive. In particular, individuals from diverging cultural backgrounds may choose responses that are in line with the dominant values and the conception of personal relationships in their culture. In this article, we focus on three cultural contexts—Ghana, Turkey, and northern United States—to investigate differences and similarities in how individuals deal with interpersonal conflict.

Conflict Management in Cultural Contexts

The extensive research on conflict management has revealed three broad types of response strategies from which conflict partners can choose: Competition, which includes efforts to dominate the partner and win the conflict situation; avoidance, which is the tendency to suppress the expression or importance of the conflict and to avoid addressing the conflict, and cooperation, which is about engaging in constructive negotiations and problem solving (Gelfand, Leslie, Keller, & De Dreu, 2012). Variation in cultural norms and values may lead to differing perceptions of and responses to conflict (e.g., Chua & Gudykunst, 1987). In individualistic cultures, the emphasis is on the needs and goals of the individual, relationships are independent and voluntary, and a dominant motivation is to have positive self-esteem. In collectivistic societies, however, the emphasis is on one’s ingroups, relationships are often interdependent and embedded, and a dominant motivation is to maintain harmony in important relationships (e.g., Adams, 2005; Hofstede, 2001). For these reasons, conflict management in individualistic cultures focuses more on distributing resources than on relationships, whereas in collectivistic cultures, the pattern is the opposite (Adair & Brett, 2004).

Another difference between the members of individualistic and collectivistic societies is in their self-regulatory strategies. Members of individualistic societies tend to have promotion-focused strategies, or an approach motivation toward gains and ideals. Members of collectivistic societies, in contrast, tend to have a prevention focus, or a tendency to avoid losses and harm (Higgins, 1997; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). In line with these ideas, competitive, assertive, and active (promotion-focused) methods to deal with conflict are perceived as normal and acceptable in individualistic cultures, whereas cooperative, non-assertive, and passive (prevention-focused) responses may be more often preferred in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Dos Santos Pearson, & Villareal, 1997; Ohbushi, Fukushima, & Tedeschi, 1999). Collectivism, however, is a broad term and there are varieties of collectivistic cultures across the world with different dominant values regarding the perception of interpersonal relationships or the emphasis put on one’s social image. In this work, we focused on Ghana as one of the collectivistic cultures where perception of having enemies is common, and on Turkey, where reputation and social image are strongly emphasized and defended.

In West African countries like Ghana, people tend to believe that they are targets of enemies and they have hidden enemies in their lives, even among friends (Adams, 2005). Compared with northern Americans, Ghanaians are more cautious toward their friends and more likely to perceive a person who claims to have no enemies as foolish or naïve. In the United States, in contrast, having hidden enemies is perceived as unusual or even pathological (Adams, 2005; Adams & Plaut, 2003). According to Adams (2005), this is due to the obligatory nature of relationships in Ghana, where people find themselves in involuntary relationships that are hard to exit. Relationships in the United States, in contrast, are independent, and people have more freedom to choose friends and to end friendships. In Ghana, relationships that go sour are not easily escaped; thus, people who are involuntarily tied together can develop animosities or feuds. In an environment where enemies can be found even among friends, ignoring an enemy as well as
quarreling with him or her would be unwise and risky (Adams, 2005). This cultural difference could also be reflected in people’s choices of how to respond to an interpersonal conflict. The obligatory nature of relationships may afford avoidance or prevention-oriented approaches to conflict so that individuals may peacefully coexist with others. The possibility of having people in their lives who bear them malice could make individuals more likely to stop or modify behavior that displeases the instigator in the conflict; they may be less likely to engage in behaviors that would escalate the conflict rather than end it.

In some other collectivistic cultures, social image and honor are highly emphasized. In traditional honor cultures, which are mostly located in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), the Mediterranean, and southern United States, honor means positive moral standing and pride in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others (Pitt-Rivers, 1965). Honor in these cultures is related not only to one’s own perception of worth but also to other people’s opinion and respect (Peristiany, 1965). A defining feature of honor in these cultures is that it can be easily lost and difficult to regain (Stewart, 1994). An insult coming from a conflict partner, for example, can threaten the honor of the insulted party (Harinck, Shafa, Ellemers, & Beersma, 2013). When faced with honor threats, people from these cultures try to regain the respect of others by defending themselves publically and sometimes aggressively (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Peristiany, 1965). Thus, members of traditional honor cultures may be motivated to choose competitive and confrontational response types in conflict situations. As one of the MENA societies, Turkish culture is predominantly shaped by the honor code (Bagli & Sev’er, 2003). Therefore, we expect that Turkish participants would be more likely to choose competitive and retaliatory responses to conflict compared with Ghanaian participants. Turkey, however, is also a collectivistic culture, where preserving relationship harmony is emphasized in the society along with reputation management. In conflict situations, therefore, both motives may be salient and Turkish people may choose avoidant or prevention-focused responses as much as Ghanaians do.

Finally, the northern United States is included in this work because it represents a dignity culture (Leung & Cohen, 2011). In these cultures, self-worth is a private matter, dignity is inherent, and the actions or perceptions of others do not affect one’s esteem as much as in honor cultures. In that sense, dignity is similar to “an internal skeleton, to a hard structure at the center of the self” (Ayers, 1984, p. 20). In dignity cultures, therefore, one’s esteem cannot be taken away by others, through disrespectful behaviors such as insults or false accusations; in contrast, esteem is primarily internal (Leung & Cohen, 2011). In line with this idea, compared with Turkey, northern American participants are more likely to approve of people who do not confront the source of a disrespectful behavior than people who do (Cross, Uskul, Gercek-Swing, Alozkan, & Ataca, 2013). The northern United States, however, is not only a dignity culture but it is also more individualistic than Turkey (e.g., Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Individualism is positively related to physical and verbal aggression in interpersonal conflicts (e.g., Bergmüller, 2013), and interpersonal aggression is more common in individualistic compared with collectivistic societies (e.g., Forbes, Zhang, Doroszewicz, & Haas, 2009). Thus, Turkish and northern American participants may both engage in confrontational and competitive responses to conflict, but for different reasons. We predicted that avoidant or prevention-focused responses, however, would be preferred less in the northern United States compared with Turkey and Ghana.

**Overview**

In two studies, we aimed to go beyond a two-culture comparison of how people respond to conflict, and we focused on three cultures with different prominent value systems. Study 1 was a preliminary investigation of cultural differences in people’s expectations of responses to specific conflict situations. In Study 2, we broadened our approach and focused on people’s responses to their personal enemies. We investigated cultural differences in the willingness to choose specific conflict responses and possible mechanisms to explain those differences.
Study 1

In this study, participants read two scenarios in which they imagined themselves to be the target of an interpersonal conflict and they reported the likelihood of different conflict strategies. To investigate the role of the relationship between conflict partners, we used two scenarios, in which the instigator was either a stranger or a friend of the target. As mentioned previously, members of individualistic cultures are more likely to choose competitive or promotion-focused responses to conflict compared with members of collectivistic cultures (e.g., Lee et al., 2000; Ohbushi et al., 1999), whereas members of collectivistic cultures are more likely to choose avoidance or prevention-focused responses compared with members of individualistic cultures (e.g., Ohbushi et al., 1999). If the conflict is perceived as reputation-threatening, however, members of collectivistic honor cultures will be more likely to prefer competitive responses rather than avoidance. To investigate cultural differences and similarities in responses to interpersonal conflict, we focused on participants’ expectation of two primary responses: verbal quarrel (a competitive response) and avoidance (a non-competitive response). We chose verbal quarrel as a competitive method because it clearly involves an approach to the instigator and it is a retaliatory response. Avoidance, in contrast, represents the prevention focus of collectivistic contexts.

In this study, we hypothesized that in response to a conflict, verbal quarrel would be expected more by Turkish and northern American participants compared with Ghanaian participants (Hypothesis 1). In cultures like Ghana, where people live closely with their enemies, quarreling with others could bring serious repercussions. In Turkey, the conflict in the scenarios could be perceived as insulting and therefore honor threatening. This perception would generate a competitive response like verbal quarrel. Northern United States is an individualistic culture; hence, people have the freedom to choose more direct and assertive response types to deal with conflict compared with other cultures. In line with our first prediction, we also hypothesized that avoidance would be expected by Ghanaian and Turkish participants more than by northern Americans, especially when the conflict partner is a friend rather than a stranger (Hypothesis 2). Avoidance does not involve a direct response or an approach to the instigator of the conflict; hence, it would not be a common response for northern Americans. Turkish and Ghanaian participants, however, may have a higher motivation to prevent the escalation of conflict and maintain harmony in their social relations; therefore, they would perceive avoidance as more likely than northern Americans.

Method

Participants. Participants were students at the University of Ghana (n = 80, 40 women, 40 men), at Bogazici University in Turkey (n = 127, 61 women, 65 men, 1 unidentified), and at Iowa State University in the northern United States (n = 203, 105 women, 98 men), who self-identified as European Americans. They were recruited through departmental participant pools in return for course credit in Ghana and the northern United States, and on a voluntary basis in classes in Turkey.

Materials and procedure. Participants signed up for the study in groups and completed a pen and paper survey in classrooms. The survey was administered by an experimenter and lasted about 20 minutes. First, participants read two scenarios in which the main character was attacked by a stranger or a friend. The names in each scenario were matched with the culture and gender of the participant.

Scenario 1 (stranger scenario): A group of students were sitting in the common room of the dormitory, where seating was scarce. Tammie got up to make a cup of tea and left her books at the desk to indicate that the space was taken. When Tammie returned with the tea, she found that another student,
who lived a few doors down from her, had taken her seat. When Tammie asked the student to leave, the student replied, “Do you own the seat? I occupy it now.” Imagine that you were in Tammie’s place.

Scenario 2 (friend scenario): Paul and Robert are friends. One day, Paul shares a secret with Robert regarding a personally embarrassing incident. Two weeks later, Paul is walking by a group of students when a person in the group, calls out, “Hey, Paul, I heard a funny thing about you and I want to know whether it’s true.” The person then proceeds to tell everyone about the embarrassing secret. Imagine that you were in Paul’s place.

After each scenario, participants were asked to imagine that they were in the target’s place and to answer the following questions:

(a) Please indicate how likely the event would be to lead to a verbal quarrel between you and the student [Robert]? (b) Please indicate how likely the event would be to lead you to avoid the student [Robert] as much as possible after this event?

They used a scale of 0 (not likely at all) to 9 (extremely likely). After that participants completed a demographic form in which they indicated their gender, age, and ethnicity. We also measured participants’ upbringing on a scale of 1 (very rural) to 9 (very urban). Studies found that honor cultures are typically more rural than non-honor cultures and rurality tends to be controlled in studies examining these cultures (Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012).

In Turkey, materials were presented in Turkish after their translation and back-translation by bilingual research assistants. In Ghana, English materials were used because it is the official language and the language of instruction.

Results

Age and upbringing (rural vs. urban) were significantly different across cultures, $F_{Age}(2, 404) = 139.87$, $F_{Upbringing}(2, 402) = 54.68$, $p < .001$. Ghanaian participants ($M = 26.60$, $SD = 6.61$) were significantly older than Turkish participants ($M = 20.33$, $SD = 1.64$), who were significantly older than northern Americans ($M = 19.29$, $SD = 1.96$), $p < .01$, $d > .58$. Age range was 19 to 45 years in Ghana, 18 to 26 years in Turkey, and 17 to 37 years in northern United States. Moreover, Ghanaian ($M = 6.75$, $SD = 2.35$) and Turkish participants ($M = 7.09$, $SD = 1.42$) were more urban than northern American participants ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 2.25$), $p < .001$, $d > .83$; but the former did not differ from each other, $p = .25$. Therefore, we controlled for age and upbringing (rural vs. urban) in our analyses.¹

Cultural differences in response expectations. We hypothesized that as a competitive response, verbal quarrel would be expected more by Turkish and northern American participants compared with Ghanaian participants (Hypothesis 1). We also predicted that avoidance would be expected by Ghanaian and Turkish participants more than by northern Americans (Hypothesis 2). To test these hypotheses, we conducted a total of seven ANCOVAs in this section. To control for a potential inflation of Type I error, we applied the Bonferroni correction. We took the alpha of .007 as the cutoff value for significance.

A 2 (response type) × 2 (scenario) × 3 (culture) mixed-design ANCOVA revealed a significant Response Type × Scenario × Culture interaction, $F(2, 390) = 7.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. To examine this interaction more closely, we conducted 2 (scenario) × 3 (culture) mixed-design ANCOVAs for each response type. Scenario type did not have a significant main effect for any response type, $p > .16$, but Scenario × Culture interaction was marginally significant for verbal quarrel, $F(2, 392) = 3.60$, $p = .03$, and significant for avoidance, $F(2, 392) = 6.97$, $p < .007$. Finally, we
conducted separate univariate ANCOVAs for each response type and scenario, in which we entered culture as a between-subjects factor.

**Verbal quarrel.** Culture had a significant main effect on verbal quarrel expectations for both scenarios, $F_{\text{Stranger}}(2, 390) = 7.84$, $F_{\text{Friend}}(2, 391) = 24.18$, $ps < .001$. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, verbal quarrel was expected more by Turkish and northern American participants than by Ghanaians in both scenarios, $ps < .007$, but the differences were greater in the friend scenario ($d_{\text{GH-TR}} = .98$, $d_{\text{GH-US}} = .95$) than in the stranger scenario ($d_{\text{GH-TR}} = .67$, $d_{\text{GH-US}} = .64$; Table 1). There was no difference between Turkish and northern American participants in any of the scenarios, $ps > .46$.

**Avoidance.** Culture had a significant main effect on avoidance expectations for both scenarios, $F_{\text{Stranger}}(2, 391) = 6.30$, $F_{\text{Friend}}(2, 390) = 26.64$, $ps < .007$. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, avoidance was preferred more by Turkish participants than by northern Americans in both scenarios but the difference was greater in the friend scenario, $p < .001$, $d = .85$, than in the stranger scenario, $p = .04$, $d = .24$ (Table 1). Contrary to predictions, however, Ghanaian participants expected avoidance to be somewhat less likely than northern Americans in the stranger scenario, $p = .09$, and equally likely to them in the friend scenario, $p = .65$. In both scenarios, Ghanaian participants expected avoidance to be less likely compared with Turkish participants, $ps < .007$.

**Discussion**

In this study, we investigated cultural differences in responses to interpersonal conflicts in Ghana, Turkey, and the northern United States. As we predicted, verbal quarrel (a competitive response) was expected to be more likely to occur in Turkey and northern United States than in Ghana, regardless of the relationship between the target and the instigator. In Turkey, the conflict in the scenarios might be perceived as highly reputation-threatening and therefore open to a competitive or retaliatory response such as verbal quarrel. In the United States, the individualistic context makes direct competition (or promotion-focused responses) acceptable when dealing with conflicts. In Ghana, however, quarreling might not be expected as much because it may have serious repercussions due to the existence of enemies in everyday life.

As predicted, Turkish participants expected avoidance to be more likely to occur than northern American participants, especially when the instigator was a friend. This could be because Turkey is a collectivistic honor culture where not only reputation management (e.g., through verbal quarrel) but also maintaining social harmony (e.g., through avoiding further conflict) is emphasized in the society. Having a conflict with a friend might make both motives salient in Turkey; hence, we observed high expectations for both verbal quarrel and avoidance, and a greater difference between Turkey and the northern United States for avoidance compared with the stranger conflict scenario (Table 1). When the conflict is with a stranger, reputation management may be more salient than harmony in Turkey. Avoidance may not be a desired response in that case; therefore, there was a smaller difference in avoidance expectations between Turkey and the northern United States. In the northern United States, avoidance may not be preferred as much because it is a prevention-oriented response rather than a promotion-oriented one.

Contrary to our predictions, Ghanaians reported the lowest expectation for avoidance in both scenarios. We hypothesized that in a culture where the perception of having enemies is common, avoidance would be a non-risky response (i.e., more suitable for prevention-focused contexts) and would be preferred more than in the northern United States. Our results, however, showed the opposite. One explanation for this unexpected finding could be that Ghanaians may have a response type that they would expect to be most likely to occur but that was not included in our study. To overcome this possibility, we added more response options in Study 2.
Table 1. Conflict Response Types by Culture and Scenario (Study 1).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ghana</th>
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<th>Turkey</th>
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<th>Northern US</th>
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<th>d&lt;sub&gt;GH-TR&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>d&lt;sub&gt;GH-US&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>d&lt;sub&gt;TR-US&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
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<td>Stranger scenario</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal quarrel</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>[−2.79, −0.94]</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>[−2.52, −0.55]</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>[−.37, 1.02]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>[−2.63, −0.68]</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>[−1.91, 0.17]</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>[0.05, 1.51]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friend scenario</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal quarrel</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>[−3.88, −2.15]</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>[−3.70, −1.85]</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>[−.41, 0.89]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>[−2.94, −1.18]</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>[−.72, 1.16]</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>[1.62, 2.95]</td>
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Note. CI = confidence interval.
Study 1 was a preliminary study to understand whether there was a difference in the expectation of people from different cultures in responses to conflict. It focused on conflict situations with friends and strangers, whereas in Study 2, we moved the focus to personal conflict experiences with enemies. Moreover, we broadened the response range in Study 2 by including multiple examples of the competitive response option as well as by creating a cooperative response category. Finally, we measured three individual difference variables in Study 2 that could explain cultural differences in conflict responses: interdependence, honor concerns, and perception of having enemies.

**Study 2**

As mentioned previously, research on conflict management has revealed competitive, avoidant, and cooperative responses as the three broad types of response strategies (Gelfand et al., 2012). Cultures may differ in their members’ endorsement of these response types, due to differences in values and the nature of interpersonal relationships. Parallel to this tripartite model, we created a new response set in this study and asked participants to indicate how they would respond to their own enemy rather than to report what they would expect to happen between the target and the instigator in a conflict scenario. As an example for the competitive response category, we included convincing the enemy to change his or her mind as a response option. Convincing is similar to verbal quarrel in Study 1 in the sense that both responses are competitive and direct; however, convincing may be more positive and constructive than verbal quarrel. As part of the competitive response category, we also included the relatively negative and destructive response options of talking negatively about the enemy and embarrassing the enemy in public, which we called retaliation. We suggest that convincing and retaliation go under the competitive response category because both of them involve efforts to dominate the partner or win the conflict situation (Gelfand et al., 2012).

Participants also reported their likelihood of modifying their behavior that displeases the enemy and stopping that behavior, which we called yielding. This would correspond to the cooperative response category because cooperators have a proactive approach and engage in constructive problem solving and negotiation (Gelfand et al., 2012). Although these two responses do not involve negotiation with the enemy, they may be considered a cooperative response because they involve taking an action (e.g., modifying behavior) to solve the conflict.

Finally, as in Study 1 and in the existing conflict response categorizations, we asked participants their likelihood of avoiding the enemy. To understand the underlying mechanisms of the differences and similarities across the cultures of interest—Ghana, Turkey, and the northern United States—we also investigated participants’ level of interdependence, perception of having enemies, and honor concerns.

**Cultural Differences in Enemy Response Preferences**

Similar to Study 1, we hypothesized that convincing and retaliation would be preferred more by Turkish and northern American participants than by Ghanaian participants (Hypothesis 1a and 1b). In honor cultures like Turkey, enemies may be a source of honor threat due to their harmful behaviors; hence, Turkish people may prefer competitive and confrontational responses to maintain and restore their honor when dealing with their enemies. As mentioned earlier, there is more freedom to endorse competitive methods to deal with conflict in cultures where relationships are less interdependent, such as in the northern United States, compared with cultures where relationships are highly interdependent. Therefore, northern Americans would also be willing to endorse convincing and retaliation as responses to enemies. Ghanaian participants, however, would not prefer these response types as much because trying to convince the enemy or retaliation may inflame the conflict and bring severe consequences.
As in Study 1, we predicted that *avoidance* would be preferred more by Turkish participants than northern Americans (Hypothesis 2). Being more collectivistic, Turkish people might be more motivated to maintain the harmony in their social life compared with northern Americans; hence, they would prefer avoidance more.

Finally, we predicted that *yielding* would be preferred more by Ghanaians than by Turkish and northern American participants (Hypothesis 3). In honor cultures like Turkey, yielding could mean accepting the attack or insult coming from the enemy, which may have negative implications for one’s own and one’s family’s reputation. In the northern United States, yielding is contrary to the motive of winning the conflict or approaching one’s goals; therefore, it would not be preferred. In Ghana, however, where enemies are salient, people may choose cooperative responses like yielding more than in other cultures to make sure that conflicts do not escalate.

**Predictors of Enemy Response Types**

As mentioned previously, collectivism is a broad term and there are varieties of collectivistic cultures with different dominant values regarding the perception of interpersonal relationships or the emphasis put on one’s social image. In this study, therefore, we investigated the predictive role of a higher-order construct—collective-interdependence—as well as two lower-order constructs—perception of having enemies and honor concerns. We explored whether interdependence predicted the four enemy response types described earlier, and whether perceptions of having enemies and concern for honor mediated this relation. More importantly, we examined whether culture was a moderator in this model. Although our analyses were primarily exploratory, we did expect that the association between *interdependence* and the *perception of having enemies* would be positive and stronger among Ghanaian participants than among Turkish or American participants (Hypothesis 4a). If ingroups are important and central to the self, as suggested by a high interdependence level, people will have closer relations with their ingroup members. This in turn could bring more enemies in a culture where relationships are involuntary and inevitable. We also expected *interdependence* to be more strongly related to *concern for one’s own honor* and *one’s close others’ honor* among Turkish participants compared with Ghanaian and northern American participants (Hypothesis 4b). In honor cultures like Turkey, honor is closely related to other people’s views. The centrality and importance of one’s ingroups reflected in high levels of interdependence might make honor concerns more salient in Turkey compared with non-honor cultures.

**Method**

**Participants.** Participants were students at the University of Ghana (*n* = 72, 36 women, 36 men), at Bogazici University in Turkey (*n* = 128, 64 women, 62 men, 2 unidentified), and at Iowa State University in the northern United States, who self-identified as European Americans (*n* = 211, 101 women, 111 men). They were recruited through departmental participant pools in return for course credit in Ghana and the northern United States, and on a voluntary basis in classes in Turkey.

**Materials and procedure.** Participants signed up for the study in groups and completed a pen and paper survey in classrooms. The survey was administered by an experimenter and lasted about 50 minutes. First, they answered the following question about how they would respond to attacks coming from people who regarded them as enemies:

> Imagine that you discovered a neighbor, coworker, or acquaintance who regarded you as an enemy. That is, they hated you to the extent of wishing for your downfall and trying to sabotage your progress. How would you respond to this situation?
We used “neighbor, coworker, and acquaintance” in our description because they represent a group of people with whom the individual may be as close as friends or as distant as strangers. In that sense, this group provides a broad conflict source and allows participants to more easily bring an enemy to mind.

Participants indicated the likelihood of each of the following response type on a scale of 0 (not at all likely) to 9 (extremely likely):

(a) You continue trying to convince the person to change his or her mind, (b) You appease the person; that is, you try to stop doing whatever it is that displeases him or her, (c) You change your everyday habits to avoid the person, (d) You ignore the person; that is, you do not modify your behavior in any way, (e) You start talking negatively about the person to other people, (f) You try to embarrass this person publicly.

We averaged the response options “stopping the behavior that displeases the enemy” (Option b) and “ignoring the enemy/not modifying the behavior” (Option d, reverse-coded) and labeled it yielding, \( r_{GH} = .28, r_{TR} = .35, r_{US} = .35, p_s < .05. \) Moreover, we averaged “talking negatively about the enemy” (Option e) and “embarrassing the enemy” (Option f) and labeled it retaliation, \( r_{GH} = .59, r_{TR} = .75, r_{US} = .60, p_s < .001. \)

Next, participants completed the Collective-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (CISC; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999; adapted from Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000), which taps the degree to which collective or group relations were part of their self-construals. Sample items are, “The groups I belong to are an important reflection of who I am” and “When I think of myself, I often think of groups I belong to as well.” Participants indicated their agreement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). CISC had a Cronbach’s alpha level of .76 in Ghana, .89 in Turkey, and .88 in northern United States.

CISC was followed by the honor measures that assessed how much people considered the consequences of their actions for their own and their significant others’ honor. Personal honor and family honor are distinguished in the literature and studies have found that losing honor brings a bad reputation and shame not only to the person but also to their family (e.g., Bagli & Sev’er, 2003; Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2008). Another study showed that Turkish participants were more likely than northern Americans to perceive that honor threats to themselves would also affect their families (Uskul, Cross, Sunbay, Gercek-Swing, & Ataca, 2012). Therefore, we assessed concern for one’s own honor and significant others’ honor separately in this study. Participants answered the following questions that were generated by the authors for this study, using a scale of 0 (not at all) to 9 (completely):

(1) Before taking any action in life, Patricia always considers how the potential consequences of her actions might negatively affect her honor. (a) To what extent do you think that people should follow Patricia’s approach? (b) To what extent does Patricia’s approach reflect yours?

Answers to Parts a and b were averaged and this variable was called own honor, \( r_{GH} = .55, r_{TR} = .85, r_{US} = .75, p_s < .001. \) Participants also answered the following questions:

(2) Before taking any action in life, Thomas always considers how the potential consequences of his actions might negatively affect the honor of significant others. (a) To what extent do you think that people should follow Thomas’s approach? (b) To what extent does Thomas’s approach reflect yours?

Again, answers to Parts a and b were averaged and this variable was called others’ honor, \( r_{GH} = .50, r_{TR} = .79, r_{US} = .70, p_s < .001. \) The names were matched with the culture and gender of the participant.
After that, participants indicated whether there are people who they would call *enemies* by answering the following questions on a scale of 0 (*not at all*) to 9 (*definitely/completely*):

1. John senses that there are people who hate him, wish negative things for him, treat him with malice, and would sabotage his progress, even though he cannot identify specific individuals who would do so. To what extent do you have the same feeling or sense as John? 
2. Are there people who hate you, personally, to the extent of wishing for your downfall or trying to sabotage your progress?

We averaged the answers to these questions and labeled the variable *perception of having enemies*, \( r_{GH} = .59, r_{TR} = .64, r_{US} = .61, ps < .001. \) The name in the question was matched with the culture and gender of the participant.

Finally, participants completed a demographic form in which they indicated their gender, age, ethnicity, and upbringing on a scale of 1 (*very rural*) to 9 (*very urban*). Turkish materials were used in Turkey, after their translation and back-translation by bilingual research assistants. English materials were used in Ghana.

**Results**

Age and upbringing (rural vs. urban) were significantly different across cultures, \( F_{Age}(2, 405) = 77.13, p < .001, F_{Upbringing}(2, 408) = 45.31, p < .001. \) Ghanaiian participants (\( M = 24.17, SD = 5.32 \)) were significantly older than Turkish participants (\( M = 20.61, SD = 1.53 \)), who were significantly older than northern American participants (\( M = 19.39, SD = 2.08 \)), \( ps < .01, ds > .51. \) Age range was 19 to 40 in Ghana, 18 to 28 in Turkey, and 18 to 40 in the northern United States. Moreover, Ghanaiian (\( M = 6.71, SD = 2.07 \)) and Turkish participants (\( M = 6.74, SD = 1.53 \)) were more urban than northern American participants (\( M = 4.81, SD = 2.29 \)), \( ps < .001, ds > .87, \) but the former did not differ from each other, \( p = .91. \) Therefore, we controlled for age and upbringing (rural vs. urban) in our analyses.

**Cultural patterns of enemy response types.** We hypothesized that *convincing* (similar to verbal quarrel) and *retaliation* (talking negatively about the enemy and embarrassing him or her) would be preferred more by Turkish and northern American participants than by Ghanaian participants (Hypothesis 1a and 1b). Moreover, we predicted that *avoidance* would be preferred more by Turkish participants than northern Americans (Hypothesis 2). Finally, we hypothesized that *yielding* would be preferred more by Ghanaians than by northern Americans and Turkish participants (Hypothesis 3).

To test our predictions, we conducted a total of five ANCOVAs in this section. To control for a potential inflation of Type I error, we applied the Bonferroni correction. We took the alpha of .01 as the cutoff value for significance. A 4 (response type) × 3 (culture) mixed-design ANCOVA revealed a significant Response Type × Culture interaction, \( F(6, 1212) = 12.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06. \) To examine this interaction more closely, we conducted separate univariate ANCOVAs for each response type, in which we entered culture as a between-subjects factor (Figure 1).

**Convincing.** Contrary to Hypothesis 1a, there was not a significant main effect of culture on the willingness to convince the enemy (\( M_{GH} = 4.03, SD = 2.84, M_{TR} = 4.21, SD = 2.52, M_{US} = 4.50, SD = 2.39 \)), \( F(2, 395) = .19, p = .83, ds < .18. \)

**Retaliation.** Culture had a significant main effect on the willingness to retaliate against enemies, \( F(2, 396) = 10.78, p < .001. \) In line with Hypothesis 1b, Turkish (\( M = 2.18, SD = 2.42 \)) and northern American participants (\( M = 2.95, SD = 2.00 \)) were somewhat more willing to retaliate against their enemies than Ghanaian participants (\( M = 1.59, SD = 2.15 \)), \( d_{TR-GH} = .26, 95\% CI \)
Avoidance. Culture had a marginally significant main effect on the willingness to avoid enemies, $F(2, 396) = 3.25, p = .04$. In line with Hypothesis 2, Turkish participants ($M = 4.24, SD = 2.58$) were somewhat more willing than northern Americans ($M = 3.42, SD = 2.32$) to avoid their enemies, $d = .33, 95\% CI [.14, 1.39], p = .02$. Ghanaian participants ($M = 4.23, SD = 3.06$) were also more willing to choose avoidance than northern Americans, $d = .30, 95\% CI [-.08, 1.61], p = .08$. Turkish and Ghanaian participants did not differ from each other, $d = .00, 95\% CI [-.81, .81], p = .99$.

Yielding. Culture had a significant main effect on the willingness to yield to enemies, $F(2, 397) = 23.52, p < .001$. In line with Hypothesis 3, Ghanaian participants ($M = 4.45, SD = 2.42$) were significantly more willing to yield than Turkish ($M = 2.54, SD = 1.95$) and northern American participants ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.85$), $d_{GH-TR} = .87, 95\% CI [1.46, 2.73], d_{GH-US} = .36, 95\% CI [.38, 1.71], p_s < .01$. Moreover, northern Americans were significantly more willing to yield than Turkish participants, $d = .59, 95\% CI [.56, 1.54], p < .001$.

Path model predicting enemy response types. We examined whether perception of having enemies and concern for own and others’ honor mediated the relations between CISC and the response types (Figure 2). We tested this model in Mplus Version 7, in which we entered CISC, perception of having enemies, and concern for one’s own honor and others’ honor as predictors of enemy response types. We allowed concern for one’s own honor and others’ honor, as well as the enemy response types, to correlate with each other (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics4 and Table 3 for correlations).

To test whether culture made a difference in the relations between predictors and enemy response types, we set all paths in the three cultures to be equal for the restricted model, $\chi^2(72) = 86.65, p = .11$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .97, and then allowed them to vary across cultures.
for the unrestricted model, $\chi^2(6) = 3.92$, $p = .69$, CFI = 1. Results showed that the chi-square difference between restricted and unrestricted model was marginally significant, $\Delta \chi^2(66) = 82.73$, $p < .10$. To examine which cultures were different from each other, we also conducted pairwise model comparisons. We conducted restricted and unrestricted models for each culture pair and tested whether chi-squares were significantly different from each other. Results showed that the model in Turkey did not significantly differ from the model in Ghana, $\Delta \chi^2(33) = 40.07$, or in the United States, $\Delta \chi^2(33) = 34.40$, $ps > .10$; however, the difference between Ghana and northern United States was marginally significant, $\Delta \chi^2(33) = 46.19$, $p < .10$. 

Figure 2. Models for Ghana, Turkey, and northern United States showing the relation of CISC, perception of having enemies, honor concerns, and enemy response types (Study 2). Note. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. The models shown differ because path coefficients that are smaller than .19 are not displayed. For the sake of simplicity, the correlations between enemy response types are not displayed. CISC = collective-interdependent self-construal. $^1p < .10$. $^*p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$. 

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Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Predictors and Standardized Predictor and Outcome Variable Estimates (STDYX) of Path Coefficients (Study 2).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Post hoc</td>
<td>Having enemies</td>
<td>Own honor</td>
<td>Others’ honor</td>
<td>Convince</td>
<td>Retaliate</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CISC</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>12.97***</td>
<td>1 = 3 &gt; 2</td>
<td>.08 (.12)</td>
<td>.20 (.12)</td>
<td>.34 (.11)**</td>
<td>-.17 (.13)</td>
<td>.02 (.13)</td>
<td>-.01 (.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having enemies</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>33.79***</td>
<td>1 &gt; 2 = 3</td>
<td>-.05 (.12)</td>
<td>-.05 (.12)</td>
<td>.10 (.12)</td>
<td>-.10 (.12)</td>
<td>.15 (.12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own honor</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>8.45****</td>
<td>1 &gt; 2 = 3</td>
<td>.31 (.11)**</td>
<td>-.16 (.12)</td>
<td>-.03 (.12)</td>
<td>.15 (.12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others’ honor</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1 = 2 = 3</td>
<td>-.01 (.13)</td>
<td>.01 (.13)</td>
<td>.17 (.13)</td>
<td>.30 (.12)*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Turkey (2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CISC</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>-.07 (.09)</td>
<td>.32 (.08)***</td>
<td>.47 (.07)***</td>
<td>.10 (.10)</td>
<td>.04 (.10)</td>
<td>.21 (.10)*</td>
<td>.25 (.10)*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Having enemies</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>-.05 (.09)</td>
<td>.23 (.08)**</td>
<td>-.19 (.08)*</td>
<td>-.15 (.09)+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Own honor</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.28 (.10)**</td>
<td>-.00 (.10)</td>
<td>.05 (.10)</td>
<td>.07 (.10)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Others’ honor</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>-.12 (.11)</td>
<td>-.17 (.11)</td>
<td>.01 (.11)</td>
<td>-.20 (.11)+</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Northern United States (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CISC</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>.07 (.07)</td>
<td>.15 (.07)*</td>
<td>.27 (.06)***</td>
<td>.14 (.07)*</td>
<td>.11 (.07)+</td>
<td>-.01 (.07)</td>
<td>.04 (.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having enemies</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>-.09 (.07)</td>
<td>.38 (.06)***</td>
<td>.11 (.07)+</td>
<td>-.12 (.07)+</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own honor</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.20 (.08)*</td>
<td>-.02 (.08)</td>
<td>.09 (.08)</td>
<td>-.03 (.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others’ honor</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>-.03 (.09)</td>
<td>-.14 (.08)+</td>
<td>-.08 (.09)</td>
<td>.07 (.09)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. “F” column tests for cross-cultural differences in the predictors of response types. The numbers in parentheses next to country names refer to the numbers used for illustrating significant cross-cultural differences in the “Post hoc” column. CISC = collective-interdependent self-construal. 

†p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
Table 3. Correlations of Enemy Response Types and Their Predictors (Study 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Northern United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Convince</td>
<td>Retaliate</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convince</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaliate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>−.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CISC</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own honor</td>
<td>−.14</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others’ honor</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>−.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having enemies</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>−.28**</td>
<td>−.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>0.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upbringing</td>
<td>−.11</td>
<td>−.11</td>
<td>.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>−.04</td>
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<td>.35***</td>
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<td>.04</td>
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<td>.20**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.56***</td>
<td>.56***</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td></td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CISC = collective-interdependent self-construal
\*p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.
To explore the relations between constructs more closely, we also focused on each culture separately. Results showed that the model in each culture fit the data well, $\chi^2_{GH} (2) = .95, p = .62$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .02, CFI = 1.0; $\chi^2_{TR} (2) = 2.62, p = .27$, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .02, CFI = 1.00; $\chi^2_{US} (2) = .35, p = .84$, RMSEA = 0, SRMR = 0, CFI = 1.0.

Relation of CISC to perception of having enemies and honor. We hypothesized that scores on the CISC Scale would positively predict the perception of having enemies and the relation would be stronger among Ghanaian compared with Turkish and northern American participants (Hypothesis 4a). We also expected that the strongest positive relation of CISC with concerns for one’s own honor and others’ honor would be observed among Turkish participants (Hypothesis 4b). Because of the sample size differences across cultures, we reported path coefficients that were .19 or greater instead of focusing on significance per se.

Contrary to Hypothesis 4a, CISC did not predict the perception of having enemies in any culture (see Table 2 for standardized path coefficients and Figure 2 for models in each culture). CISC did not significantly predict concerns for one’s own honor among Ghanaians or northern Americans; however, consistent with Hypothesis 4b, the relation was statistically significant among Turkish participants. The more Turkish people had constructed a CISC, the more likely they would be to consider the consequences of their actions for their own honor. Moreover, CISC positively predicted concerns for one’s significant others’ honor in all cultures; consistent with Hypothesis 4b, the strongest relation was among Turkish participants. This means that the more highly people endorsed the CISC, the more they considered the consequences of their actions for their significant others’ honor, especially in Turkey.

Predictors of enemy response types. We examined whether CISC, perception of having enemies, and honor concerns predicted the preference for response types. Results showed that CISC positively predicted the willingness to avoid the enemy and to yield in Turkey (Figure 2), but not in the other cultural groups. The more interdependent Turkish people are, the more likely they were to report they would avoid the enemy and stop or modify their behaviors that displease the enemy. CISC did not directly predict the willingness to convince or to retaliate in any cultural group.

Perception of having enemies positively predicted the willingness to retaliate among Turkish and American participants. Moreover in Turkey, it negatively predicted the willingness to avoid. In Turkey and in the northern United States, the more people perceived that they had enemies the more they were willing to use retaliatory methods such as embarrassing the enemy, and in Turkey, the less they avoided the enemy (Figure 2). Perception of having enemies did not predict any response type in Ghana, nor did it predict the willingness to convince or to yield in any culture.

Concern for one’s own honor positively predicted the willingness to convince the enemy in all cultural groups but it did not predict any other response type. Concern for significant others’ honor negatively predicted the willingness to yield in Turkey, but it positively predicted this response type in Ghana. The more Turkish people cared about their significant others’ honor, the less willing they would be to stop or to modify the behavior that displeased the enemy. For Ghanaian participants, in contrast, the higher the concern, the more likely they would yield. Concern for one’s own or others’ honor did not predict the willingness to retaliate or to avoid in any cultural group.

Mediation model. To test the mediation model and to estimate indirect effects, we used bootstrap sampling ($N_{boot} = 5,000$; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). In Turkey, there was a significant indirect effect of CISC on convincing through own honor, $B = .09, p < .05$, 95% CI [.08, .39], and a marginally significant indirect effect of CISC on yielding through others’ honor, $B = -.09$,
Discussion

As expected, retaliation was preferred least but yielding to the enemy was preferred most in Ghana compared with Turkey and the northern United States. This may suggest that in a social context where enemies are prominent, people may not be free to use potentially destructive conflict management methods but they are restricted to cooperative methods. In cultures like Ghana, the consequences of a potential conflict escalation may be more severe compared with other cultures where enemies are less prominent. Consistent with our predictions, we also found that yielding was preferred least in Turkey compared with the other cultural groups. This suggests that in honor cultures, yielding could mean accepting the insult, which may have negative implications for one’s own and one’s family’s reputation. In line with less interdependent contexts, avoidance was preferred least in the northern United States compared with the other cultural groups. In individualistic cultures like the United States, the emphasis is on the needs and goals of the individual and relationships are voluntary; therefore, indirect and prevention-focused methods, such as avoidance, may be endorsed less than in collectivistic cultures like Turkey or Ghana. In collectivistic cultures, interpersonal relationships are constraining, and maintaining social harmony is favored at the expense of individual needs and desires. Contrary to the results regarding verbal quarrel in Study 1, convincing the enemy was preferred equally across cultural groups in this study. This may be because convincing was perceived more positively and constructive than verbal quarrel; hence, it was highly preferred by all cultural groups.

In this study, we also explored whether CISC predicted the preference for enemy response types in the three cultural groups and whether perceptions of having enemies and concern for honor mediated this association. Although we anticipated a positive relation between Collective Interdependence (CISC) and perceptions of having enemies, we found no association in any of these cultural groups. The reason may be that enmyship is best construed as an interpretive, domain-general concept that enables us to understand cultural differences, but that is not readily translated into individual differences (see Kashima, 2009; Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul, 2009). Consistent with Hypothesis 4b, however, the relation between CISC and one’s own and others’ honor was stronger among Turkish participants than among participants from Ghana or northern United States. In fact, one of the consistent patterns across the three groups was that CISC significantly predicted concern for close others’ honor. The inclusion of one’s ingroups into one’s self-concept (as measured by the CISC) will lead to a concern for close others’ reputation and respectability. Another similarity across the three groups was that concern for one’s own honor predicted a preference to try to convince one’s enemy. This may suggest that convincing is perceived as an honorable response for individuals regardless of their cultural background.

There were multiple differences in the pattern of relations across cultures. Here, we highlight the most interesting of these patterns. First, in the Turkish and northern American samples, the more people perceived that they had enemies the more willing they would be to engage in retaliation such as talking negatively about the enemy or embarrassing him or her. This could be because having enemies is unusual in those cultures; hence, if people perceive that they have enemies, it may be necessary to take severe actions to deal with them. In line with this idea, the more Turkish participants perceived that they had enemies the less willing they would be to avoid them; avoidance may not be perceived as a sufficiently strong response to enemies. Among Ghanaian participants, in contrast, perception of having enemies did not predict retaliation. In that culture, retaliation may bring more severe conflicts and serious harm compared with cultures
where enmyship is not prominent. At the individual level, Ghanaian people who are more likely to perceive enemies in their lives may not consider competitive behaviors among response options due to this contextual constraint.

Curiously, the relation between concern for one’s significant others’ honor and the willingness to yield (i.e., stopping or modifying the behavior that displeases the enemy) differed across the three groups. The more Turkish people cared about their significant others’ honor, the less willing they would be to stop or modify the behavior that displeases the enemy. In Ghana, the relation was positive, and in the northern United States it was close to zero. In an honor culture like Turkey, yielding may be perceived as accepting an insult. In those cultures, accepting an insult and doing nothing to restore one’s honor can have more implications for one’s family’s reputation compared with non-honor cultures (e.g., Uskul et al., 2012). Somewhat surprisingly, none of the honor variables predicted the willingness to retaliate against the enemy among Turkish participants. If a person has enemies, it is likely that they would threaten the person’s honor, leading to a tendency to retaliate. One of the reasons for absence of this relation in the Turkish sample may be that these particular retaliation methods—talking negatively and embarrassing the enemy—were not perceived as sufficient to help a person maintain or restore his or her reputation. Another reason could be that some cultures and societies may have strong norms that enforce certain values, such as honor, that are not captured by personal attitude scales. Especially in societies where social norms are strong, as in the case of a tight culture like Turkey (Gelfand et al., 2011), individual difference variables may have little influence on behaviors.

**General Discussion**

In this work, we aimed to shed light on cultural differences and similarities in the way people respond to conflicts with friends, strangers, and enemies in their lives. The nature of interpersonal relationships; namely, how voluntary or embedded the person’s relationships are, may be one of the major determinants of people’s response preferences. In cultures where individuals experience contextual constraints in the form of obligatory relationships, for example, there may be a narrower range of responses to conflict from which to choose. In some of those cultures (e.g., Ghana), this embedded nature of relationships may make people vulnerable to inevitable disruptions in their relationships and may create beliefs in the existence of enemies in everyday life (Adams, 2005). In such cultures, concerns for not getting harmed may take priority when dealing with conflict. In honor cultures (e.g., Turkey), in which esteem is strongly dependent on other people’s opinions, reputation concerns may determine people’s responses to conflict. In individualistic cultures (e.g., northern United States), where people have a greater sense of freedom from social constraints compared with collectivistic cultures, one’s own interests may be prioritized in a conflict at the expense of social harmony.

In this research, we primarily found differences across cultures that were in line with the dominant cultural values and nature of relationships. Consistent with the individualism–collectivism framework, for instance, in both studies we found that Turkish participants (a collectivistic culture) were more likely to choose non-competitive response types such as avoiding the instigator, compared with northern American participants (an individualistic culture). Moreover, among Turkish participants, individual differences in CISC directly predicted non-competitive and collaborative responses, such as avoiding and yielding, after other predictors were controlled.

In line with the honor literature, in Turkey, concern for one’s significant others’ honor was negatively related to the response that might damage one’s reputation, namely, yielding; however, this was not the case for Ghanaian or American participants. These findings are in line with the idea that people from honor cultures such as Turkey are more likely to take action to restore their reputation if they are insulted or harmed by their enemies, rather than to stop or to do nothing.
Finally, our findings about the differences between Ghana and the other cultural groups were also consistent with the uniqueness of the cultures in West Africa where there are strongly embedded and obligatory interpersonal relationships and a high potential for enmyship. Compared with Turkey and the northern United States, Ghanaian participants chose competitive responses to instigators less (e.g., verbal quarrel and retaliation), but cooperative responses more (e.g., yielding). Having enemies may be considered unusual or extreme in Turkey and in the northern United States. When people perceive that they have enemies in those cultures, they may feel free to choose severe methods to deal with them. Consistent with this idea we found that the more Turkish and northern American participants perceived that they had enemies the more likely they would be to engage in retaliation, but this was not the case for Ghanaian participants.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the limitations of these studies is that we used single items to measure the likelihood of some response types (e.g., avoidance). Future studies should employ multiple items and include a greater variety of responses, such as finding a middle way (a collaborative response), seeking third party intervention, and consulting with an authority (indirect responses). A second limitation is that we used two conflict scenarios in the first study and one broad question about conflict in the second study (i.e., asking how people would respond to an enemy). A wider range of conflict situations may be included in future studies to be able to generalize the findings. A third limitation could be the smaller sample size in Ghana compared with other cultural groups. Despite the small sample size, however, there were meaningful cultural differences and relations between predictors and response types in Ghana. Finally, we only collected data in three cultures, each being an example of a cultural construct of interest. Therefore our results cannot be generalized to all individualistic, honor, or enmyship cultures, and more information is needed from other cultures that reflect these constructs.

Concluding Remarks

Personal relationships need to be examined by taking individuals’ cultural and historical background into account (Adams, 2005). Endorsing this approach, we focused on Ghana, Turkey, and the northern United States, and we investigated a cross-culturally underexamined aspect of interpersonal relationships, namely, how people respond to conflict and enemies. The individualism–collectivism dichotomy would lead people to believe that one would only find significant contrasts of Ghana and Turkey versus the northern United States. Our findings, however, revealed that different tensions within collectivistic settings led to different reactions between Ghana and Turkey as well. People in the northern United States can choose confrontational or competitive responses when faced with insult or enemy because they experience themselves as more abstracted from the social context and from threats compared with the other two cultural groups. Higher interdependence in Ghanaian and Turkish samples means that they are not similarly abstracted, but the situation impinges on them in different ways. For Ghanaian participants, the threat of enmyship leads them to behave in ways to prevent tangible, material harm through escalated conflicts. For Turkish participants, interpersonal challenge compels them to respond in ways to defend their honor, especially if the challenge comes from a person with whom there is not a positive relationship to preserve. In short, the independence of the northern United States participants affords a focus on personal goals, such as “winning the conflict,” through competitive responses. The interdependence of Ghanaian and Turkish participants, in contrast, affords attention to social constraints and compels a response to the prevention of disharmony, to interpersonal enmyship, or to reputation loss.
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Notes
1. We also included gender in our analyses but results were not easily interpretable. Results can be provided upon request.
2. Separate analyses for stopping and modifying revealed very similar results to the analyses conducted with the average of these two response options. Results can be provided upon request.
3. Due to the low corrected item-total correlation in Ghana (.06), one of the items was excluded from the analyses in all three cultures.
4. Mean comparisons for the individual difference variables revealed a few unexpected results, such as northern Americans scored higher on the Collective-Interdependent Self-Construal (CISC) Scale than Turkish participants. The reason for these findings may be the reference group effect (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002). When participants complete Likert-type scales, they tend to compare themselves with others in their own society rather than with a different cultural group; in other words, their reference group is people in their own society. When a Turkish participant responds to the CISC Scale, for example, he or she may think that compared with other people in the Turkish society, his or her interdependence is lower. This may reverse the expected cultural differences in psychological constructs. Examining the associations of those constructs with other variables within cultures provides more accurate and methodologically less biased results (Bond & van de Vijver, 2010).

References


