

Gender and Conflict Style

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll continue the discussion of cultural attitudes toward gender by focusing on the different conflict styles. The areas of focus include:

1. Review of the Five Conflict Styles
2. Gender and Conflict Styles
3. Using Different Styles in Conflict

1. Review of the Five Conflict Styles

As you may remember from an earlier lesson, there are five different conflict styles that measure how much an individual prioritizes their goals in a conflict and how much they prioritize their relationships in a conflict.

There are five different conflict styles:

- **Competing:** A party focuses more on meeting their own needs, even if this is at the other party's expense (sometimes known as forcing).
- **Avoiding:** A party makes no attempt at all to address or resolve the conflict.
- **Accommodating:** A party working to meet the other party's needs, even if that comes at their own expense (almost the opposite of competing).
- **Compromising:** A party agrees to sacrifice some of their needs in exchange for getting other needs met.
- **Collaborating:** Parties working together to try to reach a resolution that meets both of their needs (also known as problem solving).

We're all capable of using any of these styles, but we typically tend towards one that we feel a little more comfortable with.



TERMS TO KNOW

Competing

A conflict resolution style in which one party seeks to meet their own needs at the expense of another party's needs (sometimes also referred to as forcing).

Avoiding

A conflict resolution style in which a party does not make any attempt to address or resolve the conflict.

Accommodating

A conflict resolution style in which one party helps to meet another's needs at the expense of their own.

Compromising

A conflict resolution style in which parties agree to sacrifice some of their needs in exchange for having others met.

Collaborating

A conflict resolution style in which parties work jointly to try to meet all of each other's needs.

2. Gender and Conflict Styles

Many times, these conflict styles are perceived in terms of gender.

Just as there is the preferred conflict style, or a style that a person tends to use in a conflict, there is the concept of a **gender associated conflict style**, or a style that is considered "correct" for someone of a particular gender to use.

In the United States, the competing style is most strongly associated with men because behavioral traits that are traditionally considered masculine include being strong, decisive, assertive, tough, competitive, and direct. Since many people in our culture still prescribe those traits to men, competing is often seen as a more masculine conflict style.

Conversely, the avoiding, accommodating, and compromising styles are most strongly associated with female behavior. One of the traits traditionally associated with women is being nurturing or supportive, so the accommodating style is really associated with that feminine trait, as is the compromising and even avoiding style.

Finally, collaborating is considered gender neutral, as all genders are seen as capable of collaborating with one another.

A consideration for all of these conflict styles is that greater access to information and media has allowed many in the United States to understand these traits and styles can be displayed by any person regardless of gender.



TERM TO KNOW

Gender Associated Conflict Style

A conflict style considered to be "right, proper, or correct" by a given culture of members of different genders to use/adopt.

3. Using Different Styles in Conflict

Since there are strong associations between gender and particular conflict styles, the issue of a gender associated conflict style can come into play in a conflict situation.

In a conflict, one party might behave in a certain way or adopt a particular conflict style just to avoid being seen as gender inappropriate.

When a person wants to be seen more positively according to societal gender expectations, they might adopt a particular style, even if it's not helping get their needs met.

↪ **EXAMPLE** There may be a conflict situation in which a woman begins to act in an accommodating way simply because she doesn't want to be seen as demanding or uncooperative. This type of thing can happen completely unconsciously in the conflict resolution process.

When a party steps out of their perceived role, or what's considered appropriate for them in terms of gender, there can be cognitive dissonance.

↪ **EXAMPLE** There's a workplace dispute because the offices are moving, and there are limited resources while this move is taking place. A couple of teams are competing for resources, so a conflict arises over who will get which resources during this period of transition.

The main parties in this conflict are a man and a woman. Instead of being accommodating and meeting the needs of others, the woman stands up and is more assertive in claiming resources. She wants to get what she feels her team needs, even if it might be at the expense of another team and that team's project.

That behavior could cause some cognitive dissonance. People might think, "This isn't like her to behave this way." She may have been accommodating in the past but has chosen this moment to start being more assertive. There might even be some negative perceptions of this woman as a result but adopting this conflict style may allow her to get what she needs.

There is the possibility of that type of cognitive dissonance when someone begins behaving or adopting a conflict style that may be perceived as being at odds with their gender.



BIG IDEA

Culturally, there is a tendency to associate certain traits with men and women. Because gender and behavior have become so strongly associated, gender can come into play when adopting a conflict style in a conflict resolution process. Many times, this happens unconsciously.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you **reviewed the five conflict styles**: competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. You learned that because of certain traits that are traditionally prescribed to males and females, certain **conflict styles are often prescribed in terms of gender**, too. The competing style is perceived as more masculine, while the avoiding, accommodating, and compromising styles are perceived as more feminine. The collaborating style, however, is considered gender neutral. You now understand that when someone uses a **conflict style that is not perceived as appropriate for that person's gender**, this can lead to conflict, or cognitive dissonance, because the person is challenging the culturally ingrained views of what is appropriate for a particular gender. Because the association between gender and particular traits is so strong, it can often come into play in the conflict resolution process. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



Accommodating

A conflict resolution style in which one party helps to meet another's needs at the expense of his or her own.

Avoiding

A conflict resolution style in which a party does not make any attempt to address or resolve the conflict.

Collaborating

A conflict resolution style in which parties work jointly to try to meet all of each others needs.

Competing

A conflict resolution style in which one party seeks to meet his or her own needs at the expense of another party's needs (sometimes also referred to as forcing).

Compromising

A conflict resolution style in which parties agree to sacrifice some of their needs in exchange for having others met.

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