



Research article

GENDER-RELATED DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PREFERENCE TO CONFLICT HANDLING STYLES AMONG GREEK ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract: The article presents the results of a study aiming to investigate gender-related differences in emotional intelligence (EI) and preference to conflict handling styles among Greek adolescents. A total of 142 Greek adolescents with age ranges of 16 to 18 years (31 male and 40 female) voluntarily participated in the study. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test and Thomas-Kilmann conflict Mode questionnaire were used to investigate their Emotional Intelligence and conflict handling styles, respectively.

Gender-related differences in the level of EI, in the preference to conflict handling styles as well as in correlations between EI and its components and conflict handling styles were found.

Keywords: parenting styles, adolescence, emotional intelligence, conflict handling styles.

Emotional intelligence (EI) emerged as a major psychological construct in the early 1990s, as an ability based construct analogous to general intelligence. The term was introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) – the pioneers in the research of EI and defined it as “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer (1990: 189). Their postulate that subjects with high emotional intelligence possessed certain emotional abilities and skills related to appraising and regulating emotions in the self and others, nowadays are widely accepted. It was argued that subjects with high emotional intelligence could correctly perceive certain emotions in themselves and others and also regulate emotions in themselves and others in order to achieve different adaptive goals or emotional states (such as coping, motivation, or creative thinking). Therefore, Salovey and Mayer (1990) theorized that a unitary intelligence underlay those other skill sets, which they broke down into the following four “branches”:

- Identifying emotions on a nonverbal level;
- Using emotions to guide cognitive thinking;
- Understanding the information emotions convey and the actions emotions generate;
- Regulating one's own emotions, for personal benefit and for the common good.

Conflict handling style is a psychological construct closely related to the construct EI. A quite different and varying terminology is used to denote conflict handling styles (orientations, approaches, strategies, behaviors, and conflict-handling modes, and interpersonal conflict handling styles have been mostly cited under the title “conflict management” (Alakavuklar, 2007).

Usually, the preferences for certain conflict handling style/s that a person adheres to when becomes part of a conflict, are learned in childhood. “It can be viewed as (a) a characteristic of the person, much like a personality style; (b) types of conflict behavior or categories of behavior, and (c) communicative orientations that people adopt toward conflict.” (Alakavuklar, 2007: 322).

Thomas and Kilmann (1974) presented two analytically independent dimensions of behavior in conflict situations, namely, assertiveness (the attempt to satisfy one's own concerns) and cooperativeness

(the attempt to satisfy the concerns of others). On the basis of these two dimensions, five different conflict management styles were identified, namely:

- Competing behavior is both assertive and uncooperative. It is associated with forcing behavior and win-lose arguing.
- Collaborating behavior is assertive and cooperative. It has been identified with confronting disagreements and problem solving to find solutions.
- Compromising is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. It is identified with the proposal of a middle ground.
- Avoiding behavior is unassertive and uncooperative and is associated with withdrawal and failure to take a position in a conflict situation.

Accommodating behavior is unassertive and cooperative; it is seen as an attempt to soothe the other person and seek harmony (Kilmann & Thomas, 1974; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978).

These styles are seen as general strategies or behavior that people use when dealing with conflicts.

The relation between EI and styles of handling interpersonal conflicts has long been in the focus of the researchers' attention. However, previous studies' data on the relationships between these two variables, as well as the effects of the individual's gender on these relationships, are inconsistent. For example, Ivshin (2001), found no significant relationship between these two variables, while Malek (2000), Goleman (1998), and Jordon and Troth (2002) found a statistically significant relationship between EI and strategies of handling conflict. Also, Ivshin (2001) and Malek (2000) reported no significant effects of gender on the relationship between EI and conflict management.

Present study aimed to identify dimensions of EI of Greek adolescents and to reveal their preferred conflict management styles with focusing whether there are significant effects of the adolescents' gender on the level of EI and the conflict management style preference, as well as on their relationships.

Method

A total of 142 Greek adolescents with age ranges of 16 to 18 years (62 male and 80 female) voluntarily participated in the study. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test and Thomas-Kilmann conflict Mode questionnaire were used to investigate their Emotional Intelligence and conflict handling styles, respectively.

Results

Results from the Independent Samples T-test performed on the Mean scores (Mean, SD) on The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test and its four scales of the two gender groups – the group of boys and the group of girls, are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Independent Samples T-test' results on the Emotional Intelligence Test scores of the gender groups

	Boys			Girls			$t_{(140)}$; p
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	
Emotional Intelligence	62	121,66	11,47	80	126,90	12,08	$t = -2.618$; $p = .010$
Perception of emotions	62	37,80	4,16	80	38,88	4,49	$t = -1.468$; $p = .144$
Managing own emotion	62	31,79	5,22	80	34,52	4,72	$t = -3.267$; $p = .001$
Managing other's emotion	62	30,75	3,66	80	30,95	3,53	$t = -.316$; $p = .753$
Utilization of emotion	62	21,48	2,82	80	22,11	3,20	$t = -1.220$; $p = .224$

As seen, at the group level, the girls demonstrated significantly higher EI ($t = -2.618$; $p = .010$) as well as significantly higher skills for managing own emotion ($t = -3.267$; $p = .001$) in comparison to boys. With regards the rest three factors of EI: Perception of emotions ($t = -1.468$; $p = .144$), Managing other's emotion ($t = -.316$; $p = .753$), and Utilization of emotion ($t = -1.220$; $p = .224$) the between group differences are slight and statistically insignificant.

Comparison of the results regarding the distribution of the participants in the two gender groups according to the level of EI (low, normal or high) (see table 2) showed statistically insignificant gender-related differences ($\chi^2_{[2]} = 3.626$, $p = .163$, Cramer's $V = .160$). As seen, the majority of boys and the majority of girls exhibited normal level of Emotional Intelligence as the percentage of these participants is the same in both groups. However, it is impressive, that although insignificant, the frequency of low EI was higher in the group of boys, and the frequency of high EI was higher in the group of girls.

Table 2. Distribution of the participants in the gender groups according to the level of their Emotional Intelligence

	Level of Emotional Intelligence					
	Low		Normal		High	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Boys	8	12,9	46	74,2	8	12,9
Girls	4	5,0	60	75,0	16	20,0
Pearson Chi-Square, p, Cramer's V	$\chi^2_{[2]} = 3.626$, $p = .163$, Cramer's $V = .160$					

The results from the Independent Samples T-test performed on Mean scores (Mean, SD) on Thomas-Kilmann conflict Mode questionnaire of the two gender groups are presented in the next table 3.

As seen, statistically significant gender-related differences in the frequency of use of each of the five conflict handling styles, were found only regarding the Competing style ($t = 2.343$; $p = .021$), with more frequent use by the male group than by the female group. No significant between-group differences were found in the frequency of use of the rest four conflict handling styles: Collaborating style ($t = -1.428$; $p = .156$), Compromising style ($t = -1.096$; $p = .275$), Avoiding style ($t = -.211$; $p = .833$), and Accommodating style ($t = -.013$; $p = .990$).

Table 3. Independent Samples T-test' results on The Thomas-Kilmann conflict Mode questionnaire scores of the gender groups

Styles	Boys			Girls			$t_{(140)}; p$
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Competing	6 2	6,6 4	2,2 8	8 0	62	6,6 4	$t = 2.343; p = .021$
Collaborating	6 2	6,8 3	2,5 8	8 0	62	6,8 3	$t = -1.428; p = .156$
Compromising	6 2	5,6 4	1,8 2	8 0	62	5,6 4	$t = -1.096; p = .275$
Avoiding	6 2	4,8 0	2,2 3	8 0	62	4,8 0	$t = -.211; p = .833$
Accommodating	6 2	6,0 9	1,5 6	8 0	62	6,0 9	$t = -.013; p = .990$

In addition, comparison of the ranking order of the conflict handling styles in terms of their preferred use revealed that at the group level, the most preferred conflict handling style for both gender groups is the Collaborating style, and the least preferred conflict handling style is the Avoiding style. Therefore, no gender-related differences regarding the most preferred and the least preferred conflict handling style were found. The results of the correlation analyses of the male adolescents' group are presented in table 4. As seen there was a moderate positive linear relationship between EI and Competing style and Collaborating style, and a moderate negative linear relationship between EI and Avoiding style and Accommodating style, which means that the higher EI in male adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Competing and Collaborating conflict handling styles and less frequent use of Avoiding and Accommodating conflict handling styles.

Table 4. Correlations between EI and its components and conflict handling styles for the male adolescents' group

	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)				
	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating
Emotional Intelligence	.353** (.005)	.535** (.000)	-.060 (.643)	-.577** (.000)	-.495** (.000)
Perception of emotions	.272* (.032)	.494** (.000)	-.239 (.062)	-.453** (.000)	-.282* (.027)
Managing own emotion	.326** (.010)	.277* (.030)	.009 (.943)	-.408** (.001)	-.365** (.004)
Managing other's emotion	.178 (.167)	.378** (.002)	.095 (.463)	-.314* (.013)	-.547** (.000)
Utilization of emotion	.164 (.202)	.410** (.001)	-.052 (.688)	-.415** (.001)	-.222 (.083)

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Regarding the components of EI, the results showed a moderate positive linear relationship between Perception of emotions and Collaborating style, a weak positive linear relationship between Perception of emotions and Competing style, a moderate negative linear relationship between Perception of emotions and Avoiding style, and a weak negative linear relationship between Perception of emotions and Accommodating style, which means that the higher Perception of emotions in male adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Collaborating and Competing conflict handling styles and less frequent use of Avoiding and Accommodating conflict handling styles.

A moderate positive linear relationship between Managing own emotion and Competing style, a weak positive linear relationship between Managing own emotion and Collaborating style, a moderate negative linear relationship between Perception of emotions and Avoiding style and a weak negative linear relationship between Managing own emotion and Accommodating style, were found. That means that the higher Managing own emotion in male adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Competing and Collaborating conflict handling styles and less frequent use of both Avoiding and Accommodating conflict handling styles.

A moderate positive linear relationship between Managing other's emotion and Collaborating style, a moderate negative linear relationship between Managing other's emotions and Accommodating style, and a weak negative linear relationship between Managing other's emotion and Avoiding style, were found. That indicates that the higher Managing other's emotion in male adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Collaborating conflict handling style and less frequent use of both Avoiding and especially Accommodating conflict handling styles.

Pattern of the results showed a moderate positive linear relationship between Utilization of emotion and Collaborating style, and a moderate negative linear relationship between Utilization of emotion and Avoiding style, which means that the higher Utilization of emotion in male adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Collaborating conflict handling style and less frequent use of Avoiding conflict handling style.

The results of the correlation analyses of the female adolescents' group are presented in table 5. As seen, there is a moderate positive linear relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Collaborating style, and a moderate negative linear relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Avoiding style, which means that the higher emotional intelligence in female adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Collaborating conflict handling style and less frequent use of Avoiding conflict handling style.

Regarding the components of Emotional Intelligence, the results of female group showed a moderate positive linear relationship between Perception of emotions and Collaborating style and a weak negative linear relationship between Perception of emotions and Avoiding style, which means that the higher Perception of emotions in female adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Collaborating conflict handling style and less frequent use of Avoiding conflict handling style.

Table 5. Correlations between EI and its components and conflict handling styles for the female adolescents' group

	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)				
	Competing	Collaboratin g	Compromisin g	Avoiding	Accommod a- ting
Emotional Intelligence	.012 (.916)	.348** (.002)	.092 (.415)	-.366** (.001)	-.200 (.076)
Perception of emotions	-.117 (.302)	.397** (.000)	.018 (.874)	-.284* (.011)	-.062 (.582)
Managing own emotion	.122 (.283)	.232* (.039)	.144 (.203)	-.301** (.007)	-.327** (.003)
Managing other's emotion	-.003 (.978)	.298** (.007)	.059 (.600)	-.287** (.010)	-.547** (.000)

Utilization of emotion	.125 (.268)	.091 (.421)	.004 (.973)	-.279* (.012)	-.201 (.074)
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The results showed a moderate negative linear relationship between Managing own emotion and Avoiding and Accommodating styles, and a weak positive linear relationship between Managing own emotion and Collaborating style, which means that the higher Managing own emotion in female adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Collaborating conflict handling style and less frequent use of both Avoiding and Accommodating conflict handling styles.

Pattern of the results showed a weak positive linear relationship between Managing other's emotion and Collaborating style, a moderate negative linear relationship between Managing other's emotion and Accommodating style, and a weak negative linear relationship between Managing other's emotion and Avoiding style, which means that the higher Managing other's emotion in female adolescents is associated with more frequent use of Collaborating conflict handling style and less frequent use of both Avoiding and especially Accommodating conflict handling styles.

Regarding the component "Utilization of emotion", there was a weak negative linear relationship between Utilization of emotion and Avoiding style, which means that the higher Utilization of emotion in female adolescents is associated with less frequent use of Avoiding conflict handling style

Discussion

Present study's results revealed that at the group level girls demonstrated significantly higher EI and better abilities for managing own emotion in comparison to boys. These results agree with the results reported by Katyal and Awasthi (2005) as well as with Brenner and Salovey' findings (1997) that the use of emotion-regulation strategies increased with age and differed by gender, girls are better to regulate negative emotions than boys.

No gender-related differences were found in the ranking order of the conflict handling styles in terms of their preferred use: for both gender groups the most preferred conflict handling style was the collaborating style and the least preferred conflict handling style was the avoiding style. The group of boys, however, significantly more frequently used competing style in comparison to the group of girls.

Gender-related differences in correlations between EI and its components and conflict handling styles were found. The results showed that girls with higher EI and better skills of perception of emotions, managing own emotion, and managing other's emotion more often use collaborating conflict handling style and less often use avoiding style. Furthermore, especially girls with better skills of managing own emotion and managing other's emotion less often use accommodating conflict handling style, and girls with better skills of utilization of emotion less often use avoiding conflict handling style. Regarding the male group the results showed that the boys with higher levels of EI and its two components perception of emotions and managing own emotion more often use collaborating and competing conflict handling styles and less often use avoiding and accommodating styles. In addition, boys with better skills of managing other's emotion more often use collaborating conflict handling style and less often use avoiding and accommodating styles, and boys with better skills of utilization of emotion more often use collaborating conflict handling style and less frequent use avoiding conflict handling style.

Therefore, comparisons of the results of the two gender groups revealed both similarities and differences between Greek boys and girls in the patterns of correlations between emotional intelligence and its components and conflict handling styles. in both boys and girls, higher levels of emotional intelligence and its components perception of emotions, managing own emotion, and managing other's emotion are related to more frequent use of collaborating conflict handling style and less frequent use of avoiding conflict handling style. Also, in both boys and girls, better abilities of managing own emotion and managing other's emotion are related to less frequent use of accommodating conflict handling style, and better abilities of utilization of emotion are related to less frequent use of avoiding conflict handling style. regarding gender-related differences, only in boys (but not in girls), higher levels of emotional intelligence and its components perception of emotions and managing own emotion are related to more frequent use of competing conflict handling style. Only in boys, higher levels of emotional intelligence

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and better abilities of perception of emotions are associated with less frequent use of accommodating conflict handling style. Only in boys better abilities of utilization of emotion are related to more frequent use of collaborating conflict handling style.

In conclusion, we may summarize that our results support the suggestion that gender has moderating effects on the relations between EI and conflict handling styles among Greek adolescents – findings that may be applied in the development of intervention programs for development of emotional intelligence and conflict management among adolescents.

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