

Personality and Gender Differences in Preference for Conflict Resolution Styles

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The study investigated the predictive relationships of personality and gender with five conflict resolution styles. It involved 282 participants (151 males and 131 females) randomly sampled from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, aged 18-38 years, with a mean age of 22.68 years. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey, and the results of hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between openness and negotiation, mediation, and arbitration; conscientiousness and negotiation; as well as agreeableness and negotiation. There was a significant negative relationship between agreeableness and threat; as well as neuroticism and negotiation. In addition, males and females differed significantly in their preference for negotiation, mediation and arbitration, with males showing higher preference for the styles in intergroup conflict situation. It was concluded that negotiation would be more effective in conflict resolution when the parties are open, conscientious and agreeable than when they are highly neurotic.

Conflict is a ubiquitous phenomenon. Thus, it is part and parcel of the social nature of humankind. It is a form of intense interpersonal and/or intrapersonal dissonance between two or more interdependent parties based on incompatible goals, needs, desires, values, beliefs and/or attitudes (Ting-Toomey, 1985). It is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility and disagreement within or between social entities (Rahim & Magner, 1995). It connotes disagreement or a clash of divergent ideas and interests where parties involved perceive a threat to their needs and concerns. It is perceived differently by various schools of thought. Thus, it is either considered as being negative and destructive or positive and productive.

However, in order to counteract the negative or positive effects of conflict, appropriate conflict resolution styles have to be implemented (Tidd & Friedman, 2002) and one's perception of conflict (positive or negative) determines how conflicts are handled (Rahim, 1986). One of the challenges facing social scientists in the 21st century is being able to handle conflicts both in the intra and interpersonal domains (Onyeizugbo, 2008). Thus, conflict

resolution is a process and involves a wide range of methods employed to address sources of conflict.

Over the years, approaches to conflict have ranged from power-bargaining techniques, normative and legal approaches, to psychological attempts to change attitudes of participants in simulation groups, problem-solving, conflict management to conflict resolution and peace building. Conflict resolution is a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems (Miller, 2003). The evolving movement toward conflict resolution grew out of the belief that there are better options than using violence or going to court, and describes informal methods used by disputants to resolve disputes (Acland, 1990). It includes such non-formal legal arrangements such as negotiation, arbitration, mediation, conflict avoidance and threats (Emerson, 1962; Blau, 1964; LaTour, 1978; Acland, 1990; Gire & Carment, 1993b; Ojiji, 1998).

It has been asserted that conflicting parties in natural settings typically have a range of strategic options which they must evaluate and select from (Lawler & Bacharach,

1976). Research has linked interpersonal conflict behaviour to underlying motivations – variously identified as preferences, concerns, priorities, orientations, and values which is concerned with interaction-specific objectives and general social motives (Mussweiler, English & Strack, 2004). According to motivational orientations (Messick & McClintock, 1968) people vary in their attitudes about their own and their conflict partners' outcomes, and this has been linked to behaviours in social dilemmas (McClintock & Liebrand, 1988; Van Lange, 1999), conflict and negotiation (De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995; De Dreu, Weingart & Kwon, 2000; Olekalns & Smith, 2003). Also, other interpersonal motives have been linked to conflict behaviour, such as agreeableness (Barry & Friedman, 1998; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell & Hair, 1996) and need to belong (De Cremer & Leonardelli, 2003).

The strategies commonly employed to overcome conflict usually encompass the categories of overt anger, compromise, avoidance, social support, obliging and distraction (Maccoby, 1988; 1990; Bird & Harris, 1990; Feldman & Gowen, 1998; Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Thus, conflict resolution includes peaceful negotiation, mediation, arbitration, diplomacy, collaboration, compromise, community conferencing, negotiated rulemaking, reconciliation and the “peace process” (peacemaking, peace keeping, peace enforcement and peace building). Other strategies include self-enhancement, threatening to leave the relationship, coalition formation and conflict avoidance (Emerson, 1962; Blau, 1964; Ojiji, 1998).

This study is concerned with five approaches to conflict resolution – threat to the other party, accepting the situation, negotiating with the other party, seeking the assistance of a third party, and seeking the assistance of an arbitrator (Heuer & Penrod, 1986; Sternberg & Dobson, 1987; Gire & Carment, 1993a; Ojiji, 1998). Threat to the other party – This is when one of the parties in conflict notifies the other party of an intention to publicize the other party's action, and thus, damage the other party's image and reputation. Acceptance of the

situation – This implies that one of the parties complies with the demands of the other party which enables one to avoid the risk or effort associated with confrontational strategies. Negotiation – This implies that the parties seek compromise in order to reach a solution acceptable to both parties. Mediation – This is when the parties seek the assistance of a third party to assist them in negotiation and they try to reach a settlement by following the mediator's guidance. Arbitration – This is when parties seek the assistance of an arbitrator (someone who has the power and authority to settle disputes decisively) so that both parties will explain their viewpoints and the final decision made by the arbitrator must be followed by involved parties. This approach is adopted because, studies indicate that management/superior officers or labour unions/subordinate officers were proposed to often use confrontation, withdrawal, forcing, smoothing and compromise whenever conflict occur in organizations (Eze & Uzuegbunam, 2010) and not in interpersonal or intergroup relationships.

Literature indicates that method preference is related to perceived fairness of the procedure (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), the type of conflict (Gire & Carment, 1993a), culture (Ting-Toomey, 1985; Rahim, 1983; 1992), gender of disputant (Tehrune, 1970; Gire & Carment, 1993a; 1993b), position in job, experience, age and personality (Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001; Ahmed, Nawaz, Shaukat & Usman, 2010). Personality characteristics, interpersonal needs, individual behaviour (Lotriet, Crafford & Visser, 2001), organizational status (Brewer, Mitchell & Weber, 2002), emotions (Brodtker & Jameson, 2001), power, rewards, beliefs and basic values (Weider-Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995, Slabbert, 2002) influence the choice of conflict styles.

Personality traits are one of the most important determinants of conflict resolution styles (Ahmed, Nawaz, Shaukat & Usman, 2010) and personality is the particular combination of emotional, attitudinal and behavioural response patterns of an individual, with different personality theorists defining personality

based on their theoretical positions (Angler, 2009). It refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and acting which indicate one's uniqueness (Pipe & Joyce, 2001; Lahey, 2004). It is a unique set of traits and characteristics relatively stable over time (Charles-Reynolds & Gatz, 2001). It can be viewed from two perspectives (Campbell & Converse, 2001; Wong, Cheuk & Rosen, 2000). Objectively, it is studied as an observable characteristic of individual behaviour composed of interpersonal relationships, and subjectively, as an existence of reality outside the realm of observation. Thus, all humans are characterized by personality traits and each individual is uniquely endowed with different ways of expressing behaviour regardless of any common genetic and biological composition (Zibrowitz, Collis & Dutta, 1998).

In this study, the Big Five Personality Model which is the most widely studied and discussed model by researchers would be the personality dimension employed (Tupes & Cristal, 1961; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1993; Russell & Karol, 1994). It consists of five traits – Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Robbins, Judge & Sanghi, 2008; John, 1990). Openness – characterizes someone in terms of imagination, sensitivity and curiosity. It exemplifies the breadth, depth and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life. Openness to experience is associated with tolerance of ambiguity, and describes the degree to which a person has a broad range of interests and is imaginative, creative and willing to consider new ideas (Daft, 2005). Open individuals are intellectually curious, often seek out new experiences through travels, arts, reading and other activities, while individuals low in this dimension tend to have narrower interest and stick to the tried-and-true ways of doing things. The open person is insightful, thought-oriented, explorative, appreciates the deeper things in life, often intelligent, artistic, inventive, sophisticated and foresighted (Hogen, Johnson & Briggs, 1997). On the other

hand, conscientiousness – characterizes someone in terms of impulse control, task orientation, goal directedness, responsibility, dependability, persistence, organization, and a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement. It implies how much one considers others in making decisions. It describes being industrious, organized, thorough, responsible, good in planning and a tendency to get ahead in things. The less conscientious tend to be easily distracted and impulsive (Langford, 2003).

In addition, extraversion describes someone who is sociable, gregarious, energetic, and assertive as opposed to someone who is shy and reserved. It is characterized by a keen interest in other people and external events. External individuals are happy, friendly, expressive, cooperative, sociable and affectionate (Ewen, 1998; Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1998; Suls, Green & Hillis, 1998). They engage in frequent social interaction and make social gatherings lively, with the cardinal features of social attention and ability to impact on their social environment (Larsen & Buss, 2010). Furthermore, agreeableness – describes someone who is good-natured, understanding, forgiving, cooperative and trusting rather than suspicious and antagonistic toward others. It measures how compatible one is with other people and one who is low in this trait is cold, distant, insensitive, and has fewer friends (Goldberg, 1993). Finally, neuroticism (emotional instability) is the tendency to experience negative emotional states and feelings, such as anger, anxiety, sadness, irritability, insecurity, guilt, depressed mood and nervous tension (Hetteema, Neal & Myers, 2006) as opposed to someone who is calm, self-confident, and secure (positive). Annalakshmi (2007) found that those who score high on neuroticism respond poorly to environmental stress and are more likely to be biased in interpreting situations.

Moberg (2001) found that the big five factor model of personality has direct impact on the preferences and selection of conflict handling styles. He pointed out that people with different personalities deal with

conflicts in different ways. Hui-Ju (2008) indicated that the inclination and difference of personality and psychology influence the pattern of one's preference for conflict resolution style. Antonioni (1998) found positive correlation of extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness with integrating (collaborating) style of conflict handling. Also, Park and Antonioni (2007) found significant relationship between personality traits (extraversion and agreeableness) and conflict resolution styles. Individuals with high scores on agreeableness favour using negotiation to resolve conflicts, while low agreeable persons try to assert their power to resolve social conflicts (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001; Graziano & Tobin, 2002). Agreeable persons like harmonious social interaction and are more likely to withdraw from social conflict and avoiding situations that are unharmonious (Larsen & Buss, 2010). Thus, individual differences are manifested in conflict techniques and applications.

Gender seems to be a factor in preference for conflict resolution styles. Gender has been an issue of controversy and a global one. Africans, for instance, recognize that differences exist between the man and the woman. Brenner, Tomkiewics and Schein (1989) suggested the possibility that the sexes differ in their ability to resolve conflict. Likewise, Brewer, Mitchell and Weber (2002) focused on differences between the sexes in dealing with conflict. Gire and Carment (1993a) found type of conflict and gender to influence methods of resolving conflict, and Ojiji (1998) reported that males were higher in preference for threats, while females were higher in preference for negotiation. Williams and Best (1990) demonstrated that there were widespread beliefs that men are more adventurous, aggressive, daring, autocratic, forceful, dominant, enterprising, stern, robust, independent and strong, and that women are more sensitive, dreamy, sentimental, affectionate, submissive and superstitious.

On the other hand, some studies suggest that females have a more cooperative attitude to conflict resolution than males

(Rahim, 1983), while Beddell and Sistrunk (1973) suggested that females were more competitive. In addition, Sutschek (2001) found that females did not use the integrating and obliging conflict resolution styles more often than males when confronted with the same conflict scenario, while, Antonioni (1998) reported non-significance of gender in the variance of conflict-resolution style after controlling for personality differences. Shockley-Zabalack and Morley (1984) assessed male-female preferences for conflict style, and the results showed significant differences between males and females for competitive and compromising conflict styles. Furthermore, Duane (1989) compared the extent to which 63 men and 7 women used five methods of conflict management in resolving 1st-step grievances of employees, and found that women were less inclined to avoid grievance-related issues, tended to be more competitive, and were less likely to accommodate their opponents' demands compared with men.

Moreover, Sorenson and Hawkins (1995) found more similarities than differences in preferred conflict resolution styles for managers of both sexes when dealing with the same conflict situation. However, the gender-role perspective which conceptualizes masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions posits that the competitive or dominating behaviour appears to be consistent with the male-role, while, obliging and avoiding behaviour is more consistent with females (Portello & Long, 1994; Brewer, Mitchell & Weber, 2002).

As the extant literature indicates, studies on personality and gender differences in preference for conflict resolution styles focused on the management methodologies developed by Thomas and Kilman (1974). This conflict mode instrument comprises five conflict management styles based on two dimensions of assertiveness and cooperativeness – avoiding, competing, accommodating, compromising and collaborating; while some studies that adopted non-managerial conflict resolution methodologies did not explore personality differences (Ojiji, 1998). In addition, most

of these studies have western undertone. Thus, this study proposes to explore other conflict resolution strategies outside management methodologies which seem to be mostly applicable to industrial/organizational settings, thereby, contributing information about factors involved in the choice of different methods of conflict resolution in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, the following hypotheses were postulated and tested:

- Personality (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism) will not significantly predict preference for threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation and arbitration as conflict resolution styles.
- Males and females will not significantly differ in their preference for threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation and arbitration as conflict resolution styles.

Method

Participants

The study involved 282 (151 males and 131 females) undergraduate participants randomly selected from the Department of Economics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, using probability sampling technique. They were mostly Christians (99.6%), Single (93%) and from the Igbo ethnic group (82%). Their ages ranged between 18-38 years, with a mean age of 22.68 years.

Instruments

Two instruments were used for data collection, viz- the Big Five personality Index (BFI, John, 1990) and the Conflict Scenarios and Rating Scale of Preference for Methods of Conflict Resolution (Ojiji, 1998). The BFI is a 44-item inventory that assesses personality from a five-dimensional perspective – openness (10 items), conscientiousness (9 items), extraversion (8 items), agreeableness (9 items) and neuroticism (8 items), developed by John (1990) and validated for use with Nigerian samples by Umeh (2004). The BFI requires participants to describe themselves

using a code (1 = disagree strongly; 2 = disagree a little; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree a little; 5 = agree strongly) depending on the extent to which the statement is a true description of oneself. In terms of scoring, sixteen items (2, 6, 8, 9, 12, 18, 21, 23, 24, 27, 31, 34, 35, 37, 41, and 43) were negatively worded and reverse-scored, and the subscales were scored separately. A sum of the direct and reverse-scored items gives the participant's overall score.

John, Donahue and Kentle (1991) provided a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .85, while Umeh (2004) reported a mean convergent validity coefficients of .75 and .85 with the Big Five instruments by Costa and McCrae (1992) and Goldberg (1992) respectively. The divergent validity coefficients obtained by Umeh (2004) with University Maladjustment Scale (Kleinmuntz, 1961) are; openness .24; conscientiousness .11; extraversion .05; agreeableness .13; and neuroticism .39. Separate norms have been reported for male and female Nigerian samples for the subscales as follows; openness (M = 38.05, F = 35.18), conscientiousness (M = 29.10, F = 29.60), extraversion (M = 28.45, F = 27.10), agreeableness (M = 29.75, F = 28.73), neuroticism (M = 23.43, F = 24.48). The Nigerian norms were the basis for interpreting the scores of the participants, and scores higher than the norms indicate that the participant manifests the specific personality traits.

The Conflict Scenarios and Rating Scale of Preference for Methods of Conflict Resolution developed by Ojiji (1998) consists of descriptions of two separate conflict scenarios in which participants assumed principal roles in the conflict described. Each scenario is followed by a full description of five possible methods of resolving the conflict and participants were required to rate the methods on a 7-point scale for preference of usage to resolve the conflict ranging from 7 (most preferable) to 1 (least preferable). The measure is coded in terms of original ratings assigned to methods of resolving conflict.

Ojji (1998) reported an inter-correlation of the ratings for the two types of conflicts done over two periods after a two-week interval to be as shown below:

Table 1: Inter-correlations of the preferences for methods of resolving two types of conflicts over two test situations

Methods of conflict resolution	Interpersonal conflict	Intergroup conflict
Threats	.88**	.84**
Accept the situation	.75*	.81**
Negotiation	.90**	.68*
Mediation	.86**	.74*
Arbitration	.76*	.83**

Key: * significant at $P \leq .05$; ** significant at $P \leq .01$.

This indicated a significant and positive relationship between the preference ratings of the methods over the two periods in both conflict situations, which serves as evidence of reliability of the rating scales.

Procedure

Three hundred (300) copies of each of the questionnaires were distributed to participants in their classrooms, and the researcher collected them immediately after completion. Two hundred and eighty-two

copies (282) were appropriately filled and consequently used for the data analysis.

Design/Statistic

The study was a cross-sectional design and a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was performed on the data using SPSS 17 statistical package. Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses of the study.

Results

TABLE 2: Means and Standard Deviations for the Five Conflict Resolution Styles in both Interpersonal and Intergroup Conflict Situations.

	Interpersonal		Intergroup	
	Mean	SD	MEAN	SD
Threat to the other	17.38	6.66	17.67	6.88
Accept the situation	20.00	5.51	18.84	5.32
Negotiation	24.57	6.12	24.98	6.00
Mediation	26.05	5.75	25.76	5.94
Arbitration	26.92	7.28	27.36	7.64

The table of means show that use of arbitration had the highest mean both in interpersonal ($M = 26.92$; $SD = 7.28$) and intergroup ($M = 27.36$; $SD = 7.64$) conflict

situations, while threat had the least mean usage both in interpersonal ($M = 17.38$; $SD = 6.66$) and intergroup ($M = 17.67$; $SD = 6.88$) conflict situations.

TABLE 3: Means and Standard Deviations of Gender for Negotiation, Mediation and Arbitration in Intergroup Conflict Situation

	Negotiation		Mediation		Arbitration	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Male	25.75	5.78	26.42	5.38	28.34	7.39
Females	24.09	6.15	25.00	6.47	26.23	7.79

Table 3 shows that males and females had the highest mean preference score in arbitration ($M = 28.34$, $SD = 7.39$; $M = 26.23$, $SD = 7.79$, respectively), followed by mediation ($M = 26.42$, $SD = 5.38$; $M =$

25.00, $SD = 6.47$, respectively), and then negotiation ($M = 25.75$, $SD = 5.78$; $M = 24.09$; $SD = 6.15$, respectively).

Table 4: Summary of Regression Coefficients for Personality and Gender in Preference for the Five Conflict Resolution Styles in Interpersonal Conflict Situation

	Treat to the other party			Acceptance			Negotiation			Mediation			Arbitration		
	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t
Gender Ω	.82	.06	1.03	-.16	-.02	-.25	-1.15	-.09	-1.57	-.59	-.05	.40	-1.57	-.12	-1.82
Personality Δ															
Openness	-.10	-.08	-1.29	.05	.05	.80	.14	.12	2.09**	.19	.18	.09***	.18	.13	2.26**
Conscientiousness	-.06	-.06	-.94	.01	.01	.09	.15	.15	2.48**	.09	.10	1.64	-.00	-.00	-.02
Extraversion	-.06	-.04	.50	-.04	-.03	-.50	.15	.11	.06	.10	.08	1.36	-.03	-.02	-.33
Agreeableness	-.03	-.03	-.41	.03	.03	.44	.19	.16	2.69**	.05	.05	.79	.09	.07	.27
Neuroticism	.05	.05	.78	.05	.05	.86	-.07	-.07	-1.15	.01	.01	.14	.03	.02	.39

Key:*** = p < .001; ** = p < .01.

Ω: F-change for threat= 1.06, R² Change = .00; Acceptance = .06; R² Change = .00; Negotiation = 2.47, R² Change = .01; Mediation = .72, R² change = .00; Arbitration = 3.31, R² change = .01
 Δ: F-change for threat = .38, R² change = .01; Acceptance = .42, R² change = .01; Negotiation = 2.02, R² change = .04; Mediation = 2.31, R² change = .04; Arbitration = 1.04, R² change = .04

Table 5: Summary of Regression Coefficients for Personality and Gender in Preference for the Five Conflict Resolution Styles in Intergroup Conflict Situation.

	Treat to the other party			Acceptance			Negotiation			Mediation			Arbitration		
	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t
Gender Ω	1.04	.08	1.26	-.46	-.04	.47	-1.66	-.14	-2.33	-1.42	-.12	-2.01*	-2.12	-.14	-2.33**
Personality Δ															
Openness	-.09	-.07	-1.17	.01	.01	.03	.16	.15	2.49**	-.02	-.02	.79	-.07	-.04	-.65
Conscientiousness	-.13	-.11	-1.84	.04	.05	.79	.14	.14	2.27**	.05	.04	.71	.14	.09	1.56
Extraversion	.05	.04	.59	.02	.02	.27	.03	.03	.43	.06	.06	1.01	.08	.06	.10
Agreeableness	-.16	-.12	-2.02**	-.02	-.02	-.28	.20	.17	2.95***	-.07	-.07	-1.15	.01	.01	.13
Neuroticism	.09	.07	1.18	.07	.08	1.40	-.13	-.13	-2.26**	.11	.10	1.62	.07	.05	.79

Key:*** = p < .001; ** = p < .01.

Ω: F-change for threat= 1.60, R² Change = .01; Acceptance = .53; R² Change = .00; Negotiation = 5.43, R² Change = .02; Mediation = 4.03, R² change = .01; Arbitration = 5.43, R² change = .02
 Δ: F-change for threat = 1.09, R² change = .02; Acceptance = 1.12, R² change = .02; Negotiation = 1.95, R² change = .03; Mediation = .56, R² change = .01; Arbitration = .85, R² change = .02

The results of multiple regression analysis shown on **Table 4** indicate that in interpersonal conflict situation, Openness to experience positively predicted preference for negotiation β = .12, t = 2.09, p = .04, mediation β = .18, t = 3.09, p = .00, and arbitration β = .13, t = 2.26, p = .03; while Conscientiousness and Agreeableness positively predicted preference for negotiation β = .15, t = 2.48, p = .01; β = .16, t = 2.69, p = .01, respectively.

On the other hand, the results shown on **Table 5** indicate that in intergroup conflict situation, Agreeableness negatively predicted preference for threat β = .12, t = -2.02, p = .04 and positively predicted preference for negotiation β = .17, t = 2.95, p = .00. In addition, Openness, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness positively predicted preference for negotiation β = .15, t = 2.49, p = .01; β = .14, t = 2.27, p = .02; β = .17, t = 2.95, p = .00, respectively, while Neuroticism negatively predicted preference for negotiation β = -.13, t = -2.26, p = .02.

Furthermore, **Table 5** also shows that there were significant gender differences in preference for negotiation β = -.14, t = -2.33, p = .02, mediation β = -.12, t = -2.01, p = .05 and arbitration β = -.11, t = -2.33, p = .02 with males showing higher preference for the styles in intergroup conflict situation.

Discussion

The hypothesis that openness will not significantly predict preference for threat and acceptance was confirmed. However, openness positively predicted preference for negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Thus, as openness to experience increased, one's preference for negotiation, mediation and arbitration increased. This finding could be explained by the assertion that an open individual has a broad range of interests, and is also willing to consider new ideas (Daft, 2005), while individuals low in this dimension tend to have narrower interest and stick to the tried-and-true ways of doing things. The open person is

insightful, thought-oriented, explorative, and appreciates the deeper things in life (Hogen, Johnson & Briggs, 1997). Thus, the more explorative and challenging it is, the more interesting it becomes.

On the other hand, the hypothesis that conscientiousness would not significantly predict preference for threat, acceptance, mediation and arbitration was confirmed. However, conscientiousness positively predicted preference for negotiation. Thus, as conscientiousness increased, one's preference for negotiation increased. This could be explained by the notion that conscientious individuals are characterized by high impulse control and are very considerate in making decisions, while the less conscientious tend to be easily distracted and impulsive (Langford, 2003).

Furthermore, the hypothesis that extraversion would not significantly predict preference for threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation and arbitration was confirmed. This finding is inconsistent with Antonioni (1998), Park and Antonioni (2007) who found positive correlation of extraversion, with integrating (collaborating) style of conflict handling.

In addition, the hypothesis that agreeableness would not significantly predict preference for acceptance, mediation and arbitration was confirmed. However, agreeableness negatively predicted preference for threat in intergroup conflict context, and positively predicted preference for negotiation in both interpersonal and intergroup conflict situations. Thus, as agreeableness decreased, preference for threat increased, while as it increased, preference for negotiation increased. This finding could be explained by the assertion that agreeable individuals are good-natured, understanding, forgiving, cooperative and trusting rather than suspicious, antagonistic, cold, distant, and insensitive (Goldberg, 1993). This finding is consistent with the findings of Jensen-Campbell and Graziano (2001), Graziano and Tobin (2002), who found that individuals with high scores on agreeableness favour using negotiation to resolve conflicts, while low

agreeable persons try to assert their power to resolve social conflicts. Thus, agreeable persons like harmonious social interaction and are more likely to withdraw from social conflict and avoiding situations that are unharmonious (Larsen & Buss, 2010).

Also, the hypothesis that neuroticism would not significantly predict preference for threat, acceptance, mediation and arbitration was confirmed. However, neuroticism negatively predicted preference for negotiation. Thus, as neuroticism increased, preference for negotiation decreased. This finding could be as a result of the assertion that neurotic individuals are susceptible to experiencing negative emotional states and feelings, such as anger, anxiety, sadness, irritability, insecurity, guilt, depressed mood and nervous tension (Hetteema, Neal & Myers, 2006) as opposed to someone who is calm, self-confident, and secure (positive). Thus, one might not be emotionally stable to reach a consensus as well as compromise. This finding is consistent with the findings of Annalakshmi (2007) who found that those who score high on neuroticism respond poorly to environmental stress and are more likely to be biased in interpreting situations.

Furthermore, the hypothesis that males and females would not differ significantly in their preference for threat and acceptance was confirmed. However, males and females significantly differed in their preference for negotiation, mediation and arbitration in intergroup conflict situation, with males showing higher preference for the styles. This finding is consistent with the findings of Sutschek (2001) who found that females did not use the integrating and obliging conflict resolution styles more often than males when confronted with the same conflict scenario. However, this finding is in line with the findings of Duane (1989) who found that women were less inclined to avoid grievance-related issues, tended to be more competitive, and were less likely to accommodate their opponents' demands compared with men.

Therefore, these findings imply that in conflict situations, openness to experience which is characterized by a broad range of interests, and willingness to consider new ideas encourages negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Thus, there is a need to take into consideration the level of openness between conflicting parties prior to conflict resolution. On the other hand, conflicting parties that are less agreeable are the less likely to negotiate, and more likely to adopt the use of threat in resolving conflicts. This is because, agreeable individuals are understanding, forgiving and cooperative, and as a result more predisposed to negotiate, and less predisposed to use threats. Thus, level of agreeableness should not be overlooked in resolving conflict between and among parties.

In addition, the highly conscientious are more likely to prefer the adoption of negotiation in conflict resolution. They tend to have greater impulse control and are more considerate of others in making decisions, while the highly neurotic (emotionally unstable), who are susceptible to experiencing negative emotional states and feelings are less likely to negotiate. Thus, negotiators, mediators, arbitrators, and all human rights activists need to take into consideration the level of openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability of the parties involved prior to delving into the conflict resolution process.

However, a limitation of the present study is with the generalisability of the findings, which may be limited to university undergraduates. In addition, only the students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka were involved in the study, and no comparison was made between these students and students in other higher institutions at other locations within Nigeria. Another limitation is in the attribution of relationship to the variables studied. There are other variables such as self-esteem, religion, culture, self-efficacy, exposure and other demographic variables that may bring about differences in preference for conflict resolution styles.

These factors could be confounding variables to the study.

Following the limitations highlighted above, it is recommended that in subsequent research, it will be necessary to carry out further studies on the moderating effects of the individual variables used in this study as well as other demographic, social and personality variables. Summarily, individuals and groups involved in conflict typically have a range of strategic options which they must evaluate and select from. The strategies employed to overcome interpersonal and intergroup conflicts commonly encompass the categories of threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration. The present study focused on personality and gender differences, which seem to influence preference for conflict resolution styles. The findings showed that openness positively predicted preference for negotiation, mediation and arbitration, while conscientiousness and agreeableness positively predicted negotiation. Also, agreeableness negatively predicted the use of threat and neuroticism negatively predicted negotiation. Furthermore, males and females significantly differed in their preference for negotiation, mediation and arbitration, with males showing higher preference for the styles. Therefore, it could be concluded that highly conscientious, open and agreeable individuals are more likely to engage in negotiation. Also, in as much as most people show the least preference for the use of threat, they would adopt the use of threat when they are emotionally unstable.

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