

# Competition and Interpersonal Conflict in Same-Sex Platonic Friendships

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the connection between competition and distributive and integrative conflict messages in same-sex platonic friendships. The study is a partial replication of Messman and Mikesell's (2000) examination of competition and interpersonal conflict in dating relationships. The competitive behaviors of same-sex friends examined here are compared with those of dating couples as explored by Messman and Mikesell. Findings of the current research indicate that increased competition between same-sex friends is linked to a rise in distributive conflict tactics as well as to a reduction in integrative messages, which is consistent with Messman and Mikesell's results. The current study also investigates the similarities and differences between men and women in their approach to competition while interacting with their same-sex platonic friends. In this study, significant differences between men's and women's competitive behaviors were found. This result contrasts with the findings of Messman and Mikesell, who concluded that no distinctions were apparent between males and females in romantic relationships in regard to their competitive interactions.

## INTRODUCTION

Competition is one of the intrinsic characteristics of mainstream culture in the United States (Aronson, 1999; Tjosvold, Johnson, Johnson, & Sun, 2003). The American society was founded on an ideal of each individual being self-reliant and struggling to meet his or her desires and needs while attempting to outperform others. Highly individualistic Americans tend to constantly compete against their own weaknesses and the strengths of others in order to develop their full potential, prove their superiority, differentiate themselves, and acquire high status (Hirschman, 2003). Doing well in American culture frequently corresponds to beating someone else (Aronson, 1999). This society of winners and losers avails itself of a language that mirrors these values. In a culture where one "wins a promotion, beats the other sales clerks, outsmarts a teacher, becomes a superstar, defeats enemies, and is the best student," a day without competition is rather unlikely (Tjosvold et al., 2003, p. 63). It permeates all aspects of America including the economy, education, leisure, and the workplace. Thus, it is unavoidable in interpersonal relationships (Kohn, 1986).

In order to test the supposition that individuals in U.S. society compete while interacting with one another, empirical study of competition in interpersonal relationships is indispensable. The present study explores the connection between competition and conflict interaction in same-sex platonic friendships and examines the similarities and differences between men and women in their approach to competition as it relates to their friendships. This study is a partial replication of the research conducted by Messman and Mikesell (2000), who investigate the nature of competition among men and women in dating relationships and the link between competition and conflict strategies.

In the following section, the connection between competition and conflict, as well as varying stances on competition in interpersonal relationships, will be reviewed. Next, the findings concerning men's and women's competitive behavior and conflict interaction strategies will be presented. Finally, the nature of the interpersonal relationships investigated in the study will be scrutinized. Research on men's and women's same-sex friendships will be explored in order to illustrate an array of views on the characteristics of these relationships.

## COMPETITION, CONFLICT MESSAGES AND SEX DIFFERENCES

### Competition and Conflict

Numerous researchers consider competition to be one of conflict management strategies or styles, and contrast it with cooperation (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988; Cupach & Canary, 2000; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977;

Sillars, 1980). According to Kilmann and Thomas, a competing style is utilized by individuals who desire to defeat the other party in an attempt to meet their own concerns while ignoring the needs of others. Sillars argues that competitive or distributive conflict strategies decrease the likelihood of successful conflict resolution because they generate competitive attributions about the partner. He characterizes distributive strategies as those that refer to attempts at conflict resolution that involve concession seeking, individualistic goal orientation, and a negative evaluation of the other. Integrative strategies, on the other hand, promote the exchange of information, open conversation about conflict, and positive or neutral perception of the interactants.

The researchers' perceptions of competition as well as its impact on interpersonal relationships vary. For some, it is inextricably interwoven with distributive conflict behaviors and relational ruin (Deutsch, 1973; Kohn, 1986). For others, competition does not appear to be inherently destructive. In fact, it can benefit individuals because of its positive effect on self-esteem (Meeker, 1990). It can serve as a healthy catalyst for relationships, and is not restricted to distributive conflict tactics (Cheng & Chan, 1999; Hartup, 1992; Rawlins, 2001; Tjosvold et al., 2003).

The present study investigates the relationship between the areas of competition revealed by the research conducted by Messman and Mikesell (2000) and integrative and distributive conflict strategies in same-sex platonic friendships. Specifically, the research question posed is:

RQ 1: How are areas of competition associated with integrative and distributive conflict behaviors in same-sex platonic friendships?

#### Women, Men and Competitive Behaviors

The relationship between gender and competition has been explored by a plethora of researchers (Alagna, 1982; Benenson, Roy, & Waite, 2002; Campbell, 1999; Campbell, 2004; Meara & Day, 1993; Meeker, 1990; Robinson & Lipman-Blumen, 2003; Staley & Cohen, 1988). Their findings as to who tends to be more competitive in their interpersonal interactions, however, are inconclusive. Several authors argue that males are likely to behave more competitively than females (Alagna, 1982; Kohn, 1986; Platow & Shave, 1995; Staley & Cohen, 1988) while others claim the opposite (Meara & Day, 1993; Spitzberg, 1997). Yet, a number of studies demonstrate that there are no sex differences in the desire to compete (Benenson et al., 2002; Campbell, 1999; Campbell, 2004; Meeker, 1990) and that individual's behavior cannot be predicted on the basis of their biological sex (Cupach & Canary, 1995).

For some scholars, the concept of competitiveness is the feature that separates femininity from masculinity (Bem, 1974; Richmond & Martin, 1998). The stereotypical assumption that men tend to be more competitive, aggressive and forceful is confirmed by Staley and Cohen's (1988) study. Alagna (1982) suggests that women do tend to compete less than men. She explains her findings in terms of women's greater sensitivity to being evaluated by their peers, who may perceive their competitive behaviors to be at variance with stereotypical sex role norms. They may strive for more positive interactions, avoid tension and strain, which they feel may endanger their relationships (Voss, Markiewicz, & Doyle, 1999; Wright, 1982).

Competition is by no means restricted to one sex. Although in the American culture, men are typically perceived as more assertive or masculine than women, whose communicative style is described as responsive or feminine, both sexes can display both characteristics, depending upon situational, relational, cultural and individual aspects (Bem, 1974; Cupach & Canary, 1995; Meeker, 1990; Richmond & Martin, 1998; Winstead, Derlega, & Rose, 1997). Men's and women's willingness to compete in specific situations can also be contingent upon the sex of the partner with whom they are interacting (Meara & Day, 1993). Since both sexes are subject to the same social and cultural influences that value competition, they are likely to equally engage in competitive behaviors (Meara & Day, 1993; Robinson & Lipman-Blumen, 2003). As the foregoing review of the literature indicates, however, the relationship between competition and gender still remains ambiguous. Messman and Mikesell (2000) explore competitiveness between heterosexual dating partners, whereas the present study examines sex differences and competitive behaviors in another type of interpersonal relationship, namely same-sex platonic friendships and poses the following question:

RQ 2: Do men and women differ in the frequency of their reports of areas of competition in same-sex platonic friendships?

#### Same-Sex Platonic Friendships

Friendships may vary in intensity, but in essence, they are all voluntary, preferential and gratifying relationships in which individuals are committed to each other (Hartup, 1992; Laursen, 1996; Wright, 1982; Wright, 1985). Trust, reciprocity and equity are inherent features of friendships (Rawlins, 2001; Winstead et al., 1997; Wright, 1982; Wright, 1985). All close friendships, regardless of the sex of individuals involved, entail the sharing of activities and interests, intimacy, emotional support, and self-disclosure (Wright, 1985). They are not divorced from tension and stress, however, since they may involve competing for rewards (Winstead et al., 1997; Wright, 1982; Wright, 1985).

Several researchers assert that women's same-sex platonic friendships differ notably from men's as to the type of the interaction, although the importance of the relationship is comparable for both sexes (Roy, Benenson, & Lilly, 2000). These differences have been associated with distinct socialization patterns (Winstead et al., 1997). Generally, men's friendships involve joint activities, especially physical and competitive sports, while the core of women's friendships consists of mutual disclosure and sharing, greater intimacy and closeness (Parker & de Vries, 1993; Rawlins, 2001; Roy et al.; Wright, 1982).

Wright (1998) challenges the stereotypical dichotomy of the nature of friendships for the two sexes. He contends that the characteristics of women's friendships and men's friendships are more fundamentally similar than different. Wright posits that the fact that men's friendships are considered less communal than women's friendships might be due to the distinct manner in which men express intimacy. Women create closeness through conversations and self-disclosure; however, talking is not the only way to show intimacy (Black, 2000; Rawlins, 2001). In fact, engaging in shared activities is an equally valid expression (Winstead et al., 1997; Wright, 1998). Although women are somewhat more inclined to treat their friendships more holistically than men, the differences between the two types of relationships are not fundamental (Wright, 1982; Wright, 1998). Moreover, the frequently cited distinct nature of men's and women's friendships becomes even less conspicuous with the increased closeness and longer involvement in the relationship (Wright, 1982).

Women report less conflict with their same-sex platonic friends than do men (Voss et al., 1999; Black, 2000). This could either be due to the different definitions of conflict that the two sexes might hold, or to the fact that women experience less conflict in their close same-sex relationships than men, perhaps because of the greater closeness and intimacy of their relationships (Voss et al., 1999). Direct competition with same-sex friends is likely to create more discomfort in females than in males (Benenson et al., 2002; Cheng & Chan, 1999). Female competition might be perceived more negatively by their same-sex peers, which could possibly disturb the relational equilibrium (Alagna, 1982; Benenson et al., 2002). Campbell (1999, 2004) asserts that females are less likely to compete directly with other females because competition is less beneficial to them biologically. This does not mean, however, that they do not compete at all with one another; instead, they are more inclined to select the forms of competition that are less conducive to physical injury.

Friendships and romantic relationships share several characteristics. They both entail affection, loyalty, substantial relational investment, trust and commitment (Rawlins, 2001). Hartup (1992) and Laursen (1996) posit that friendships, as compared with romantic relationships, involve less closeness between partners. Thus, conflict is less likely to lead to relational improvement among friends, since they are less concerned about the termination of the relationship. The question remains whether the conflict interaction behaviors and approach to competition are the same or different in same-sex platonic friendships as in dating relationships. Hence, this study attempts to compare the link between competition and integrative and distributive conflict strategies in same-sex platonic friendships with those in dating relationships as reported by Messman and Mikesell (2000). Thus, the third research question posed here is:

RQ 3: How do same-sex friendships and heterosexual dating couples differ in their conflict strategies and in the relationships between areas of competition?

## METHODS

### Procedures

As in the original research conducted by Messman and Mikesell (2000), the data for the current study have been collected from students at a large Midwestern university. The students were contacted during a lecture and

briefed on the nature of the research. They were informed that participation was voluntary, that they would receive extra credit for taking part in the study, and that their identities would remain confidential. Those who agreed completed the questionnaire within 15-20 minutes. The students were asked to respond to questionnaire items with a particular same-sex platonic friend in mind. They were requested to write the initials of this friend in order to ensure that they were thinking of a particular person as they were answering all the questions.

### **Participants**

A total of 204 students participated in the study. All the questionnaires were suitable for analysis. Although in the original study by Messman and Mikesell (2000) the sample consisted of 449 students, the number of participants asked for input in the present research was considered sufficient for the analyses performed here.

In the current study, 132 participants were female (64.7%) and 72 were male (35.3%). Seventeen students were African American (8.3%), three were Asian American (1.5%), and 107 were European Americans (52.5%). There was one Hispanic American (0.5%) and one Native American student (0.5%). The remaining 75 students (36.8%) reported their ethnicity/race as other. More than half of the participants (55.4%) were between 18 and 20 years old. Almost forty-one percent of the students (40.7%) were between the ages of 21 and 25; 1.5% were between 25 and 30 years of age, and 2% were over 30. Students' class standing was as follows: 3.9% were freshmen, 31.9% were sophomores, 38.2% were juniors, and 25% were seniors. There was one graduate student (0.5%), and one participant (0.5%) reported his or her class standing as other.

One hundred and twenty-two students (61.3%) responded to the questionnaire with their best friend in mind, 57 students (28.6%) thought about a close friend while answering the questions, 19 students (9.5%) identified their relationship as good friends, and one (0.5%) referred to his or her same-sex platonic friend as a casual friend. Five students did not respond to the "type of friend" item. The length of friendships reported varied, with 55.4% reporting involvement of longer than 5 years, 12.7% having been friends for 3-5 years, 26.5% reporting friendships lasting between 1 and 3 years, and 5.4% answering the questions in reference to a friend whom they have known for less than one year.

### **Instrumentation**

Consistent with Messman and Mikesell's (2000) methods, the questionnaire utilized for the present study was comprised of two parts. Competition was defined on the first page of the questionnaire as "attempting to out-do or keep up with your friend." The first part of the survey included 21 questions that asked the participants to assess the frequency of competing with their same-sex platonic friend using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always). The 21 questionnaire items employed in the study were the same as those used by Messman and Mikesell. Three of the original questions were modified to improve their clarity. Specifically, the question: "Do you compete over physical appearance?" was changed to "Do you and your friend compete over who is more physically attractive?"; "Who has more relational skills?" was changed to "Who has better relational skills?", and "Who gets better offers?" was modified to "Who makes more money?" The questions fell into one of the seven categories of competition identified by Messman and Mikesell: (1) Achievement, (2) Social Skills, (3) Altruism, (4) Social Attractiveness, (5) Controversy, (6) Affection, and (7) Play. The items were ordered randomly; however, care has been taken to place the more difficult questions between easier ones.

The second part of the questionnaire was preceded by the following definition of interpersonal conflict: "a significant struggle over incompatible goals between you and this particular same-sex friend." The participants were reminded to keep the same relationship in mind and to think of a particular conflict with this person while responding to a set of 14 questions. They reported how much they agreed or disagreed that they used each of the 14 tactics (integrative or distributive) in a particular conflict with their same-sex platonic friend utilizing 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Disagree/Nor Agree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree).

## **RESULTS**

Research Question 1 referred to the association between the seven areas of competition identified by Messman and Mikesell (2000) and the two conflict strategies: integrative and distributive. In order to examine the relationship between competition and conflict strategies in same-sex platonic friendships, Pearson Correlations were computed. All the correlations between the seven categories of competition and the two conflict strategies are included in Table 1.

Distributive messages were positively and significantly correlated with all seven areas of competition, indicating that an increase in all these forms of competition is related to a rise in distributive conflict tactics ( $p \leq .01$ ). The range of variance accounted for was from 20% to 40%, with Play accounting for 20%, Social Skills 22%, Affection 25%, Controversy 32%, Altruism and Achievement 37%, and Social Attractiveness 40%.

Integrative messages were negatively correlated with all five categories of competition: Achievement, Altruism, Social Attractiveness, Controversy and Play, meaning that greater competition in these areas is linked to a reduction in integrative conflict tactics. The negative correlations between three areas of competition – Play, Achievement and Social Attractiveness – and integrative messages were significant, accounting for 20%, 23% and 28% of variance respectively. However, Altruism and Controversy, which accounted for 11% of variance, were negatively correlated with integrative messages but not at a significant level. There was no correlation between Social Skills and Affection and integrative messages.

TABLE 1

*Correlations between Categories of Competition and Conflict Strategies in Same-Sex Platonic Friendships*

	Integrative	Distributive
Achievement	-.23*	.37*
Social Skills	.00	.22*
Altruism	-.11	.37*
Social Attractiveness	-.28*	.40*
Controversy	-.11	.32*
Affection	.00	.25*
Play	-.20*	.20*

\*  $p \leq .01$

Research Question 2 inquired whether the reports of the frequency in the seven areas of competition differ for men and women engaged in same-sex platonic friendships. Independent t-tests were computed to investigate the similarities and differences between the sexes on all of the categories. The results are reflected in Table 2.

Men reported to compete more than women in four areas: Achievement, Social Attractiveness, Controversy, and Play, and the difference between the sexes was significant in all of them ( $p \leq .01$ ). Women reported to be more competitive than men in two areas: Affection and Social Skills. There was no reported difference between males and females in one category of competition: Altruism.

As far as conflict messages utilized among same-sex friends, women stated that they used more integrative tactics ( $M = 3.96, SD = .72$ ) than men did ( $M = 3.66, SD = .74$ ), and this difference was significant ( $t = -2.72, df = 202, p = .00$ ). There was no significant sex difference, however, in the usage of distributive tactics, with the mean for men being 2.64 ( $SD = .85$ ), and for women: 2.49 ( $SD = .86; t = 1.21, df = 202, p = .22$ ).

TABLE 2

*Means and Standard Deviations by Sex for Competition Categories and Conflict Strategies*

	Men's Means (Standard Deviations)	Women's Means (Standard Deviations)	t	df	p	Mean Difference
Achievement	2.33 (.76)	1.89 (.70)	4.20	202	.00*	.44
Social Attractiveness	2.36 (.91)	1.97 (.86)	2.95	202	.00*	.38
Controversy	2.27 (1.02)	1.93 (.84)	2.47	202	.01*	.33
Play	3.30 (.98)	2.07 (.88)	9.10	202	.00*	1.22
Affection	1.97 (1.04)	2.45 (1.14)	-2.92	200	.00*	-.47
Social Skills	1.77 (.77)	2.04 (.98)	-2.01	202	.04	-.27
Altruism	1.84 (.76)	1.95 (.82)	-.95	202	.34	-.11
Integrative	3.66 (.74)	3.96 (.72)	-2.72	202	.00*	-.29
Distributive	2.64 (.85)	2.49 (.86)	1.21	202	.22	.15

\*  $p < .01$

Research Question 3 asked whether the relationships between the categories of competition and the two conflict strategies are the same or different in same-sex platonic friendships as in heterosexual dating couples. The aforementioned results of this study were compared with Messman and Mikesell's (2000) findings. These comparisons are included in Table 3.

For both types of relationship, distributive messages were positively and significantly correlated with all categories of competition. For same-sex platonic friendships, the variance ranged from 20% to 40%, whereas for dating heterosexual partners, it was from 14% to 51%. These findings suggest that, for both same-sex friendships and romantic relationships, an increase in distributive conflict behavior is marked by a rise in competitiveness.

There were some differences between the two kinds of interpersonal relationships in the correlations of the integrative conflict tactics and the competition categories. For both same-sex friendships and romantic couples, the correlations were negative and significant in the areas of Social Attractiveness (accounting for 28% of variance for friends, and 17% for couples) and Achievement (23% of variance for friends, and 18% for romantic partners). For Controversy and Altruism categories, the negative correlations were at a significant level for couples (with 24% and 23% of variance, respectively) but not for friends (11% of variance for both areas of competition). As far as the Social Skills category is concerned, there was a negative, although not significant, correlation with integrative tactics for dating partners (9% of variance); however, for friendships, this area of competition was not correlated with cooperative messages at all. Finally, there was no correlation between the Play category and integrative tactics for romantic relationships. This contrasts with the findings pertaining to same-sex friends, for whom the increase in competing in the area of Play is linked to a decrease in integrative messages, accounting for 20% of variance.

TABLE 3

*Correlations between Categories of Competition and Conflict Strategies in Same-Sex Platonic Friendships Compared with Dating Relationships*

	Distributive		Integrative	
	Same-Sex Friendships	Dating Relationships	Same-Sex Friendships	Dating Relationships
Achievement	.37*	.31*	-.23*	-.18*
Social Skills	.22*	.37*	.00	-.09
Altruism	.37*	.37*	-.11	-.23*
Social Attractiveness	.40*	.36*	-.28*	-.17*
Controversy	.32*	.51*	-.11	-.24*
Affection	.25*	-	.00	-
Play	.20*	.14*	-.20*	.04

\*  $p \leq .01$ .

*Note.* Messman and Mikesell (2000) did not include statistical data for the Affection category.

## DISCUSSION

### Competition and Conflict Interaction Strategies

The study investigates the link between competition and distributive and integrative conflict messages in same-sex platonic friendships. The categories of competition under scrutiny cover a wide range of behaviors. The respondents assessed the frequency of competing with their same-sex friend over issues such as who is more financially successful, more skillful, talented and knowledgeable. They also reported how often they compete with each other at sports, games and activities as well as during arguments over significant issues. Competing over physical appearance and the attractiveness of social lives were two other aspects rated by the participants.

The results of the current study indicate that individuals' increased competitiveness in same-sex platonic friendships is related to a greater use of distributive messages and a reduction of integrative tactics. These findings are in line with the aforementioned conflict literature that asserts that competition and interpersonal conflict are intertwined (Cupach & Canary, 2000; Deutsch, 1973; Kohn, 1986; Sillars, 1980).

These results are also consistent with those of Messman and Mikesell (2000), who found that in the case of dating partners, competing in all the areas explored is linked to distributive conflict tactics. Dating couples appear

to compete more frequently in the areas of Controversy and Social Skills, while same-sex friends seem to be more competitive when it comes to Play, Social Attractiveness and Achievement. The Controversy arena, which includes debating, arguing and competing over values, and is most likely to resemble conflict (Messman & Mikesell, 2000), revealed the greatest usage of distributive conflict strategies in dating relationships. This was not the case for same-sex friendships, where Social Attractiveness (having more interesting experiences and night life) indicated the highest occurrence of competitive messages. This finding is reflective of the distinct nature of the two relationships and the fact that higher intimacy of romantic couples is likely to lead to more intense emotions and greater conflict (Rawlins, 2001; Voss et al., 1999).

Some differences between the two types of relationships emerged in relation to the link between categories of competition and integrative messages. Namely, for dating partners, competition in the area of Play did not imply a decrease in cooperative messages. This contrasts with same-sex platonic friendships, where competing at sports, games and being funny led to a significant decline of integrative tactics. This is not surprising if one takes into consideration the character of the two relationships and the fact that the time that friends spend together is oftentimes filled with joint activities, such as competitive games and sports (Rawlins, 2001; Voss et al, 1999).

Furthermore, for dating couples, competing in the category of Social Skills decreased the frequency of integrative messages for dating relationships but not for friends. It appears that impressing the other with one's relational and communicative skills is more salient to romantic partners than to friends. Finally, competition about who does more for the other and who is more giving (Altruism) as well as arguing over important values (Controversy) led to a greater reduction in cooperative conflict behavior in romantic couples than in friends. This mirrors the greater closeness and relational investment within dating relationships as compared to friendships (Voss et al, 1999).

This comparison of same-sex platonic friendships and dating couples does not reveal consequential differences in their competing behaviors or conflict management tactics employed. These findings are not reflective of Emmers-Sommer's (1999), Laursen's (1996), and Wright's (1998) supposition that the nonobligatory nature of friendships and the lack of explicit norms and roles regulating these relationships make them more prone to resort to competitive conflict tactics. Emmers-Sommer as well as Laursen suggest that the higher investment in the relationship and the greater intimacy of romantically involved partners motivate them to utilize a more integrative approach to conflict, which is more conducive to relationship sustenance.

### **Sex Differences in Competition**

The present study also explored the similarities and differences between men and women in their approach to competition and conflict interaction in same-sex platonic friendships. Significant sex differences were found in six out of seven categories of competition examined, with males competing more than females.

Men reported to compete more often than women over issues such as making more money, being more skillful, knowledgeable, successful, receiving more recognition, and performing better at activities (Achievement). They also competed more frequently in being more appealing to the opposite sex than their friend, having more interesting experiences and going to better parties (Social Attractiveness). Arguing and debating over important issues and values (Controversy), as well as competing in sports, games and being funny (Play) were other areas of competition where men rated higher than women. This supports the results of Holmes-Lonergan (2003) and suggests that males indeed get involved in joint activities such as sports and games more often than females and that these pastimes are conducive to their behaving in a dominant and competitive manner. The findings of the present study, which are also in line with Rawlins' (2001) results, imply that men might more frequently engage in debates with their male friends, make social comparisons such as who is the higher achiever, and be more concerned with status than women.

Women, on the other hand, reported to compete much more frequently than men over each other's attention (Affection) and issues such as who is a better communicator and who has more relational skills (Social Skills). The inclination of the female same-sex friends to compete over each other's attention and time might be reflective of their perceiving any interference from others as endangering their relationship (Emmers-Sommer, 1999).

The areas of competition that were relevant to women in the current study corroborate the assertion that females pay more attention to communicative skills and relational maintenance (Rawlins, 2001; Voss, et al, 1999). One of the reasons why they generally compete less than men might be due to the fact that competitive behavior may

be frowned upon by their female friends as being at variance with traditional sex roles (Alagna, 1982). It is also possible that women do not feel comfortable competing with their female friends for fear that it will disturb the relational equilibrium (Benenson et al., 2002; Cheng & Chan, 1999).

In addition, women reported the use of more integrative conflict management tactics than men did, which is consistent with Wright's (1982) assertion that women's proclivity to treat their friendships more holistically may lead to a greater regard for the relationship quality and the concern for its maintenance. There were no significant differences between men and women in the use of distributive tactics, indicating that competitive conflict behavior is not restricted to one sex (Meeker, 1990; Richmond & Martin, 1998).

These findings corroborate previously conducted research that asserts the stereotypical dichotomy of competing and conflict resolution behaviors between the sexes (Alagna, 1982; Platow & Shave, 1995; Staley & Cohen, 1988). Both the number and the types of categories of competition where men and women differed are indicative of the traditional distinction that the aforementioned authors found relevant.

Interestingly, in Messman and Mikesell's (2000) study, there are no differences between men and women engaged in a romantic relationship regarding the frequency of competition and the utilization of integrative and distributive strategies. Their findings substantiate the literature reporting that women are equally competitive and use as many distributive tactics as men (Meeker, 1990; Richmond & Martin, 1998). Messman and Mikesell also discover that women used more conflict management tactics, both integrative and distributive, which supports the argument that they tend to serve as relational experts. They might also be more sensitive to tension and strain that is likely to affect the relationship negatively and are therefore more inclined to make an effort to directly deal with the conflicts that emerge (Wright, 1982).

Although the present study contributes to the understanding of the different nature of two interpersonal relationships: same-sex platonic friendships and dating couples in regard to competitive behavior and conflict messages, caution must be taken to generalize the results to a larger, non-college population. Further research is needed to explore the connection between competition and interpersonal conflict between same-sex friends in other life stages.

The results of the study are further limited by the fact that it focused exclusively on biological sex. Future research investigating competitive behaviors and conflict resolution modes of individuals in same-sex platonic friendships should also take into consideration the psychological gender of participants.

One of the limitations of this study lies in the fact that self-reports were used to evaluate individuals' behavior during conflict and their proclivity to compete with others. This may lead to subject bias, such as social desirability (Black, 2000). These reports may be inaccurate since people might attempt to present themselves in a favorable light. Thus, further research should address this issue by utilizing both self and friends' reports as well as observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

This research could be enhanced by exploring other areas of competing, and making it more explicit to the participants that competition can also include mental comparisons, not just overt behaviors. More information about the friendships might provide further insights into individuals' approach towards competition and conflict. It would be interesting to explore whether the nature of friendships, their length, intimacy level, and context affect competitiveness or any of its categories.

The study focused on the mainstream American culture, where competition is a salient cultural value (Aronson, 1999; Hirschman, 2003; Tjosvold et al, 2003). It would be noteworthy to study competition in interpersonal relationships in collectivistic societies, where interdependence and the maintenance of harmonious relationships are of paramount importance.

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