Differences between males and females in regard to conflict behaviors toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers were examined in a sample of 501 undergraduate university students (326 males, 175 females). They completed a one-page questionnaire containing the theoretical definitions of five conflict behaviors identified by Thomas (1976): competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Students were asked to rate the extent to which they exhibit each of these conflict behaviors, on a 5-point Likert-type scale, separately for same-sex and opposite-sex peers. Results revealed that males reported more competing behavior toward same-sex peers than toward opposite-sex peers, and more avoiding behavior toward opposite-sex peers than toward same-sex peers. Males, compared to females, reported more accommodating behavior toward both same-sex and opposite-sex peers. These findings support the view that preferences regarding conflict behaviors are different for males and females, particularly as exhibited toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers.
Conflict as a relationship variable has generally been defined as a state of incompatible behaviors (Deutsch, 1994). Two dimensions pertinent to conflict management -- concern for self and concern for other, each of which can range from low to high -- have been articulated by many theorists (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Deutsch, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Thomas, 1976). Based on these dimensions, five conflict behaviors have been identified: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating (Thomas, 1976). Competing is associated with high concern for self and low concern for other; collaborating with high concern for self and other; compromising with intermediate concern for self and other; avoiding with low concern for self and other; and accommodating with low concern for self and high concern for other (Deutsch, 1994). Competing is an attempt to force one's viewpoint on the other party; collaborating seeks to have all parties engage in problem-solving activities to bring the dispute to a mutually satisfying conclusion; compromising involves the search for a middle-ground solution; avoiding is an attempt to withdraw from the conflict; and accommodating involves giving up one's own needs for the sake of meeting the needs of the other party (Thomas, 1976). It has been proposed that the constructive and destructive consequences of a given conflict are strongly influenced by the behaviors of the participants (Deutsch, 1994; Thomas, 1976).

In exploring adolescents' preferences regarding conflict behaviors, researchers have argued that there is variation by type of relationship (Haar & Krahe, 1999; Laursen & Collins, 1994; Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996). In other words, conflict resolution strategies differ depending on whether parents, siblings, or peers are involved. For example, a meta-analysis of twelve studies on adolescent conflict management found a high level of submission and disengagement, and a low level of compromise, in parent-adolescent conflict (Larsen, 1993). However, there was considerable compromise and little disengagement with close peers. In general, researchers have found, regardless of methodology, that there are relationship differences in conflict resolution; adolescents and young adults have been found to report more compromising with friends (and less coercion within peer relationships) than with family members and nonfriends in both hypothetical and actual disputes (Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996).

Differences between males and females in regard to conflict behaviors have also been noted (see Gayle et al., 1991, for a review). Van Slyck, Stern, and Zak-Place (1996), emphasizing the potential usefulness of conflict resolution in promoting optimal adolescent development, have stated that these differences must be taken into account in youth-oriented conflict resolution interventions. Studies on peer conflict have revealed that females use compromise with friends rather than submission/accommodation; males rely on submission to resolve conflicts with friends (see Laursen & Collins, 1994).
The sex of the other party has also been investigated in regard to conflict behaviors. In general, these studies have been carried out either with children or with adults. For example, Murphy and Eisenberg (1996), using a sample of schoolchildren, reported that girls seldom use destructive (coercive) strategies with other girls, though they may do so when interacting with boys. Martin and Bergmann (1996), in an investigation of organizational conflict, found that sex is a moderating variable only when both parties are male (i.e., there is a tendency to attempt to end the conflict with competitive responses). Kluwer, de Dreu, and Buunk (1998) studied intimacy as a factor in conflict; in nonintimate relationships, females were found to rate males as less cooperative and more competitive, and males to rate females as more cooperative and less competitive.

Conflict management is a skill that has lifetime consequences for initiating and maintaining relationships (Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, & Hair, 1996; Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996). Understanding this phenomenon as it occurs during adolescence, particularly late adolescence, is important, since it is the transition period to adult life, both as a worker and an intimate partner. Thus, adolescents' peer relationships provide a natural context for investigating interactions within and across sex in terms of conflict behavior. However, as noted by Laursen and Collins (1994), further studies are needed on this issue.

The present study sought to address that need. Specifically, differences in conflict behaviors toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers were examined in a sample of male and female late adolescents.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 501 undergraduate university students (326 males, 175 females). They represented different departments and years at the university, and their participation was voluntary. Their mean age was 20.0 years, with a standard deviation of 1.61. This research was conducted as part of a larger study investigating the psychosocial characteristics of these students.

Instrument

A one-page questionnaire was prepared to assess the students' conflict behaviors toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers. The questionnaire included five statements representing the conflict behaviors described by Thomas (1976): competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. These have been identified as basic modes of behavior in other conflict situations (Tezer, 1996, 1999). Students were asked to rate the extent to which they exhibit each conflict behavior on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 = very little to 5 = a lot, separately for same-sex and opposite-sex peers. The definition of peer was not provided in the instructions, for the purpose of allowing students to rely on their
own perceptions of peer relationships. We believed that an attempt to define such a construct would serve to confuse the students (see Halpern, 1997; Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996).

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered in a group setting (i.e., students' classrooms). The purpose of the study was explained, and students were asked to answer the questions individually. Anonymity was guaranteed.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the five conflict behaviors that female and male students reported toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers. It also presents the results of separate 2 (sex) by 2 (sex of the peer) analyses of variance, with sex of the peer serving as the repeated measure.

As shown in Table 1, repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) yielded statistically significant results for competing, avoiding, accommodating, and collaborating. Specifically, results concerning competing behavior revealed a significant main effect for sex of the peer, $F(1, 489) = 39.76, p < .001$, and a significant sex by sex of the peer interaction effect, $F(1, 489) = 30.50, p < .001$, indicating that males reported more competing (forcing) behavior toward their same-sex peers than toward their opposite-sex peers ($t = 9.21, p < .001$). Similarly, in regard to avoiding behavior, there was a significant main effect for sex of the peer, $F(1, 485) = 11.63, p < .001$, and a significant sex by sex of the peer interaction effect, $F(1, 485)= 13.59, p < .001$, revealing that males reported more avoiding behavior toward their opposite-sex peers than toward their same-sex peers ($t = 5.47, p < .001$). Results regarding accommodating behavior revealed a significant main effect for sex, $F(1, 487) = 14.79, p < .001$, and a significant sex by sex of the peer interaction effect, $F(1, 487) = 7.88, p < .01$; that is, males reported more accommodating behavior than did females, both toward same-sex peers ($t = 2.52, p < .01$) and toward opposite-sex peers ($t = 4.77, p < .000$). Finally, concerning collaborating behavior, there was a significant main effect for sex of the peer, $F(1, 484) = 4.03, p < .05$; students reported more collaborating behavior toward their same-sex peers than toward their opposite-sex peers ($t = 2.40, p < .05$). No significant main or interaction effects were found for compromising behavior.

In the present study, we found that males reported more competing behavior toward same-sex peers than toward opposite-sex peers, but more avoiding behavior toward opposite-sex peers than toward same-sex peers. Males, compared to females, reported more accommodating behavior toward both their same-sex and opposite-sex peers. These findings support the view that
preferences regarding conflict behaviors are different for males and females, particularly as exhibited toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers.

Males' same-sex competitive orientation toward resolving conflict is evident in the literature (see Gayle et al., 1991). However, the literature suggests that this competitive behavior occurs in asymmetrical relationships, such as between college-educated fathers and late adolescents (Comstock, 1994) and between adult males and their supervisors (Tezer, 1996), indicating either a traditional pattern of socialization or power strategies used by the parties involved. Martin and Bergmann (1996) argued that male-male competition may be occurring in situations where "... males believe in order to save face, they must resort to competitive behaviors when resolution is not imminent. ... Males who are in competition with each other believe it is important to protect their male image, and competitive responses are the socially acceptable way to accomplish it" (p. 8). Male-male competition in peer relationships, particularly in self-report studies like ours, may well be explained in a similar manner.

Males' preference for avoiding behavior is also evident in the literature. For example, Haferkamp (1992) found that, compared to females, males saw their relationships as less intimate and stable, saw their conflict as less important but more stable and likely to recur, and reported utilizing denial/avoiding strategies more frequently and cooperative strategies less frequently. The finding of the present study concerning males' avoiding behavior toward the opposite sex also points to relational quality. It may be argued that such an "uncommitted" relationship orientation, together with traditional masculine norms regarding inexpressivity (inherent in avoiding), is exaggerated when dealing with conflict with opposite-sex peers. That may have been the case with the male students in the present study. This area warrants further exploration.

The greater preference found for males than females in regard to accommodating behavior toward both same-sex and opposite-sex peers is supported by most of the research in the literature. As mentioned previously,
studies have indicated that males of all ages rely on submission/accommodating to resolve conflicts with friends (see Laursen & Collins, 1994, for a review).

Overall, results concerning males' competing behavior toward same-sex peers, avoiding behavior toward opposite-sex peers, and accommodating behavior toward both same-sex and opposite sex peers seem to indicate two extreme reactions--fight or flee--to interpersonal conflict (see Opotow, 1991). Concerning the interaction effects obtained in the present study, we agree with Feingold (1998), who has argued that more theoretical research is needed before conclusions can be reached.

Interestingly, there were no significant differences in females' preferences regarding conflict behaviors toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers. Ohbuchi and Yamamoto (1990) found that girls used significantly more conflict strategies than did boys, indicating their higher level of social skills. Studies investigating the relationship between agreeableness and conflict strategies have revealed that females are more agreeable than males. Carli (1989) found that both men and women could more easily reach agreement with a female partner. Similarly, Johnson and Johnson (1996) suggested that females are more socially attuned than are males and therefore more likely to vary their conflict behavior in response to social cues. The lack of differences found here for any of the conflict behaviors of female students might be due to their relationship orientedness rather than their relying on the sex of the other party.

It is important to acknowledge that the present study had certain limitations. First, since it examined differences in conflict behaviors of male and female university students toward their same-sex and opposite-sex peers, the results are applicable to a college-age population. Second, considering the self-report nature of the study, the results may not reveal the students' actual behavior in real-life conflict. Third, instructions did not clearly define "friend," "close relationship," or "peer," which may have led the students to attach their own idiosyncratic meanings to these words. Finally, researchers investigating sex differences in conflict behaviors have argued that conflict management is affected by expectations based on sex role stereotypes (see Gayle et al., 1991, for a review). Therefore, the conflict behaviors of the students participating in the present study may reflect their sex role stereotypes rather than their actual behaviors.

Nevertheless, this study suggests that, in understanding late adolescents' preferences regarding conflict behaviors, not only the individual's sex but also the sex of the other party must be taken into account. The results revealed different patterns of conflict behaviors toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers for males and females. Previous research on interpersonal conflict largely used either child or adult samples, and any differences between those findings and ours might be due to the particular period of development studied in the present research. Further research on these differences is needed. Future studies should also explore patterns that may be common in the preferences regarding conflict behaviors.
behaviors toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers, by adapting a variety of methodologies to examine this phenomenon.

REFERENCES


Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Five Conflict Behaviors Toward Same-Sex and Opposite-Sex Peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Behavior</th>
<th>Male (n = 326)</th>
<th>Female (n = 175)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-S</td>
<td>M  3.5</td>
<td>SD  1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-S</td>
<td>M  3.0</td>
<td>SD  1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-S</td>
<td>M  2.3</td>
<td>SD  1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-S</td>
<td>M  2.6</td>
<td>SD  1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-S</td>
<td>M  2.5</td>
<td>SD  1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-S</td>
<td>M  2.6</td>
<td>SD  1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-S</td>
<td>M  3.4</td>
<td>SD  1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-S</td>
<td>M  3.3</td>
<td>SD  1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-S</td>
<td>M  3.0</td>
<td>SD  1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-S</td>
<td>M  2.9</td>
<td>SD  1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F
Conflict Behavior  Sex  Sex of Peer  Interaction
Competing           0.93  39.76  30.50  (.001)  (.001)
Avoiding            2.78  11.63  13.59  (.001)  (.001)
Accommodating       14.79  0.10  7.88  (.001)  (.01)
Compromising        0.32  2.82  0.49
Collaborating       1.24  4.03  0.85  (.05)

Note. S-S = same-sex peer; O-S = opposite-sex peer. Numbers in parentheses are p values.