



Does Culture Influence How People Perceive High - Conflict Dating Partners?

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Introduction

- Western cultures and Eastern cultures differ in beliefs about emotions.
- Western cultures endorse linear, or hedonic beliefs about emotions: positive emotions are considered a virtue or moral obligation and negative emotions are perceived to be unwanted or harmful (Miyamoto, Ma, & Wilken, 2017)
- Beliefs about emotions in Eastern cultures are rooted in **Dialecticism**: contradiction is accepted and expected (Peng & Nisbett, 1999).
- East Asians are more likely than European Americans to perceive that **negative emotions have utility**.
- It is unknown if this paradigm applies to relationship contexts (e.g., conflict).

Hypotheses:

→ **East Asians** will perceive a more positive side of conflict in relationships than European Americans and will predict that relationships with conflict will last longer compared to European Americans.

→ **European Americans** will perceive a more negative side of conflict in relationships than East Asians and will predict that relationships with conflict will end sooner compared to East Asians.

Method

- Online study (N = 149 college students; 74 European American, 75 East Asian)
- Participants read three hypothetical scenarios about dating partners with varying levels of conflict in the relationship (low, medium, and high) and rated the likelihood of breaking-up in the next year or getting married (0 to 100%). (Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2010).
- Participants answered the open-ended question, "How do you perceive your relationship with your partner?"

Hypothetical Dating Scenarios

Low

You both enjoy reading, trying new restaurants, and talking about your favorite shows. You have a lot of fun together on the weekends and you like to study together during the week.

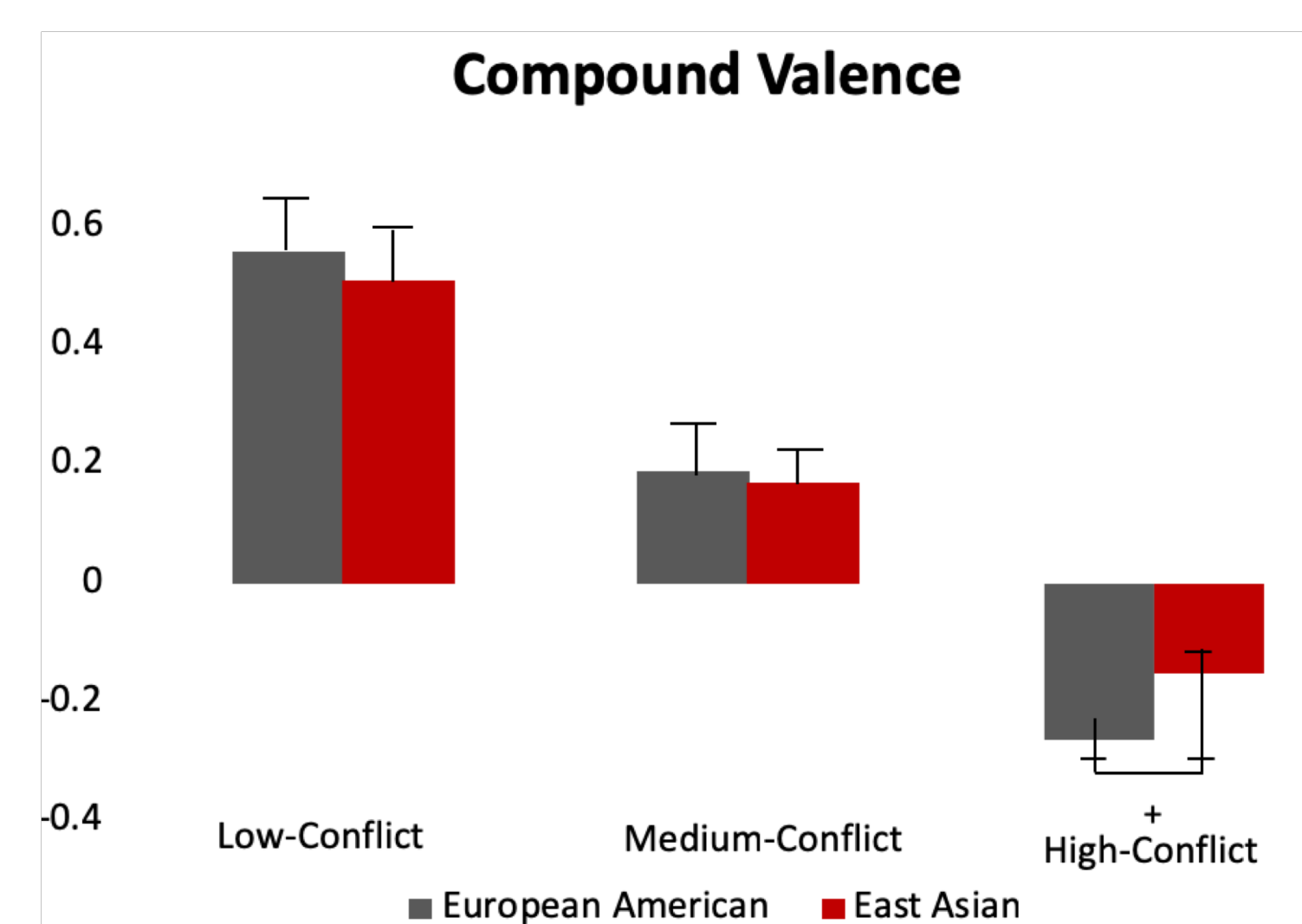
Medium

You disagree on some things; you like to go out with your friends on the weekends, but your partner doesn't like to go out. Your partner thinks that your grades would be better if you didn't go out so much and you had an argument about this.

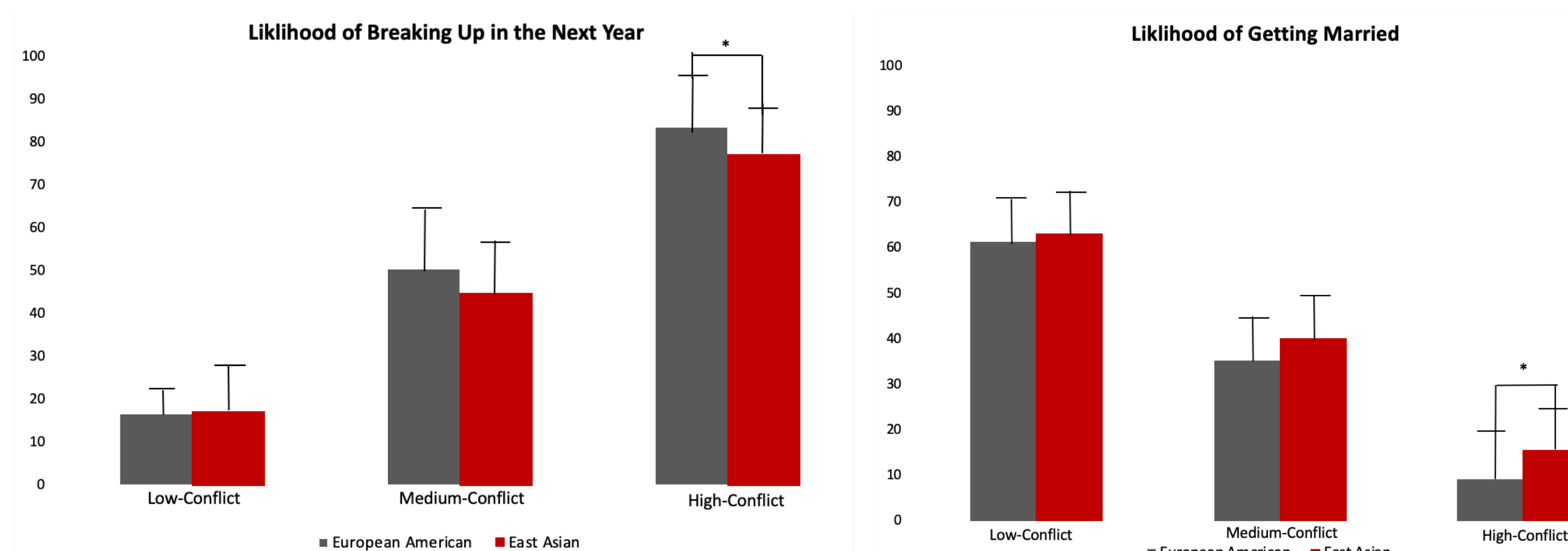
High

Your partner deliberately started a fight with you the night before an important exam knowing that this would affect your performance. Your partner thinks that you may be cheating on them and does not trust you around other people when you go out.

Results



- We performed a VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and Sentiment Reasoner) analysis on the free response answers and computed a compound valence score for each participant (e.g., the sum of all the lexicon ratings which have been normalized between -1 (most extreme negative) and +1 (most extreme positive)).
- There was a trend for East Asians to score higher than European Americans for the high-conflict scenario, meaning their free response answers tended to be more positively valenced than European Americans, $t(157) = 1.78, p = .077$.



- We found a significant Culture x Scenario interaction for breaking up ($F(2, 314) = 3.39, p = .035$), European Americans were more likely than East Asians to predict that the high-conflict couple would break up, $t(157) = 2.35, p = .02$.
- The Culture x Scenario interaction for marriage was not significant, but the results from the high-conflict scenario trended in the direction of our hypothesis that East Asians would rate the high-conflict couple as more likely to get married compared to European Americans, $t(138) = 2.39, p = .018$.

Conclusion

- Although both Asians and European Americans were equally likely to predict that the low-conflict couple would stay together, **East Asians were more likely than European Americans to predict that the high-conflict couple would stay together.**
- East Asians also perceived the high-conflict dating scenario as more positively valenced than European Americans.
- This study suggests that dialectical beliefs about emotion extends to relationship contexts and that **culture influences perceptions of high-conflict dating relationships.**
- Future work should examine how culture may influence people's perception of their own relationships.

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