Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională
ISSN: 2066-7329 | e-ISSN: 2067-9270
Abstracting & Indexing | Clarivate Analytics - Web of Science (WoS); EBSCO; Google Scholar; ICI Journals Master List - Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Philpapers; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; J-GATE

2025, Volume 17, Issue 3, pages: 1-15 | https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/17.3/1010
Submitted: June 16, 2025 | *Accepted for publication:* July 21, 2025

Connection between Conflict Management Style and Relationship Bonding and Detecting Differences in Conflict Management Styles among Generation Z

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Abstract: *The research focuses on the issue of attachment and its connection with conflict management. The aim of the work is to determine the existence of connections between attachment and conflict management. We also focused on determining whether there are differences in conflict management styles in a selected sample of adolescents. The research sample consisted of 127 respondents aged 16-20 years and consisted of 65 women and 62 men. To measure attachment, we used a standardized questionnaire Parental Bonding We used the PBI instrument and the Thomas -Kilmann Conflict Test (TKI) to assess conflict management. The results showed that there was no gender difference in conflict management styles. The findings did not confirm a relationship between relationship attachment and conflict management style.*

Keywords: *relationship attachment; conflict management; conflict management styles; adolescence*

How to cite: Doktorová, D. & Ivanovič, D. (2025). Connection between conflict management style and relationship bonding and detecting differences in conflict management styles among generation Z. *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională, 17*(3), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/17.3/1010

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Introduction

According to Mayseless & Scharf (2007), the main changes in adolescence relate primarily to how the relationship bond is expressed externally, and the structure of the group of people to whom the individual has a relationship bond also changes. Štefánková (2007) states that the organization of the relationship bond develops and can change throughout life. The formation of the relationship bond in adolescence is contributed by the experience with primary persons in childhood, but also to a large extent by the quality of current relationships with primary persons. In some situations, adolescents are more likely to turn to a parent, while for others, mostly older individuals, the function of emotional support in some situations may be fulfilled by peers, who are more understanding in the eyes of adolescents in certain situations. Cassidy (2001) states that the created secure relationship bond to the primary person is related to the success and positive formation of intimate romantic relationships. It is also related to positive self-esteem, academic success, career growth, and positive coping strategies. Bippus & Rollin (2003) found that the type of relationship attachment predicts conflict management and similarly predicts the behavior of the individual in relationships. People with secure relationships more often choose more prosocial strategies that lead to maintaining good relationships than individuals with other types of relationship attachment. Conflict management refers to the ability of an individual to negotiate and resolve conflict interpersonally. Conflicts can have a negative effect on a person, causing stress or anxiety. Conflicts can also have a positive effect on the individual. They provide an opportunity for new and creative ways of solving problems. The individual evaluates relationships between people through the process of conflict resolution, which can further increase interest in solving problems. In how the conflict will develop, the degree of interest of the individual in achieving his or her own solution and also the degree of interest of the individual in helping the other person achieve the goal are important (Rovenská & Župová, 2018). Within the issue of conflict management, several factors influencing the style of conflict resolution have been investigated. One of the most extensive researches conducted by Rapoport (1974) in Křivohlavý, 2008) dealt with the issue of differences between men and women in resolving interpersonal model conflicts, where the differences between men and women were visible. (Křivohlavý, 2008). Women are more cooperative than men, choose a less dominant approach and do not tolerate hierarchical position. They are more interpersonally focused and use democratic behavior. In a conflict situation, they choose cooperation and negotiation. On the contrary, men show a more

aggressive leadership style and act assertively. They focus more on achieving their goals even at the expense of a good relationship. They choose a more dominant approach and demeanor and, within a conflict situation, they more often choose a dominant and integrative style of conflict resolution (Rovenská & Župová, 2018). Differences are also recorded by Sogra (2014), who states that the gender factor is most often analyzed in the context of conflict strategies and states that women are much more cooperative and choose a more dominant approach than men and use democratic behavior. According to Sogra (2014), women most often choose negotiation and cooperation when resolving conflicts, while men, who have a more aggressive leadership style and act assertively, more often choose an integrative style of conflict management. Kotková & Lacinová (2014) examined the connection between relationship attachment and conflict resolution style in relationships. They found that a secure relationship attachment style is related to a constructive (compromising) conflict resolution style, and an insecure relationship attachment style is related to a destructive, dominant conflict resolution in relationships. They also found that the avoidant conflict resolution style was unrelated to relationship bonding. Cann et al. (2008) examined the associations between conflict management styles and attachment styles. They argued that secure attachment is associated with an integrative style of conflict resolution, and avoidant attachment is associated with conflict avoidance. Individuals with anxious attachment styles tend to choose more negative conflict resolution styles than dominant and avoidant styles.

Several studies have examined the relationship between attachment and conflict management (Cassidy, 2001, Cann et al. 2008, Valiyan et al, 2019), which confirm the relationships between these variables. The relationship between attachment and conflict management was confirmed by Kotková & Lacinová (2015), who found that a secure attachment style is related to a compromising conflict resolution style, and an insecure attachment style is related to a destructive, dominant conflict resolution in relationships. Similarly, Cann et al. (2008) confirm that a secure attachment style is related to an integrating conflict resolution style. They also claim that anxious attachment predicts a dominant and avoidant conflict resolution style. Creasey et al. (1999) also state that the type of relationship attachment predicts conflict management, which is also confirmed by Bippus & Rollin (2003) and state a positive relationship between secure relationship attachment and conflict management strategies that lead to maintaining good relationships. We verify the identification of connections between the variables we monitor on the basis of previous research and supplement it with additional findings, since we consider the issue of this topic to be insufficiently researched, untested and undeveloped.

The main goal of the research is to identify and verify the existence of connections between relationship attachment and conflict management.

We have set the following secondary, partial goals:

- to determine the preferred conflict management style of the participating respondents,
- to find out if there are differences in conflict management styles between men and women,

Based on the established research objectives and the mentioned research examining the given issue, we set research questions and hypotheses.

VO1: Are there gender differences in conflict management styles?

Cann et al. (2008) found a significant correlation between insecure attachment and avoidant conflict resolution. This finding prompted us to formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: We assume that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the level of perceived control from the mother and conflict resolution through avoidance.

H2: We assume that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the level of perceived control from the father and conflict resolution through avoidance.

Methodology

Research file

The research group consisted of third- and fourth-year students of secondary schools in Trnava and students of the University of Trnava. The research sample consisted of students of the Jozef Herda Sports Gymnasium in Trnava, the Private Bilingual Gymnasium BESST in Trnava, and the Secondary Industrial School in Trnava. We selected individual schools by purposive sampling and according to the availability of individual schools. After completing an informed consent form, which was completed by parents for respondents under the age of eighteen and by adults for respondents above the age of eighteen, participants took part in the study. Their involvement was voluntary, and all schools were identified with the implementation of the research itself. Purposive sampling was used to choose the respondents. The total number of respondents consisted of 140 students, from which we excluded 13 respondents due to incomplete completion of the questionnaires. The resulting sample of our research consisted of 127 respondents, students of grammar schools, secondary vocational schools and universities aged 16-19, and therefore fell into the developmental period of adolescence. The average age of the respondents in our group was 17.8 years.

The group of respondents consisted of 65 men and 62 women. Respondents were comparable in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic status, as well as the level of the schools where we conducted the research.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by gender of respondents

Gender of respondents	abundance	Percentage frequency
man	65	51.2
woman	62	48.8
together	127	100.0

Source: (authors of the study)

We have presented a descriptive characteristic of the relationship with parents in Table 2. The table shows the average values of the individual relationship scales and also their comparison between men and women.

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of the relationship bond

Relationship attachment scales					
Gender		**caring mother**	**caring father**	**control mother**	**father control**
men	N	65	65	65	65
	Diameter	29.06	25.58	11.29	7.43
	Standard deviation	5,849	6,576	4,866	4,664
	Maximum	36	36	24	16
	Minimum	14	11	5	0
women	N	62	62	62	62
	Diameter	29.19	27.48	12.53	9.08
	Standard deviation	5,892	6,326	6,625	8,025
	Maximum	36	36	26	31
	Minimum	16	11	3	0
together	N	127	127	127	127
	Diameter	29.13	26.51	11.90	8.24
	Standard deviation	5,847	6,500	5,802	6,551
	Maximum	36	36	26	31
	Minimum	14	11	3	0

Source: (authors of the work)

Table 3 shows the descriptive characteristics of conflict management styles. The table shows the average values of individual scales, conflict management styles, and their comparison between men and women.

Table 3. Descriptive characteristics of conflict management styles

Conflict management styles						
Gender		**duel**	**cooperation**	**compromise**	**avoidance**	**adaptation**
men	N	65	65	65	65	65
	Diameter	5.69	5.52	8.80	8.97	5.45
	Standard deviation	3,526	2,001	2,635	1,952	1,521
	Maximum	12	9	12	9	8
	Minimum	0	0	1	2	3
women	N	62	62	62	62	62
	Diameter	4.56	6.02	8.95	8.02	5.18
	Standard deviation	3,448	1,929	2,645	1,987	2,045
	Maximum	12	10	12	9	10
	Minimum	0	3	1	3	3
together	N	127	127	127	127	127
	Diameter	5.14	5.76	8.87	8.01	5.31
	Standard deviation	3,520	1,974	2,631	1,967	1,794
	Maximum	12	10	12	9	10
	Minimum	0	0	1	2	3

Source: (author of the work)

Research organization

We conducted the research in the form of a questionnaire, in the form of pencil and paper, by personally distributing questionnaires. The respondents were presented with a questionnaire consisting of three specific questionnaires for individual variables in the following order: Parental Bonding Instrument, Thomas-Kilmann conflict test. The condition for selecting respondents was the age limit of the respondents - meeting the conditions for the developmental stage of adolescence. The research took place from January to March 2025 at three secondary schools. We selected schools by purposive selection and according to the availability of individual

schools. During administration, respondents were informed about the anonymity of the questionnaires.

Materials and apparatus

To collect data from respondents, we used 2 questionnaires, each of which focused on individual variables under study. To monitor the relationship, we used Parental Bonding Instrument, and we monitored conflict management with the Thomas- Kilmann conflict test.

Parental Bonding Instrument

We used the Parental questionnaire to measure the respondents' relationship bond. Bonding Instrument, PBI (Číkošová & Preiss, 2011), which is a Czech standardized version of the original version of the questionnaire by Parker et al. (1979). The questionnaire is intended for people aged 16 and over and in 25 items on a 4-point Likert scale the respondent retrospectively assesses the parental bond perceived during the first 16 years of life. All items are divided into two dimensions. The care scale, containing 12 items, presents on the one hand closeness, empathy, emotional warmth and on the other hand rejection, indifference and emotional coldness. On the care scale, a score of 0-36 can be obtained and includes statements such as *"She was gentle with me"*. The higher the score the respondent achieves on the scale, the higher the level of care he perceives. The second scale is the control scale, containing 13 items, representing excessive contact, interest, control and harassment, and on the other hand, representing the possibility of autonomy and independence. On the scale, a respondent can obtain a score of 0-34 and includes statements such as *"He tried to control everything I did"*. The higher the score the respondent achieves on the scale, the higher the level of control he perceives (Číkošová & Preiss, 2011).

PBI is a method that does not fully correspond to the original definition of attachment, but focuses mainly on two qualities of the emotional relationship derived from attachment theory, care and control, which parents provided to children. However, it is also possible to determine the types of parenting by the total score of the questionnaire and the combination of scales.

Thomas- Kilman's conflict test

The last instrument used in research to measure conflict management is the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict fashion instrument – TKI by Thomas & Kilmann (2008). The questionnaire has undergone modifications

since the original version (1974) and is available in its current version on the Internet (https://www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/). The questionnaire is used quite often in our country, but the Slovak standardized version of the questionnaire is not available. We translated the questionnaire through bilingual verification and the internal consistency in its individual items was greater than 0.80.

The TKI questionnaire is based on the Thomas & Kilmann typology presented in the theoretical background. The administration of the questionnaire is relatively quick and easy and takes approximately 10 minutes. It contains 30 items, which are composed of pairs of statements related to conflict situations, such as:

A) *"I try to resolve all problems and ambiguities openly and immediately."*

B) *"I try to put things off until I have enough time to think them through."*

The respondent marks one statement from the pair that best describes his behavior. The statements are divided into 5 scales, representing 5 methods of conflict resolution: avoidance, competition, accommodation, cooperation, compromise. On each of the 5 scales, the respondent can achieve a score from 0 to 12, which depends on the chosen answer representing the given conflict style. (Thomas & Kilmann, 2008)

Operationalization

As part of the statistical processing, we worked with the following variables:

- Gender
- Age
- Relationship factors (within the PBI questionnaire): mother's care, father's care, mother's control, father's control
- Conflict management factors (within the TKI questionnaire): avoidance, competition, accommodation, cooperation, compromise

Statistical analysis was performed by processing data in the SPSS Statistics program , in which we analyzed the data and subsequently evaluated them. To verify the results, we used a significance level of $p < 0.05$. In the case of VO, we also tested the normality of the distribution and in the case of non-normal distribution, we used the Mann-Whitney test. U test for two independent samples and in the case of normal distribution. We tested the hypotheses through correlations

Results

To process and analyze the research results, we used the SPSS 20 statistical program, with which we compared and searched for statistically significant relationships between variables.

Within the research question, VO: *Are there statistically significant differences in conflict resolution styles?,* We evaluated the differences between men and women in the individual conflict resolution styles of the respondents. We compared the differences between the sexes using the Student's t-test and the Mann-Whitney U test, based on which variables were normal and which were not. From the results of testing the differences on all scales (cooperation, compromise, confrontation, adaptation, avoidance), we did not record a statistically significant difference and the respondents achieved similar scores within the sexes. We can conclude that there is no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in conflict resolution styles.

Table 4. Results of testing VO, duel scale, scale, fit using Mann-Whitney U test.

	Gender	**N**	**Average rank**	**Mann-Whitney test**	
Duel	Men	65	69.92	U	1630,000
	Women	62	57.79	From	-1.864
	Total	127		**Sig.**	**0.062**
Customization	Men	65	68.42	U	1725,500
	Women	62	59.36	From	-1.408
	Total	127		**Sig.**	**0.159**

Source: (author of the work)

Table 5. Results of testing VO, avoidance scale, compromise scale, cooperation scale, using Student's t-test

	Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t-test**	
avoidance	Men	65	5.97	1,952	t	-0.238
	Women	62	6.05	1,787	Df	125
	Total	127			**Sig.**	**0.812**
	Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t-test**	
cooperation	Men	65	5.52	2,001	t	-0.160
	Women	62	6.02	1,929	Df	125
	Total	127			**Sig.**	**0.160**
	Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t-test**	
compromise	Men	65	8.80	2,635	t	-0.323
	Women	62	8.95	2,645	Df	125
	Total	127			**Sig.**	**0.747**

Source: (author of the work)

We then formulated the hypothesis H1: *We assume that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the level of perceived control from the mother and conflict resolution by avoidance* and H2: *We assume that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the level of perceived control from the father and conflict resolution by avoidance.* After testing the normal distribution, which was confirmed, we chose the parametric Pearson correlation analysis shown in Table 7. There is no statistically significant correlation between the variables conflict avoidance and control from the mother and the variables conflict avoidance and control from the father (sig = 0.244; sig = 0.212). We reject both hypotheses.

Table 6. Pearson correlation analysis - conflict avoidance, mother control, father control

		Mother control	Checking the father
Avoidance	Pearson correlation	**,107**	**,115**
	Sig .	**,244**	**,212**
	N	120	120

Source: (author of the work)

Discussions

Interpretation of results

In this work, we dealt with the issues of relationship bonding, emotional intelligence and conflict management. We conducted research to identify and verify the existence of connections between relationship bonding and conflict management. We also examined the differences between men and women in conflict management.

With research question VO1, we were interested in whether there are differences in individual conflict management styles within the genders. We did not confirm any statistically significant difference between men and women. Within the genders, coping strategies are represented in approximately the same way, without major statistically significant differences. Compared to the research conducted, different results are also recorded by Sogra (2014), who states that women most often choose negotiation and cooperation when resolving conflicts, while men more often prefer an integrative conflict management style. Rovenská & Župová (2018) found that there are no differences within the framework of resolving conflicts through compromise, cooperation, adaptation and confrontation, which is also in line with our findings. However, they recorded a different result within the framework of resolving conflicts through avoidance. They noted a difference on this scale and claim that women more often resolve

conflict through avoidance. They recorded the results on a sample of young adults, while the results of our research include a sample of adolescents. Therefore, based on our results, we conclude that adolescents are not interested in resolving conflict and more often avoid conflict, which is why we do not record a difference between the sexes in the avoidant conflict management style. The difference in results may also be caused by the use of different measurement methods and the conflict resolution theory we base our work on. Many questionnaires that focus on conflict resolution are often biased by respondents' socially desirable answers, while in the method we used, Thomas & Kilmann (2008) focus on minimizing this bias by making each option acquire approximately the same level of social desirability, which could also have affected the results.

In hypothesis H1, we focused on the existence of a significant positive relationship between the level of perceived control from the mother and conflict resolution by avoidance, and similarly in hypothesis H2, we focused on the existence of a statistically significant positive relationship between the level of perceived control from the father and conflict resolution by avoidance. Our statements related to a higher level of perceived control from parents are linked by Číkošová & Preiss (2011) with an uncertain relationship. In our results, we do not show a significant correlation between the variables. We did not accept the hypotheses, and therefore our findings are not consistent with the research on which we based our results. Cann et al. (2008) followed in their research, which may be a factor determining the difference with our sample. Based on this statement, we conclude that the observed discontinuity between the variables may be due to the demanding nature of the developmental period of adolescence, when individuals are not interested in resolving conflict and more often avoid conflict despite the established relationship with their parent (Das & Bhatt, 2024). Allen & Landová (1999) also claim that at this developmental stage, the organization of the relationship bond is unified due to the finalization of the development of cognitive abilities, formal operations abilities, logical and abstract thinking, which may be the reason why our sample could be exceptional and we do not see a statistically significant relationship between the avoidant conflict management style and the degree of experienced parental control in childhood. At the same time, our results are in agreement with the research of Kotklová & Lacinová (2014), who state that an insecure attachment style is related to destructive, dominant conflict resolution in relationships and also found that an avoidant conflict resolution style is not related to attachment.

Limits

After conducting our research, we encountered several limitations that could have influenced or distorted the research results and we did not pay enough attention to them during the research. During the data collection, participants filled out questionnaires in pencil and paper during class, which could have caused respondents to feel insecure or afraid of being evaluated, even though we explained the information about the research process to the respondents during the administration and stated complete anonymity during the testing. This factor could have caused respondents to focus more on socially desirable answers. We were unknown to the respondents and in a short interaction we were unable to motivate them sufficiently or inspire confidence in the testing. Within this statement, we also refer to the multiple items in the questionnaires and the time-consuming nature of the questionnaire administration as limitations. The number of items and the lack of interest of respondents could have led to loss of attention, distorted responses in the questionnaires, and incomplete responses, as a result of which we had to exclude a total of 12 questionnaires from testing.

Another limitation of the testing is the questionnaire for assessing conflict management style, which does not have a Slovak standardized version, which could have led to certain distortions in the research, despite the fact that the questionnaire was translated by a professional translator from a language school, i.e. it was bilingually verified and we also assessed its internal consistency, but it would be more appropriate to work with a questionnaire that is standardized for our population.

As a limitation, we also mention the fact that the results of our testing cannot be generalized. During the testing, we worked with respondents exclusively from the Trnava region, and this fact makes it impossible to generalize to the entire population.

Another limitation that could have affected the research could have been the comparison of our results with different studies. The included studies define the monitored variables differently and use different methods and procedures compared to ours. The studies included different samples of respondents, while in our research we worked exclusively with a sample of adolescents. The period of adolescence is in itself a relatively demanding developmental period and compared to a sample of adults, it is likely that differences will be present. In the comparisons with foreign-language studies, certain distortions could also have occurred within the framework of possible shortcomings in translation, different cultural norms, and the like.

Conclusion

The results found in the work may have practical application in the field of developmental psychology, school and counseling psychology, and in clinical practice.

The work is also beneficial for the field of research, as it is possible to build on the recorded findings and expand research in a given area that is not sufficiently explored. It means that the connection arises at a later age. This finding is revolutionary, especially for the design of programs focused on working with relationship bonding. It would be appropriate to replicate the research with Generation Z in other cultures; it would be interesting to find out whether it is possible to eliminate deficiencies in relationship bonding through conflict in romantic attachment (Janghu & Bhau, 2023; Paquette et al. 2020).

Future intentions

In any further investigation of the issue and the connections monitored by our research, we would focus on a larger sample of respondents and a sample that could be generalized. We would include different age categories of respondents in the research to compare differences, and it would be beneficial for the investigation of the given issue to examine the sample of respondents longitudinally , because it is likely that the individual factors monitored change, form, take on new dimensions or stabilize with age during the life of an individual. We assume that the differences between the sexes at the level of emotional intelligence will be statistically significant with age, as reported in the research by Guastello (2003) and similarly we assume that differences will also be present in conflict management styles.

The future goal would also be to investigate the connections between attachment and other personality characteristics that attachment could predict and possibly also focus on the impact of attachment on the quality of relationships in adulthood. It would be interesting to connect our concept consisting of attachment, emotional intelligence and conflict management to the personality of the individual, where we can assume, for example, connections between insecure attachment, level of emotional intelligence, avoidance style of conflict resolution and neuroticism.

We examined the relationships between variables in a sample of adolescents, high school students, and university students. By evaluating the results, we found that there was no gender difference between the individual conflict management styles.

Funding: This research VEGA 1/0498/25: Activating the potential of Generation Z representatives through the use of mindless games to increase the effectiveness of their development

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