Conflict resolution styles among Australian Christians and Muslims

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ABSTRACT: Findings from this study of Australian practising and non-practising Christians and Muslims support the proposition that both religious affiliation and the depth of that affiliation affect an individual's conflict resolution style (collaborator, compromiser, accommodator, controller, or avoider), and that minority status and particular historical time and situation may also affect it. Practising and non-practising Christians and non-practising Muslims chose a collaborating style in resolving conflicts, while practising Muslims reported a preference for the compromiser style of conflict resolution.

Introduction

Recent media reports have drawn attention to conflicts between Christians and Muslims in many parts of the world (Henderson, 2003; Rane, 2000). This study examines whether Australian practising and non-practising Christians and Muslims differ in their attitudes towards conflict and how to solve it.

Religion

For legal and political purposes, the High Court of Australia in 1983 defined religion as a 'complex of beliefs and practices which point to a set of values and an understanding of the meaning of existence' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001).
Throughout history, religion has been a factor in many interpersonal and intergroup conflicts including the Crusades, ethnic genocide in Bosnia, hostilities in Northern Ireland, and the continuing Palestinian–Israeli war (Russell & Edwards, 1956). At the same time, religion is a defining moral power that can be an instrument of peacemaking (Shore, 2000).

Christianity
The term ‘Christian’ will be used here to represent individuals who base their lives upon the examples and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Their faith is expressed through identification with a particular Christian sect, regular church visits, readings of the Bible, and celebrations of important events such as Easter and Christmas. Such individuals may be called ‘practising’ Christians. Other Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter but do not regularly read the Bible or worship in church, subscribing to the general belief system of Christianity without practising their faith through worship. This study will examine the differences between these ‘non-practising’ Christians and practising Christians and their preferred conflict resolution style. In Australia, Christianity dates from the First Fleet in 1778 and is currently the predominant religion. In the last Australian Census in 2001, 12,764,342 people (70.9% of the population) claimed to be Christians, with the largest group being Catholics (5,001,624) followed by Anglicans (3,881,162) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Islam
In Arabic, the word Islam means ‘surrender to God’s law’ (Eliade, 1987). Islam is often translated into English as ‘voluntary submission to the will of Allah’. A Muslim is a follower of Islam who submits to Allah (Keene, 1993). The Qu’ran is a record of the will of Allah. His commands were revealed to Muhammad, whom Muslims believe to be the last and most important of many prophets of God. In the most recent Australian census in 2001, 281,578 people claimed to be Muslims. In this study, practising Muslims are defined as those individuals who say they adhere to the five pillars of Islam (Armstrong, 1995):

1. Iman: Belief that no deity is worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is His last prophet and messenger.

2. Salat: Prayers that are performed five times each day.
3. Siyam: Fasting in the month of Ramadan, which means abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations with spouses from sunrise to sunset.

4. Zakat: The requirement for Muslims to give 2.5% of their saved earnings to the poor once a year as purification of wealth.

5. Hajj: This pilgrimage is a journey to the Kab’ah in the sacred city of Mecca. Muslims are required to do this at least once in a lifetime, if they are physically and financially able.

‘Non-practising Muslims’ are defined here as those who say they do not perform all of the five pillars, but worship Allah and acknowledge Muhammad as His messenger.

Christianity and Islam
Islam and Christianity share many similarities. Adherents of both religions believe in a single, omnipotent god, who has sent messengers to guide the behaviour of human beings. Both religions express a belief in the one and true God (Martin, 1998). Both refer to their holy books for inspiration and guidance.

Muslims in Australia
Since a Labor government abolished all ethnic bias aspects of the Immigration Restriction Act in 1973, policies of multiculturalism have encouraged the tolerance of religious groups in Australia and the establishment of legal sanctions against discrimination. Multicultural polices are designed to accept and respect the right of all Australians to express and share their cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy (Department of Immigration, Multiculturalism & Indigenous Affairs, 2002). However, policies of multiculturalism do not guarantee harmony or prevent discrimination. Lack of knowledge and understanding concerning the Islamic religion and the current political climate has led to some discrimination within the Australian community. In addition, negative and derogatory media coverage of Muslims has portrayed them as aggressive and violent (Rane, 2000).

Although the majority Christian society has largely accepted the minority Muslim group, events such as the war in Iraq have drawn increased attention to this group. The events of September 11, 2001, the Bali bombing in October 2002, and Muslim-Christian clashes in the...
suburbs of Sydney during 2002 have increased scrutiny of Muslims by
the Christian majority and done nothing to improve the understanding
and appreciation between adherents of the two religions.

Conflicts related to differences in religious beliefs have taken prime
position in world politics (Martin, 1998) and in local communities.
There is a need for greater understanding and knowledge on the
subject of religion and its relationship with conflict and conflict
resolution. The way in which conflicts related to religion are dealt with
can either strengthen the relationship between the two conflicting
parties or destroy it (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

Although it would be impossible to eradicate all community conflict,
it is important to learn how to manage it skilfully and to understand
how different personality characteristics and qualities affect perception
of conflict and its resolution. Conflict can be defined as ‘an expressed
struggle in which two or more interdependent parties are experiencing
strong emotion resulting from a perceived difference in needs or
values’ (Katz & Lawyer, 1992, p. 93). Conflict management is about
understanding the nature of each individual conflict and using an
appropriate method that will reduce the negative energy and enable
the two parties to reach resolution.

The purpose of this study is to determine the conflict management
styles of Muslims and Christians living in Australia.

Conceptualisation of conflict resolution styles
Interpersonal or intergroup conflict involves two main issues: the
amount of concern people have for their own and for others’ outcomes
(Bolton, 1986; Fisher & Ury, 1981; Hocker & Wilmot, 1995; Katz &
Lawyer, 1992; Poortingh & Byrne, 2001; Weeks, 1992). The ‘dual
concern model’ developed by Pruitt and Rubin (1986), and based
on the work of Blake and Mouton (1964) and Thomas (1976),
suggests five styles of handling conflict: collaborating, compromising,
accommodating, controlling, and avoiding. The decision to use one
style instead of another depends on a number of factors. Pruitt and
Rubin (1986) emphasise the community and political context features
of conflict resolution, and other research has highlighted culture and
religion as factors affecting conflict resolution style preferences (Cai &
Fink, 2002; Elsayed-Ekhously & Buda, 1996; Kriesberg, 1998; Ohbuchi,
Fukushima, & Tedeschi, 1999; Polkinghorm & Byrne, 2001).
Research supports the notion of individuals preferring a certain style of conflict management to another (Cai & Fink, 2002; Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Ohbuchi et al., 1999; Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001; Sillars, 1980; Sternberg & Soriano, 1984). This preference is believed to be consistent both within and across interpersonal, inter-organisational, and international domains of conflict (Sternberg & Soriano, 1984).

Styles of conflict handling are elaborated below:

**Collaborator**
The use of this style involves maintaining an interpersonal relationship with the conflicting party as well as ensuring that both the parties' needs are met. Collaborators are not concerned only with their own self-interest but with the other parties' needs as well. This style of conflict management creates a 'win/win' situation, with both conflicting parties achieving their goals while maintaining their interpersonal relationship (Katz & Lawyer, 1992). Pruitt and Carnevale (1993) believe that this mode of handling conflict is most likely to occur when there is an expectation of a long-term dependency on the other party.

**Compromiser**
Cai and Fink (2002) describe this style as involving give and take—as a search for the middle ground. This method assumes that it is necessary for both sides to accept some losses. The compromiser will seek to find a mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies the parties involved.

**Accommodator**
The accommodator's main concern is to maintain the interpersonal relationship at all costs (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001). Accommodators have little or no concern for their own personal goals and are willing to sacrifice them in order to maintain the relationship. Accommodators behave co-operatively in an attempt to smooth things over with the other party, often creating a lose/win situation where the accommodator yields in order to reduce conflict.

**Controller**
The Controller does whatever is necessary to ensure that their personal goals are met. Controllers are not concerned about maintaining a relationship and lack concern for the other parties' goals and needs. They do not accept the possibility of two winners (Katz & Lawyer, 1992). Winning is associated with status, competence, and power. Forceful tactics such as threats and a refusal to modify their position are used to win.

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Avoider
This form of conflict management avoids confrontation. Avoiding usually occurs when the benefit in pursuing the conflict is small or because the other party is unlikely to cooperate (Cai & Fink, 2002) or when it is hoped that the conflict will go away if ignored (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986).

Several studies support the notion that people develop stable methods of dealing with conflict (Folger et al., 2001; Gormly & Johnson, 1972; Jones & Melcher, 1982; Sternberg & Soriano, 1984). Despite these findings, there is also evidence to suggest that people have the capacity to change and modify their conflict resolution styles to suit particular situations and circumstances (Folger et al., 2001; Papa & Natalie, 1989; Phillips & Chesterton, 1979; Sillars, 1980).

Polkinghorn and Byrne (2001) conducted research into conflict resolution styles across four major conflict zones—South Africa, Israel, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Northern Ireland—using a sample of 384 university students who were living in stressful and violent environments amid enduring ethnic and religious conflict. Katz and Lawyer’s (1992) Conflict Styles Inventory Test and a shortened version of Lieber’s (1994) Conflict, Violence and Peacemaking: What’s Your Opinion? were administered to the participants. In their study, religion contributed statistically significant, observable differences to an individual’s reported choice of conflict resolution style. Most participants preferred the more socially desirable approaches to conflict of accommodator and compromiser. However, Muslim participants from Bosnia preferred the avoiding method.

In 2002, Cai and Fink investigated cross-cultural differences in conflict resolution styles using 188 university graduate student subjects from 31 different countries who were living in the United States. Using Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions (1980), participants from countries such as China, Japan, and the Middle East were classified as collectivists, while those from the United States and Australia were seen as individualists. Contrary to past research and the study’s hypotheses, more individualists than collectivists were found to prefer the avoiding style. Collaborating and compromising styles were favoured more by collectivists. There was no significant difference in preference for the controlling and accommodating styles.

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Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda (1996) examined the impact of culture on conflict handling in the Middle East and the United States. Participants from the Middle East were male and followers of the Islamic religion, while those from the United States were predominantly Christian and of mixed gender. Results from this study indicated that business executives from the Middle East used more of a collaborating and avoiding style in handling interpersonal conflict, while the executives from the USA preferred an accommodating, controlling, or compromising style.

Ohbuchi et al. (1999) compared the conflict management tactics of university students aged between 18 and 29 from the United States and Japan. Those participants from the collectivist culture of Japan preferred avoidance tactics in conflict. Participants from the individualist US culture were more assertive, controlling, and active in their approach to conflict. These results supported the findings of Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda (1996).

From these studies, it appears that religion and culture do influence the way in which an individual chooses to handle conflict. It is assumed for the purposes of this study that regularly practising a religion by worshipping and reading the relevant texts influences the way in which individuals live their life and ultimately is reflected in their behaviour.

The study
This study examined conflict resolution style using the five categories outlined above: collaborator, compromiser, avoider, accommodator, and controller. Adoptees of these styles were compared on the variables of religion (Islam and Christianity) and degree of religiosity (practising or non-practising).

We have seen that there is support for the finding that an individual's religion and the way in which they deal with conflict are related. Therefore, the degree of religiosity practised by an individual might be expected to impact significantly upon their preference in conflict resolution style. It was therefore hypothesised that there would be a significant difference in preferred conflict resolution style between practising Christians and practising Muslims, between non-practising Christians and non-practising Muslims, between practising Muslims and non-practising Muslims, and between practising Christians and non-practising Christians.
Method

Participants

One hundred and thirty-one Australian citizens were involved in the study. Seventy-eight (59.5%) participants were male and 53 (40.5%) were female. The participants were separated into five age categories. Table 1 shows the number of participants in each age category.

Table 1
The number of participants in each age category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male Count</th>
<th>Female Count</th>
<th>Total (% of Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the participants in this study worked in professional occupations (38.9%) or were university students (32.1%). The remaining participants comprised those working in administration (8.4%) and sales (11.5%), retirees (5.3%), and housewives/husbands (3.8%). Only those with English as their first language were included in the sample because of the high level of language required for the surveys. Participation was voluntary.

Participants were classified into four groups depending on their responses to the religiosity scale in the questionnaire. Group one comprised 35 practising Christians, 17 males and 18 females, recruited from three different churches on the Gold Coast: Catholic, Uniting, and Lutheran. The second group included 36 non-practising Christians, 17 males and 19 females. The third group was made up of 30 practising Muslims, 23 males and 7 females. Subjects were recruited through the Muslim Students’ Association at Bond University, the Gold Coast Mosque, the Lutwyche Mosque, and the Islamic Society of Brisbane. Difficulty occurred in obtaining an equal gender balance of participants. Only questionnaires completed by males were returned from the Mosques and the Islamic Society. A Muslim student from Bond University aided in seeking out female Muslim participants and, as a result, all female participants in groups 3 and 4 are students. The fourth group consisted of 30 non-practising Muslims, 21 males...
and 9 females. Although participants who classified themselves as non-practising Muslims were difficult to find, the Muslim Students’ Association at Bond University and a student representative helped in locating participants for this group.

Conflict resolution styles were measured using Katz and Lawyer’s (1992) Conflict Styles Inventory Test based on Hall’s (1969) Conflict Management Survey. The Conflict Styles Inventory Test is a 12-item questionnaire that asks participants to number, in preference, five possible solutions to everyday conflict situations. The 12 questions cover a range of conflict situations such as with friends, colleagues, or in a group. Subjective responses are recorded on a zero-to-ten scale, where ‘0’ is ‘not an indication of my typical behaviour’ and ‘10’ is ‘very typical of my normal behaviour’.

Opinions on peacemaking and conflict were measured using a modified version of Lieber’s (1994) ‘Conflict, Violence and Peacemaking: What’s Your Opinion?’ test. This 18-item survey elicits responses from participants concerning their views on conflict, peace, and violence from an international perspective. It uses a Likert scale where ‘1’ is ‘strongly agree’ and ‘5’ is ‘strongly disagree’. Following a pilot test, items that negatively affected the questionnaire’s internal reliability were removed, reducing the questionnaire to six items. Participants provided information on their gender, Australian citizenship (this was included so that the study could maintain the criterion of representing the Australian society), age group, first language (this demographic was selected due to the high level of English needed to complete the Conflict Styles Inventory Test), and occupation. A five-item scale measured a participant’s degree of practice of their religion. On recommendation from representatives from the Muslim and Christian communities, the questions ask specifically how much an individual practised their religion. All participants who responded with ‘regularly’ to all three of the questions were classified as practising and those participants who responded with ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ have been classified as non-practising.

A contact person at each organisation distributed the questionnaires. Participants were advised that their participation was voluntary. Participants returned completed questionnaires in a sealed envelope to a box held at the reception of each organisation for two weeks.

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Results
Initially, 142 surveys were returned. From these, 11 responses were removed because English was not the respondent’s first language or questionnaires were incomplete. The final sample of 131 questionnaires fulfilled the required number of participants for the study to have sufficient power to detect significant effects.

Data analyses were conducted using SPSS. An alpha level of .05 was used in all statistical significance decisions.

The Conflict Styles Inventory
Because of the low number of cells available for analysis, the initial categories of conflict style were combined from five to three. The styles of compromiser and collaborator were kept separate and the remaining three categories of controller, accommodator, and avoider were combined to create a category called ‘Other’. These latter three styles had a low response rate from participants. Past research has shown that the avoider and controller styles are less attractive character traits to claim (Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001).

Table 2
Preferences in conflict style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Practising Muslim</th>
<th>Non-practising Muslim</th>
<th>Practising Christian</th>
<th>Non-practising Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborator</td>
<td>6 (20)</td>
<td>18* (60)</td>
<td>23* (65.7)</td>
<td>26* (72.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromiser</td>
<td>19* (63.3)</td>
<td>6 (20)</td>
<td>6 (17.1)</td>
<td>5 (13.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5 (16.7)</td>
<td>20 (20)</td>
<td>6 (17.1)</td>
<td>5 (13.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Participants</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Other = avoider, accommodator and controller.
Note. * denotes significance at (p<.05) level.

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Table 2 presents the results from chi-square tests conducted to examine each of the study's four hypotheses. Hypothesis one, that there would be a significant difference in preferred conflict style between practising Christians and practising Muslims was supported ($\chi^2(2) = 16.530$, $p<0.0001$). Practising Christians preferred the collaborator style, while practising Muslims preferred the compromiser style.

Hypothesis two, that a significant difference in preferred conflict style would be found between non-practising Christians and non-practising Muslims, was not supported ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.100$, $p>0.577$). Both groups preferred the collaborator style.

Hypothesis three, that there would be a significant difference in preferred conflict style between practising Muslims and non-practising Muslims, was supported ($\chi^2 (2) = 15.705$, $p<0.0001$). Practising Muslims preferred the compromiser style, while non-practising Muslims preferred the collaborator style.

Hypothesis four, that there would be a significant difference in preferred conflict resolution style between practising Christians and non-practising Christians, was not supported ($\chi^2 (2) = .351$, $p>0.839$). Practising Christians and non-practising Christians both preferred the collaborator style of conflict resolution.

For the purposes of this study, only six items derived after the pilot test of Lieber's (1994) scale—'Conflict, Violence and Peacemaking: What's Your Opinion?'—were used. The five-point Likert scale was compressed into three categories: agree, neither agree nor disagree, and disagree.

Responses to item one were found to be significantly affected by an individual's religion ($\chi^2 (6) = 16.658$, $p<0.011$). Practising Christians were the only group to disagree with the statement that the world would be a better place without conflict. Responses to item three were also significantly affected by an individual's religion ($\chi^2 (6) = 40.362$, $p<0.0001$). Non-practising Muslims agreed with the statement, 'all conflict can be avoided', whereas the other three groups disagreed.

Participants were asked if peace was the absence of violence. Responses to this item were not significantly affected by an individual's religion ($\chi^2 (6) = 18.869$, $p>0.27$). Practising Muslims and non-practising Christians agreed with the statement, while non-practising Muslims and practising Christians neither agreed nor disagreed with it. Responses to the question, 'peace is the absence of conflict', produced a significant
difference \( (x^2 (6) = 32.659, p<0.0001) \). Practising Christians were the only group to disagree with this statement; the other three groups all agreed.

A significant difference was found for the question that asked participants if the first step towards violence is the refusal to listen \( (x^2 (6) = 16.934, p<0.01) \). Non-practising Muslims disagreed with this statement, while the other three groups agreed. The final question analysed asked if ‘fighting and violence are learned at home before the acts are taken to the street’. No significant difference was found \( (x^2 (6) = 12.471, p>.052) \). A summary of the cross-tabulated results from all six analyses is in Table 3.

**Discussion**

Religious affiliation and its relationship with conflict resolution style

Two conflict resolution styles featured strongly in the participants’ responses: collaborator and compromiser. The collaborator style involves maintaining the interpersonal relationship with the conflicting party as well as ensuring that both the parties’ needs are met. The collaborator is not only concerned with self-interest, but with the other parties’ needs as well (Katz & Lawyer, 1992). On the other hand, the compromiser style is associated with a search for the middle ground and it involves give and take. Cai and Fink (2002) suggest that those who adopt this style assume that a win/win situation is impossible and that it is therefore necessary to accept less than what they want. Practising Christians preferred the collaborator style and practising Muslims preferred the compromiser style. This difference in Australian practising Muslims could be a reflection of their minority status in that less dominant groups have to ‘fit in’ more with the dominant culture and thus become practised at compromising.

Unlike previous research in the area, this study categorised participants as either practising or non-practising their religion. It was argued that there would be a significant difference in preferred conflict resolution style between non-practising Christians and non-practising Muslims. The results did not support this hypothesis as non-practising Christians and non-practising Muslims showed the same preference for the collaborator style.

Another hypothesis claimed that there would be a significant difference in preferred conflict style between practising Muslims and non-practising Muslims. The results supported this hypothesis. Practising Muslims preferred the compromiser style of conflict, while
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Count)</td>
<td>(Count)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practising Muslims</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>Non-practising Muslims</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>19*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practising Christians</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-practising Christians</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. * denotes significant results at (p<.05) level.
non-practising Muslims preferred the collaborator style. This suggests that the level of practice of Islam by Muslims significantly impacts upon their conflict resolution style preference.

It was similarly hypothesised that there would be a significant difference between practising Christians and non-practising Christians. The results did not support this hypothesis. Both practising and non-practising Christians reported a preference for the collaborator style. Unlike the Muslim participants in this study, level of practice by Christians has no significant bearing upon their conflict style preference.

The results from this study regarding the Christian participants are consistent with those from Polkinghorn and Byrne’s study (2001) of Christian individuals in four countries: Bosnia, Israel, South Africa, and Ireland, in which Christians showed a preference for the collaborator style.

However, past research has shown mixed results in terms of conflict resolution style preference and the religion of Islam. Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda (1996) found that Muslim executives from the Middle East preferred the Collaborator style. Participants in that study were powerful businessmen in a majority Muslim society. The level of power and their majority status in the culture of these participants may have influenced these results. Polkinghorn and Byrne (2001) stated that a large percentage of Muslims from Bosnia showed a preference for the avoiding style of conflict resolution. Once again, the social and political context of Bosnia at the time may have influenced how Muslims in this country chose to handle conflict.

In the light of these studies, it appears that, in different social environments, members of different religions will prefer different methods of handling conflict. Christians have shown a preference for the collaborator style and this is consistent with Christians in other countries (Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001). In Australia, Christianity is the predominant religion (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001), while Australian Muslims form a minority religious group. Their preference for the compromiser style may be a reflection of their minority status in Australia.

**Conflict, violence, and peacemaking: What's your opinion?**

Question one asked participants if the world would be a better place without conflict. Practising Christians were significantly different in their response to this statement compared with the three other groups:
non-practising Christians, practising Muslims, and non-practising Muslims. Practising Christians disagreed that the world would be a better place without conflict, while the other three groups agreed with the statement. Another question asked if all conflict could be avoided. Non-practising Muslims answered affirmatively, while all other groups disagreed. The results suggest that practising Christians accept conflict as an inevitable part of life and as a means of moving forwards. This is consistent with their preference for the collaborator style, in which conflict is seen as an opportunity for both conflicting parties to achieve their goals.

There was no significant difference between participants in their response to the statement 'peace is the absence of violence'. The final question concerning peacemaking asked if peace was the absence of conflict. Practising Christians disagreed with this statement. Practising Muslims, non-practising Muslims, and non-practising Christians agreed that peace is the absence of conflict. Results from these questions suggest that the four religious groups define peace differently. Practising Muslims define peace as the absence of violence and conflict. This is consistent with their preference for the compromiser style of conflict that sees conflict as negative, since a win/win situation is impossible.

Another question asked participants if the first step towards violence was the refusal to listen. Non-practising Muslims disagreed with this statement, which was significantly different from the responses of the other three groups, who all agreed. Finally, there was no significant difference in the responses to the question that asked if fighting and violence were learnt at home before the acts are taken to the street. There was no significant difference in the responses across the three response categories.

The results of this study support past research insofar as they show that religious affiliation does significantly affect an individual's preference in conflict resolution style. As expected, in most conflict resolution style research, the more socially desirable styles of collaborator and compromiser were claimed more than the less socially desirable styles of controller and avoider.

Considering the current social climate of Australia and the conflict in Iraq, further insight into how different religions solve conflict is of extreme importance. This knowledge aids in greater understanding of the 'other party', whether you are Muslim or Christian. Ultimately, greater understanding is hoped to contribute to peace. This study
has contributed Australian data to the limited body of knowledge surrounding the concepts of religion and conflict resolution. As a result, there are future research opportunities for this area of study.

References


Henderson, G. (2003, May 20). Beware, we are all targets now. The Age [Melbourne], p. 11.


