Aggression and emotions: cultural and individual differences

Dahamat Azam, M.N.B.

CHAPTER 6

COPING STRATEGIES AND FRIENDSHIP QUALITY: THE MODERATING ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL CLOSENESS AND COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

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ABSTRACT

Best friends can be worse when having conflicts, but do their cultural backgrounds act as risk factors? The present study examined the relationships between coping strategies and positive or negative friendship quality in a sample of Dutch and Malaysian adolescents, and the moderating role of cultural values in these relationships. The sample comprised 535 young adolescents aged 12 to 14 years old who completed self-report questionnaires measuring friendship quality, and coping strategies of approach, avoidance and maladaptive, as well as interpersonal closeness. The bivariate correlation analyses showed similarities and also some differences between the two samples. Further analysis with two hierarchical regression analyses revealed that interpersonal closeness moderated the relationship between negative friendship and avoidance and maladaptive strategies, whereas country of origin moderated the relationship between positive friendship and approach strategy, and between negative friendship and avoidance strategies. Implication of the findings and recommendations for future research were provided.

Friendship is an essential part of teenagers' social lives. Friendship provides the opportunity to form a reliable alliance with those who have similar interests, to receive support when needed, and to serve as a medium to share ideas and beliefs (Berndt, 1982). Moreover, these positive friendship qualities and the bond between peers create a unique sense of belonging that their parents cannot provide (Duck, 2002; Kobak, Rosenthal, Zajac, & Madsen, 2007). As such, friendships play a crucial role in the development of social identity (Doumen et al., 2012; Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002). Friendships also influence youngsters' well-being and mental health. Adolescents with positive friendships tend to be more socially and emotionally competent, have higher self-esteem and perform better at school than those without these friendship qualities (Hiatt, Laursen, Mooney, & Rubin, 2015; Kiuru et al., 2012; Waldrip, Malcolm, & Jensen-Campbell, 2008). In addition, having positive friendship qualities is related to less psychological distress (e.g., loneliness, anxiety, and depression) (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Parker & Asher, 1993; Schrepferman, Snyder, & Stropes, 2006) and behavioral problems (e.g., bullying and victimization (Bollmer, Milich, Harris, & Maras, 2005; Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand, & Amatya, 1999).

However, not all friendships are positive: Some friendships have negative qualities, including jealousy, dominance, interpersonal conflict, or betrayal (Adams & Laursen, 2007; Berndt, 2004). Research shows that having negative friendship qualities is related to a decrease in enjoyment and engagement in school (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996), and an increase in antisocial and delinquent behaviors (Kupersmidt, Burchinal, & Patterson, 1995), victimization, and social anxiety (Erath, Flanagan, Bierman, & Tu, 2010).

Why do some youngsters develop friendship with positive qualities, while others develop friendships with negative qualities? Prior work suggests that it matters how youngsters deal with their emotions in social situations (Reavis, Donohue, & Upchurch, 2015; von Salisch, 2018). As children grow and develop, they must learn to cope with the intensity of their emotions in ways that are socially acceptable. For example, while it is tolerated to throw a temper tantrum as a toddler, this is usually unacceptable in adolescence. However, what is considered socially acceptable varies cross-culturally (De Leersnyder, Boiger, & Mesquita, 2013; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). To date, the majority of studies that have examined the relationships between emotional coping and friendships have been conducted in Western countries. The aim of the present study was therefore to bring the field forward by considering cultural factors when examining the relationships between emotion coping strategies in social conflict situations and friendship qualities. Specifically, we took into account culture on a country-level (by comparing adolescents from a typical individualistic and a typical collectivistic country: Dutch and Malaysian adolescents, respectively) and on an individual-level (by assessing the moderating effect of the perceived interpersonal closeness between self and others).

Coping with conflicts and friendship quality in Western adolescents

Regardless of the quality of the friendships, conflicts between friends occur. Indeed, adolescents experience approximately one disagreement per week with their friends (Noakes & Rinaldi, 2006; Raffaelli, 1997). These conflicts can range from mild disagreements to larger arguments that may be difficult or impossible to reconcile. Conflict between friends is not necessarily a bad thing: It can also provide a possibility to learn or improve important social skills, such as enhancing problem-solving and negotiation skills, which can be used to settle disagreements in later life (Adams & Laursen, 2007; Laursen, 1993; Nelson & Aboud, 1985). Nevertheless, conflict often coincides with the experience of intense negative emotions, and coping with the emotions that arise during a conflict situation is a challenging developmental task.

Early in childhood, children are confronted with the need to regulate their emotions to satisfy the expectations of their social context. Over time, the strategies they use to cope with conflict and the intensity of emotions behind it become increasingly sophisticated and advanced as their cognitive and social skills mature (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Many years of research in Western societies suggests that the utilization of children's coping strategies is related to the quality of their friendships (Spencer, Bowker, Rubin, Booth-LaForce, & Laursen, 2013). These coping strategies can be grouped into three categories: approach, avoidant and maladaptive.

Approach coping is the most common coping strategy in Western cultures (Eschenbeck, Kohlmann, & Lohaus, 2007), and refers to active attempts to resolve the conflict, including confronting the friend directly and seeking social support to talk about what happened (Wright, Banerjee, Hoek, Rieffe, & Novin, 2010). Children who use more approach coping strategies when resolving conflicts tend to have friendships with more positive friendship qualities (Flynn, Felmlee, Shu, & Conger, 2018; Shin & Ryan, 2012). They often make gestures, such as asking for forgiveness and making amends, to maintain positive and continuous relationships with peers (Stuewig, Tangney, Heigel, Harty, & McCloskey, 2010; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007).

In contrast, avoidant strategies refer to the attempt to withdraw from the situation, including walking away from the conflict and seeking distraction (cognitively or behaviorally) (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Wright et al., 2010). The use of avoidant strategies, such as withdrawal, is also related to positive friendship qualities, especially when this strategy is used for peaceful conflict resolution (Björkvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 2000). It is possible that this allows for more time to calm down and relax, thus preventing a person from acting out strongly and making the conflict worse (Rieffe et al., 2018; Rieffe, De Bruin, De Rooij, & Stockmann, 2014). Interestingly, some studies also show that avoidant strategies are also related to friendships with negative qualities (Spencer et al., 2013). Though it remains empirically unclear in what circumstances avoidant strategies are harmful for the social relationship, it is plausible that in some conflict situations, withdrawing from or ignoring the conflict may also worsen the situation.

The above studies indicate that Western adolescents who can regulate their emotions using either approach or avoidant strategies are often successful in minimizing peer conflicts, thus encouraging positive friendship qualities. The third category of coping strategies are maladaptive strategies, which refer to internalizing behaviors, including ruminating and worrying, and externalizing behaviors, including hitting and screaming. Yet, internalizing or externalizing one's emotions may disrupt interpersonal relationships, as emotions can run high in those cases, which could potentially put an end to a friendship (Hammen, 2006; Hektner, August, & Realmuto, 2000).

Cultural Differences

While friendships are experienced and valued across nations (French, Pidada, & Victor, 2005), many features are culturally influenced, including what is considered as being the core characteristics of friendship, the frequency of conflicts with a friend, and how to deal with these conflicts when they arise (Benjamin, Schneider, Greenman, & Hum, 2001; González, Moreno, & Schneider, 2004; Gummerum & Keller, 2008). All cultures have their own set of prominent values and norms, which can directly or indirectly influence the way adolescents interact with their friends. In cross-cultural literature, the most widely known and frequently used distinction is between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In collectivistic cultures, such as in East Asian countries, individuals typically view themselves as being interdependent (i.e., someone who fits with and is closely related to close others) and highly endorse group-oriented values (e.g., social harmony, similarity, and conformity;Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1995). In individualistic cultures, such as in Western countries, individuals typically view themselves as being independent (i.e., someone who stands out, is separated from others and highly endorses individual-oriented values (e.g., autonomy, self-determination, self-reliance; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995).

In line with these differences in interpersonal closeness and salient values, adolescents from collectivistic cultures more frequently consider their friendships to be built upon supportive, harmonious and non-confrontational relationships, and report fewer conflicts than those from individualistic cultures (Benjamin, Schneider, Greenman, & Hum, 2001; French, Rianasari, Pidada, Nelwan, & Buhrmester, 2001; Zhang et al., 2013). When conflicts occur, comparisons between adolescents from East Asian and Western countries show that East Asian adolescents are more likely to use avoidant coping strategies, through disengaging or reacting submissively, whereas adolescents from Western countries opt for an approach strategy more often, such as confronting the peer (French, Pidada, Denoma, McDonald, & Lawton, 2005; Haar & Krahé, 1999; Novin, Rieffe, Banerjee, Miers, & Cheung, 2011). More importantly, in one particular study, Chinese adolescents thought that avoiding a confrontation would evoke more positive reactions from their peer. The Dutch adolescents in this study, however, opted more often for a confrontation, yet were also less expectant

of a positive reaction. Unfortunately, the long-term effects on the quality of their friendships was not measured in this study (Novin et al., 2011). Based on the available studies to date, these outcomes suggest that approach strategies seem to match the *separate* self-other view and individual-oriented values, as typically seen in individualistic cultures, that also stress the importance of speaking up for oneself. Yet, avoidant strategies might be a better match for the *close* self-other view and group-oriented values, as typically seen in collectivistic cultures, which stress the importance of social harmony.

While interesting, these studies do not provide insight into if and how individuals from various countries differ in what it means to use these coping styles for friendship qualities in adolescents. Moreover, these between-country comparisons do not provide insight into the underlying mechanisms that drive the observed differences. The differences in coping strategies between adolescents from Eastern and Western countries seem to reflect interpersonal closeness and salient cultural values, but since it has not yet been tested, we can only make assumptions. Therefore, a more systematic examination of what might underlie cultural differences is necessary.

Present Study

The general aim of this study was to examine the relations between coping strategies (i.e., approach, avoidance, and maladaptive) and positive and negative friendship qualities in adolescents from a cultural perspective. We examined the possible influences of culture in two ways: 1) on a country level by comparing adolescents from a typical individualistic (the Netherlands) and a typical collectivistic country (Malaysia) and 2) on an individual level by considering interpersonal closeness as an underlying mechanism that could explain between group differences.

We first predicted that coping strategy and friendship quality would be moderated by country. Based on earlier studies (French, Pidada, Denoma, et al., 2005; Xu, Farver, Chang, Yu, & Zhang, 2006), avoidant coping may be more strongly related to positive friendship qualities in Malaysian than in Dutch adolescents. In contrast, approach coping may be more strongly related to positive friendship qualities in Dutch than Malaysian adolescents. We expected maladaptive coping to be related to a similar degree to negative friendship qualities in the two countries.

Second, we predicted that the levels of interpersonal closeness between friends would moderate the relationships between coping style and friendship quality, thus providing insight into the underlying reason why the groups from the two countries may differ. Specifically, we predicted that avoidant coping would be more strongly related to more positive friendship qualities in adolescents who perceived themselves as being close to their friends. This is because individuals who feel very close to their friends may use avoidance strategies to keep their friendship positive and enduring (Novin et al., 2011), as this would strengthen social harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995). Moreover, we expected that approach coping would be related to more positive friendship qualities in adolescents who

viewed themselves as being more separate from their friends, as they value honesty and speaking up for oneself as important characteristics (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995).

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

A total of 535 adolescents between 12 and 14 years old from four secondary schools in the Netherlands (n = 251; 53.4% girls; M_{age} = 13.90, SD = 0.57) and three secondary schools in Malaysia (n = 284; 52.5% girls; M_{age} = 13.09, SD = 0.58) participated in the study during school hours. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from all organizations and individuals involved. In Malaysia, the government authorities (i.e. Department of Prime Minister through it Economic Planning Unit (EPU), and the Ministry of Education Malaysia) granted us permission to conduct this study at selected national (public) schools. In the Netherlands, ethical approval was granted by the Psychological Ethics Committee of Leiden University. In addition, consent was obtained from the school principals or their assistants (in both countries), the parents or caregivers (only in the Netherlands), and all participants (in both countries) before we started data collection. All participants were thanked and debriefed about the purpose of the study after the completion of data collection.

Measures

The Best Friend Index (Kouwenberg, Rieffe, & Banerjee, 2013) is an 18-item questionnaire that assesses positive (e.g., "My friend makes me feel I do nice things" and "I turn to my best friend for support with personal problems") and negative friendship qualities (e.g., "I am jealous towards my friend" and "My friend says mean things about me to others"). Participants are asked about their best friend (i.e., the availability and name of best friend) before responding to the items on a 3-point scale (1 = *almost never* to 3 = *often*).

Coping Scale (Wright et al., 2010) is a 29-item self-report scale that assesses how children and adolescents cope with bad situations. Three coping strategies are measured using this scale: (a) approach coping (e.g., ''I get help from someone in my family'' and ''I do something to change the situation''), (b) avoidance coping (e.g., ''I find lots of other things to think about'' and ''I ignore the problem'') and (c) maladaptive coping (e.g., ''I stamp my feet and slam or bang doors I'' and ''I worry that others will think badly of me''). These items are rated from 1 = *almost never* to 5 = *always*.

The Inclusion of Others in the Self (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) assesses interpersonal closeness by showing seven Venn diagrams of two same-size circles. One circle represents the self and the other another person. The diagrams range from 1 (two circles next to each other) to 7 (two circles almost completely overlapping). In this study, we assessed closeness with friends. The item asked "Which picture represents the relationship between you and your friends best?" (1= *circles next to each other*, 7= *circles almost completely overlapping*).

Table 1 presents the psychometric properties of the measures for the total sample and for each country group. Overall, all measures showed adequate internal consistency reliability (.68 < α < .94).

Translation Procedure

All measures were translated from English to Malay for the purpose of this study with permission from the authors. The Malay-translations were back-translated to English by a bilingual translator. The original and back-translated versions were compared and checked for language consistency.

Statistical Analyses

Firstly, correlation analyses were performed to examine the relationships between coping strategies (approach, avoidance and maladaptive) and interpersonal closeness with friendship qualities. All scores were centered around the mean score per country (Andela & Truchot, 2017; Krause & Hayward, 2016). Subsequently, we applied Fisher's r-to-z transformations to test whether correlations differed in strength between the Dutch and Malaysian samples.

Next, to examine the moderating effect of interpersonal closeness and country of origin on the relationships between coping strategies and friendship qualities, we conducted two separate hierarchical regression analyses. In each analysis, our control

Table 1. Psychometric properties of the questionnaires for friendship qualities, coping skills, and interpersonal closeness for the total, Dutch and Malaysian sample

	No. of items	*Response range*	Cronbach's α			*M (SD)*			T
			Total	Dutch (*n* = 251)	Malaysian (*n* = 283)	Total	Dutch (*n* = 251)	Malaysian (*n* = 283)	
Friendship Quality									
Positive	9	1 – 5	.84	.78	.81	3.69 (.75)	4.05 (0.55)	3.37 (0.76)	11.91**
Negative	9	1 – 5	.84	.74	.83	1.90 (.73)	1.57 (0.45)	2.18 (0.80)	-10.95**
Coping									
Approach	11	1 – 5	.85	.89	.82	2.96 (.79)	3.06 (0.83)	2.87 (0.74)	2.70*
Avoidance	10	1 – 5	.80	.79	.81	2.64 (.74)	2.70 (0.71)	2.58 (0.75)	1.96
Maladaptive	8	1 – 5	.76	.68	.78	2.15 (.75)	1.91 (0.62)	2.36 (0.80)	-7.44**
Interpersonal Closeness	1	1 – 7	-	-	-	5.59 (1.37)	5.61 (1.24)	5.57 (1.48)	.32

*p < .01; **p < .001
Note: The t-values represent between country comparisons on the mean levels for each variable.

variables (gender: -1 = boy, 1 = girl; and centered participants' age), and the centered scores of approach-, avoidance-, and maladaptive-coping strategies were entered in the first model. The centered score for interpersonal closeness was entered in the second model. In the third model, we entered all two-way interactions for the three coping strategies with interpersonal closeness or country of origin (-1=Netherlands, 1 = Malaysia).

Missing Data Analysis

To determine the proportion and pattern of our missing data, a missing value analysis was conducted prior to data analysis. The non-significant value of the Little's MCAR test (χ^2 = 6.83, DF = 9, p = .653) indicated that the missing data were missing completely at random. Considering that the amount of missing data was small (1.50% of the incomplete cases, and only 0.37% of the values were left unfilled), complete case analysis (*list-wise deletion*) was employed for all further analyses.

RESULTS

Coping, interpersonal closeness, and friendship quality

Table 2 shows the relationships between coping strategies and interpersonal closeness with friendship qualities. In regards to positive friendship: Approach coping, maladaptive coping and interpersonal closeness were positively related to positive friendship quality in both samples. Avoidance coping was related to more positive friendships, but only in Malaysian participants. In regards to negative friendship quality, all three coping strategies were positively related to negative friendships in Malaysian participants, but only maladaptive coping was related to more negative

Table 2. Pearson correlation coefficients of approach, maladaptive and avoidance coping skills and interpersonal closeness on friendship qualities

	Coping Strategy			Interpersonal Close-ness
	Approach	Maladaptive	Avoidance	
Positive Friendship				
Dutch	.37***	.12**	-.03	.41***
Malaysian	.42***	.21***	.31***	.12*
Z value	-0.76	-1.04	-4.00***	3.56***
Negative Friendship				
Dutch	-.00	.37***	-.04	-.17**
Malaysian	.21***	.47***	.37***	-.00
Z value	-2.46*	-1.39	-4.87***	-1.96

*p < 0.05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Note: The z-values are based on Fisher's r-to-z transformations of the correlation coefficients between the Dutch and Malaysian samples. A positive Z-value indicates that the strength of correlations is higher in Dutch sample than the Malaysian sample, and a negative Z-value indicates vice versa.

friendships in Dutch participants. Interpersonal closeness to friends was related to less negative friendships in Dutch participants only. Supplementary Table 1 shows the correlations between variables in more detail.

Further analysis with Fisher's r-to-z transformation showed that the correlation between avoidance coping and positive friendship was stronger in Malaysian participants than in Dutch participants (z = -4.00, p = .000). Yet, a stronger correlation between interpersonal closeness to friends and positive friendship (z = 3.56, p = .000) in Dutch participants, in comparison to their Malaysian peers, was also evident. In regards to negative friendship, the correlations between approach- and avoidance coping with negative friendship were stronger in Malaysian than Dutch participants ($z_{approach}$ = -2.46, p = .014; $z_{avoidance}$ = -4.87, p = .000).

Table 3 presents the results of the regression analyses on positive and negative friendship qualities. The analysis with positive friendship as the dependent variable showed that being female and having higher levels of interpersonal closeness to friends were related to positive friendship. Furthermore, country of origin interacted with levels of approach coping. As shown in Figure 1, higher levels of approach coping were related to more positive friendships in both samples, but the effects were more pronounced in Malaysian (B = .37; p = .000) than Dutch participants (B = .20; p = .000).

Table 3. Regression analyses of age, gender, coping strategies, and interpersonal closeness on friendship qualities

Predictor	Positive Friendship				Negative Friendship			
	B	*SE B*	*p*	R^2 /ΔR^2	B	*SE B*	*p*	R^2 /ΔR^2
Model 1				.18/ .18***				.22/ .22***
Age	.03	.05	.589		.04	.05	.423	
Gender	.11	.03	.000		-.05	.03	.058	
APP	.29	.04	.000		-.07	.04	.070	
MAL	.01	.04	.726		.40	.04	.000	
AVO	.07	.04	.089		.13	.04	.001	
Model 2				.21/ .03***				.22/ .00
CLOSE	.09	.02	.000		-.03	.02	.175	
Model 3				.23/ .02*				.25/ .03**
APP x CLOSE	-.01	.03	.637		-.07	.03	.026	
MAL x CLOSE	-.01	.03	.674		.09	.03	.004	
AVO x CLOSE	.03	.03	.275		-.00	.03	.908	
APP x CNTY	.09	.04	.032		-.06	,04	.122	
MAL x CNTY	.00	.04	.958		.05	.04	.233	
AVO x CNTY	.07	.04	.095		.11	.04	.004	

*p < 0.05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficients; *SE* = Standard Error; p = significant value; Δ R^2 = change in R^2 value; CNTY = Country; APP= Approach coping; AVO=Avoidance coping; MAL= Maladaptive coping; CLOSE=Closeness to Friends.

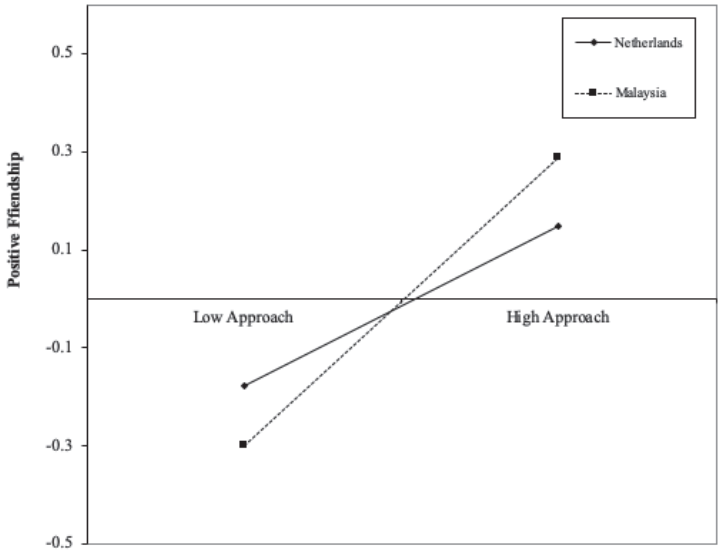

Figure 1. The moderating effect of country of origin on the relationship between approach coping and positive friendship

The analysis with negative friendship as the dependent variable showed that maladaptive and avoidant coping were related to more negative friendships in model 1. Although interpersonal closeness to friends was not significantly related to negative friendship, its interactions with approach and maladaptive coping were significant (Model 3). As shown in Figure 2, higher levels of approach coping were related to less

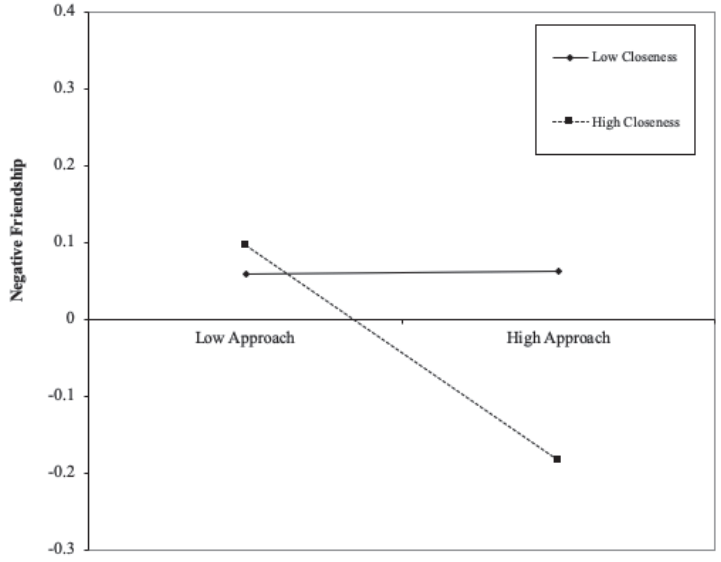

Figure 2. The moderating effect of closeness to friends on the relationship between approach coping and negative friendship

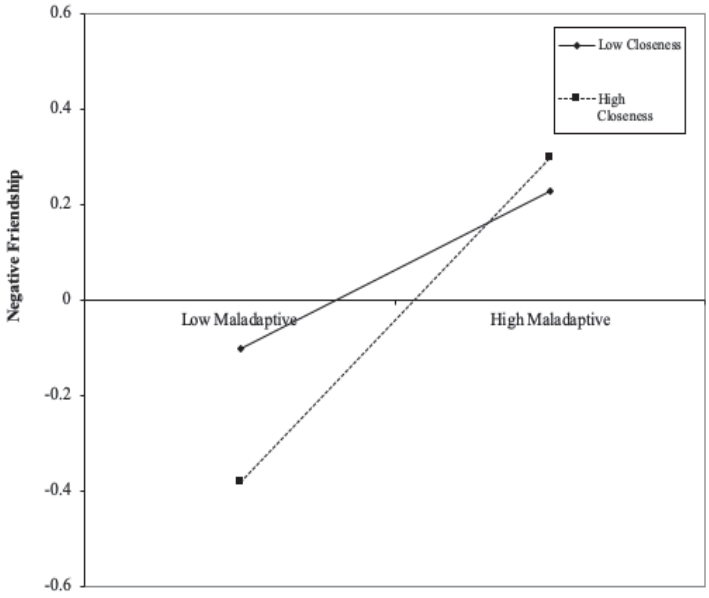

Figure 3. The moderating effect of closeness to friends on the relationship between maladaptive coping and negative friendship

negative friendship qualities in participants who rated their interpersonal closeness as higher (B = -.18. p =.001), but no effect was found for participants who had lower interpersonal closeness with friends (B = .00; p = .964). Furthermore, though higher levels of maladaptive coping were related to more negative friendships in participants

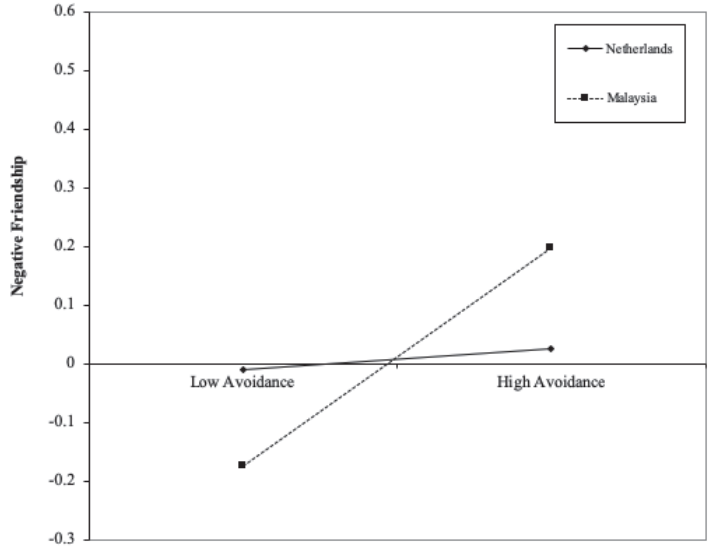

Figure 4. The moderating effect of country of origin on the relationship between avoidance coping and negative friendship

who had high and low levels of interdependence with friends (Figure 3), the effects were more pronounced in participants who were higher in interpersonal closeness (B = .47. p =.000) than participants who were lower (B = .23; p =.000).

As well as this, country of origin interacted with the levels of avoidant coping in Model 3. As shown in Figure 4, higher levels of avoidance were related to more negative friendships in Malaysian participants (B = .25. p =.000), while no effect was found for Dutch participants (B = .02; p = .704).

DISCUSSION

Conflicts in peer relationships are inevitable. The question is how adolescents deal with these conflicts, and whether these strategies strengthen or jeopardize the friendship. Negative emotions can arise during a conflict, but there are different methods of coping with these emotions to keep the situation under control. To date, most studies that have focussed on how different coping strategies can affect friendship quality have been performed in Western countries. It is yet unclear as to what extent these patterns differ from those in East Asian countries, such as Malaysia in particular, and if so, why. These two gaps were the focus of our study.

In general, our findings seem to share similarities with previous research conducted in Western countries, but also showed many unexpected findings regarding the current literature on East Asian countries. That is, approach coping was related to more positive friendship qualities for adolescents in both countries, and it was also related to fewer negative friendship qualities when there was also a high level of interpersonal closeness among the friends. In fact, the relationship between approach strategies and positive friendship was even stronger in Malaysian than in Dutch youths. Despite our expectations, we found that avoidant coping was not beneficial to the relationship. First, avoidant coping was unrelated to positive friendship qualities, but second, it was even related to more negative friendship qualities in Malaysian youth. Furthermore, the relationship between avoidant strategies and friendship quality was unaffected by interpersonal closeness. Lastly, maladaptive coping was examined, and though it was unrelated to positive friendship features for both samples, higher levels were – as expected – related to more negative friendship qualities, especially when relationships were also high on closeness.

Interpersonal closeness is often taken in the literature as an indication of a stronger collectivistic orientation. That is, higher self-other closeness is expected to reflect a higher degree of interdependence and a stronger focus on collectivistic values, such as social harmony and conformity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). A more separate self-other is expected to reflect a higher degree of independence, and a stronger focus on individualistic values, such as autonomy and speaking up for oneself (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Regarding approach coping, the outcomes for the Malaysian group seem to match those with higher self-other closeness. Yet, no overlap between country differences and interpersonal closeness was found regarding avoidant and maladaptive strategies, indicating that interpersonal closeness cannot be considered

as being an underlying mechanism that explains the between-country differences in the relationships between coping and friendship qualities.

Moreover, our results seem to only partially fit with the expectations formulated in the Introduction. In fact, the outcomes of this study show that friendships among adolescents from collectivistic cultures in particular, such as Malaysia, or adolescents who are high on interpersonal closeness, benefit from addressing the problem in a peer conflict situation, rather than avoiding or ignoring it. It is possible that Malaysian adolescents have different ways of formulating their concerns in a conflict situation than their Dutch counterparts, who may be more direct and outspoken. The current study examined how often certain strategies were used, but not how they were expressed. A clear outcome of our research was that friendships in an East Asian country, such as Malaysia, improve when interpersonal problems are dealt with. Dutch adolescents, on the other hand, were relatively high on the use of approach strategies, thus the difference in the magnitude of the relationship between approach coping and positive friendship features on a country level may be due to a ceiling effect in the Dutch sample.

Another striking and unexpected finding was that higher levels of interpersonal closeness were related to fewer negative friendship features when approach strategies were used. In other words, close friends also seem to benefit from approaching the problem. Openly discussing interpersonal conflicts may reduce negative aspects, such as rivalry or envy, thereby creating more mutual understanding or respect. Alternatively, lower levels of negative friendship features may lead to more open communication between close friends. Note that this study is cross-sectional, and therefore assumptions about the causality of the identified relationships should be examined in future studies, either experimentally or longitudinally.

This study has strengths that warrant mentioning. Firstly, this study is among the pioneers that address the moderating role of culture on the relationships between coping strategies and friendship qualities. Secondly, we measured cultural factors at a group level (i.e., individualistic vs. collectivistic) and at an individual level (i.e., perceived interpersonal closeness).

Yet, some limitations also warrant acknowledgement. First of all, the selection of one East Asian and one Western country - which we believe represent a collectivistic and an individualistic country, respectively - limits the generalization of our findings. Considering that each country has its own set of values, norms, and rules, it may be difficult to generalize our findings to other populations in East Asia, to other Western countries, or to the rest of the world. Therefore, we suggest that future studies that are interested in replicating our work should include more Western and Eastern countries in order to obtain a more representative sample.

Secondly, as mentioned previously, the cross-sectional nature of our data did not allow for us to establish causal relationships between coping strategies and friendship quality. Although the dependent variables were positive and negative friendship quality, the direction of causality still can be argued. For example, it is also possible

that the negative features of a friendship may influence adolescents' preference to use maladaptive coping strategies, as has been suggested in previous studies (Cillessen, Jiang, West, & Laszkowski, 2005; Kokkinos, Voulgaridou, & Markos, 2016). To address this concern, we call for future research to use a longitudinal or experimental design to examine causal effects and directions between the variables cross-culturally.

Thirdly, our data does not include participants' demographic information. Collecting information on socioeconomic status, such as household income, parental employment and education variables may, for example, provide additional information about whether friendship quality and the selection of coping strategies by adolescents can be influenced by the variation of socioeconomic status within and among different countries.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the limitations, our study is an important step towards understanding the relations between coping strategies, and positive and negative friendships in different cultures. In this study, we found that the directions of the relationships between coping strategies and friendship quality did not differ between Dutch and Malaysian adolescents. Indeed, coping strategies play an important role in predicting the quality of friendship relations in Western adolescents, and this has now also been shown to be the case in East-Asian adolescents, such as in Malaysia. Most importantly and new to the current literature: The quality of adolescents' friendships seem to benefit from addressing, rather than ignoring, the problem in conflict situations, especially in a collectivistic culture or when in friendships rated high on interpersonal closeness. Although we hope that the present study fills an important gap in the literature by gaining insight into friendship quality in young adolescents, and on their association with emotional coping strategies in a Western and an East-Asian cultural sample, this study is only a first attempt to attain a better understanding of these issues. More work is still needed to further deepen our understanding.

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