Keeping Conflicts Latent: "Salient" versus "Non-Salient" Interpersonal Conflict Management Strategies of Japanese

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Abstract: Cross-cultural studies on interpersonal conflict management have revealed that Japanese have a tendency to avoid conflict, preferring non-salient strategies over confronting, salient ones. This study aimed to elaborate on the motives surrounding their non-salient strategy choice, specifically focusing on their intents behind keeping potential conflicts to themselves (i.e., non-salient intents), and how these intents affect their conflict strategy preference. Questionnaires were collected from 309 Japanese university students. Factor analysis revealed two non-salient intents of Considerateness and Avoidance, along with three strategies: Active Non-Salient, Passive Non-Salient and Salient. A model depicting the relationship between non-salient intents and conflict strategies was tested through path analysis, revealing that the Considerateness intent was positively associated with the Active Non-Salient strategy, while negatively associating with Passive Non-Salient strategy. Avoidance intent positively affected the Active Non-Salient, while negatively affecting the Salient strategy. While existing studies have not adequately addressed the differentiation between salient and non-salient conflict strategies, this study proposed a salient—non-salient conflict strategy axis, providing an original account for why people choose to keep a conflict latent. Implications of this new non-salient conflict model were discussed.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, interpersonal conflict, conflict avoidance, Japanese culture

1. Introduction

We have often been faced with situations in which we must decide whether or not to confront our relational partner about an issue that may arise in a conflict. For example, we may think twice about confronting a colleague about his/her habit of fidgeting during a meeting. Of course, we must balance the costs and benefits of making a conflict salient, or just leaving it be. Sometimes, it is in our best interest to avoid confrontation and keep potential conflicts to ourselves.

Studies in the conflict management arena have generally proclaimed that the most effective strategy is a collaborative win-win strategy in which both parties in a conflict seek a constructive and mutually satisfying resolution (Chen, Zhao, Liu & Wu, 2012; Powell & Hickson, 2000; Weider- Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995; Wheeless & Reichel, 1990). At the opposite end of the spectrum, however, is the avoidance strategy, in which individuals are passive, or reluctant about resolving the problem. Avoidance is thought to be a lose-lose strategy, and has been

regarded as the most ineffective way to deal with a conflict (e.g., Wheeless & Reichel, 1990). From a Western individualistic perspective, avoidance is particularly considered detrimental because problems are put up on a shelf to be resolved later over time. However, from a collectivistic viewpoint, avoidance may serve to maintain a harmonious relationship, especially when the relationship is deemed important enough to justify making self-sacrifices (Trubisky, Ting-Toomey & Lin, 1991). Thus, the effectiveness of a conflict management strategy depends on the culture, along with circumstances and relational importance. The present study focuses on conflict avoidance, which by virtue of its proclaimed ineffectiveness, has been relatively shunned by conflict researchers. It attempts to shed a new, positive light on conflict avoidance by examining how the Japanese, who have been noted for their avoidance tendencies (Ohbuchi, 1991), handle their conflict.

While most existing conflict management models include avoidance as a strategy (e.g., Rahim, 1983), it is construed as a reaction to a conflict that has already erupted, hence been made salient, between partners. However, when one party has an issue that s/he has not yet brought up with his/her partner, avoidance is one possible strategy for dealing with the conflict, i.e., just letting things be. Conversely, if s/he cannot remain silent, s/he will use a confronting strategy to let the partner know of his/her discontent, and the conflict, thus, materializes. Leaving a conflict latent, as in the former situation, has been identified to be a very common reaction to interpersonal conflict within the Japanese culture. For instance, Ohbuchi (1991) revealed that 66% of the Japanese, compared to only 27% of the American, prefer to pretend as if nothing is wrong, when they have a clear dissatisfaction toward their partner. From this study, it is quite clear that avoidance is a very important conflict management strategy, at least for the Japanese, and one that deserves more attention than has been given. This is attested by the fact that Japanese children are socialized to avoid conflict. Imai (1990) conducted a content analysis of Japanese and American elementary textbooks, and discovered that Japanese books by far outweighed the importance of harmonious relationships compared to American, while the latter emphasized self-assertion much more than the former. Given these results, it would appear that Japanese learn from an early age to avoid conflict for the sake of interpersonal harmony, while Americans learn to assert themselves more, which can be cause for conflict.

From the above, it is apparent that conflicts need not be salient, and can be latent, as in the case when one partner deliberately avoids a confrontation, yet has some discontent in the relationship with his/her partner. Ohbuchi and Takahashi (1994) distinguished between covert (Senzai-teki) non-salient conflict, in which one partner perceives that his or her wishes or expectations are obstructed by the other, and overt (Kenzai-teki) conflict, when both partners are aware of discord between themselves. In this study, we propose a new model of conflict strategies geared toward covert conflicts. In order to distinguish between overt/covert conflicts (Senzai-teki/Kenzai-teki), versus overt/covert strategies (Senzai-ka/Kenzai-ka) for dealing with the conflict, we refer to covert, conflict aversion strategies as non-salient strategies, and overt, confronting strategies as salient strategies. Conflict strategies, thus, can be considered *non-salient* when a person intentionally chooses to avoid confronting the partner, while they can be *salient*, when s/he seeks to let the partner know of any issues between him/her and the partner.

The aim of this study is to elaborate on the use of non-salient conflict strategies by the

Japanese, and connecting this usage with the intents behind keeping conflicts latent. Few studies have examined specific intents and behaviors with regard to conflict that have not yet been made open, and this study will explore factors pertaining to non-salient intents, and probe into the specific behavioral strategies related to latent conflict.

2. Conflict Intent

A conflict intent is the reason behind the use of a particular conflict strategy. The multiple goals theory of conflict, proposed by Ohbuchi and Fukushima (1997), argues that individuals are motivated by multiple goals in interpersonal conflicts. Their theory focuses on motives in conflict resolution for long term overall goals. They looked at six types of goals (relationship, power and animosity, fairness, identity, personal resources, and economic resources) and their relationship to conflict strategies consisting of: collaboration, competition, third parties, and avoidance strategies. While Ohbuchi and Takahashi (1994) found that the Japanese are motivated to use avoidance strategies for the sake of relationship goals, Ohbuchi and Fukushima (1997) found that avoidance is explained by an identity goal of maintaining an affirmative social image.

    While Ohbuchi's studies focused on long term goals, we contend that non-salient strategies are more likely to be influenced by short term (i.e., here-and-now intents). Fukushima and Ohbuchi (1997) argue that "intent" is a short term, direct goal of a particular behavior, while "motive" is a long term, ultimate goal. While they focus on long term goals in their work on the multiple goals theory, we contend that avoidance strategies should be viewed from a short term perspective. This is because when people choose to avoid conflict, they are concerned with the here and now situation, and not with achieving a particular long term goal. They are more likely to be concerned with avoiding the potential negative outcome of making a conflict salient. Given the above, we believe that it is necessary to separately examine the intents behind non-salient behaviors and analyze how they are related to non-salient strategies.

3. Conflict Avoidance Strategies

Much research on interpersonal conflict management strategies has been based on Blake and Mouton's (1964) two dimensional, five style model (e.g., Rahim, 1983; Thomas 1988; van de Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990). This dual concern model, as it is known, measures the two dimensions of self-versus other-concerns. Self-concerns pertain to assertiveness, or self expression of an individual's own interests, while other-concerns entail cooperativeness in support of the interests of the other person. Based on these two dimensions as independent axes, conflict management strategies are categorized into collaboration, accommodation, compromise, competition, or avoidance. As a matter of convenience, we will refer to the assertiveness axis as "self-oriented", and cooperativeness as "other-oriented." Collaborative strategy is both high self-oriented and high other-oriented, avoidance strategy has low orientations for both self and other, and compromising strategy has middle level orientations. Competitive strategy has high self-orientation and low other-orientation, while accommodative strategy has low self-orientation and high other-orientation. The non-salient conflict strategies that are the subject

of this present study are equivalent to avoidance strategy in the dual concern model. The dual concern model defines avoidance as a strategy that is both low self-oriented and low other-oriented, and in which an individual withdraws from conflict and refuses to deal with it (Rahim, 2002).
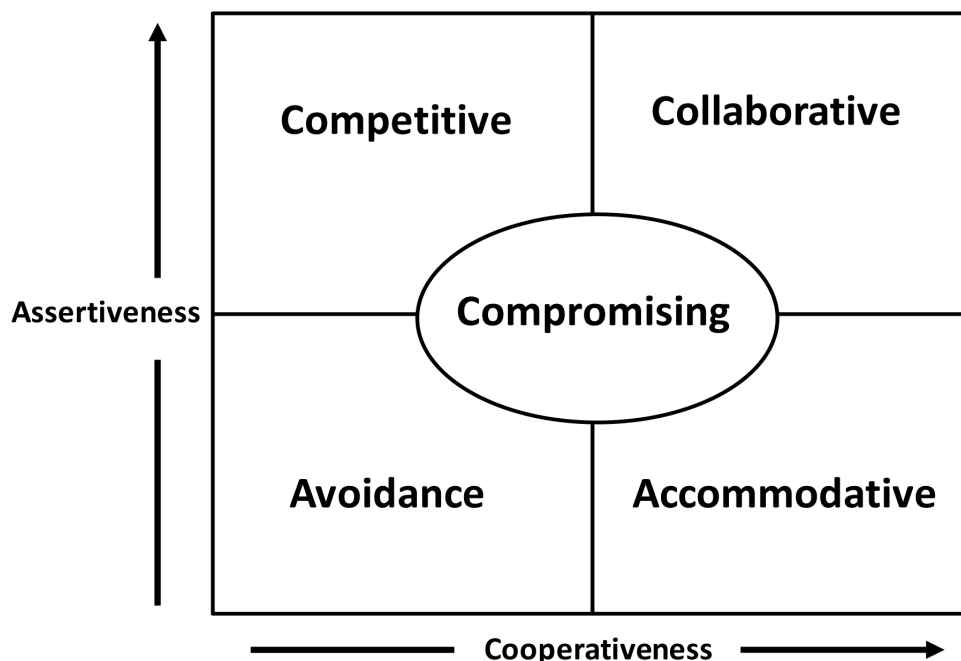

Figure 1. Five Conflict Styles and Their Relationships
Note. Generated on the basis of the two-dimensional conflict styles from Ruble and Thomas (1976).

In Japan, the avoidance strategy has been discussed by a number of studies that, while not testing particular models per se, do incorporate interpersonal conflict management strategies as their variables. Kato's (2003) study on the relationship between the five dual concern model strategies and the Japanese Big Five personality traits (Wada, 1996; extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience) suggested that avoidance was positively influenced by neuroticism and agreeableness, and negatively influenced by openness to experience and conscientiousness. In a study by Moriizumi and Takai (2006), relationship type was used as a variable to test the relationships between cultural self construals, public self-consciousness, face consciousness, and the five dual concern model strategies. Their findings indicated that in low familiarity interactions, use of submission and avoidance strategies increases with face consciousness. Results also suggested that interdependent self construals had a positive influence on submission and avoidance strategies. However, both of these studies featured salient conflicts, and neither focused specifically on non-salient strategies.

4. Theoretical Framework on Japanese Conflict Avoidance

Ohbuchi and Takahashi (1994) and Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi (1999) found that Japanese had a strong tendency to avoid confrontation while Americans preferred assertive tactics. Interpreting these findings from a theoretical perspective, Markus and Kitayama's (1991) cultural self-construals may provide a likely explanatory framework for non-salient Japanese communication styles. Japanese people may prefer indirect, avoiding strategies to conflict because of their predominant interdependent self-construal, which accentuates the need for relational harmony over individual needs. Hence, Japanese opt to avoid conflict as much as they can, and try to cope with their dissatisfaction internally. On the other hand, those with an independent self-construal emphasize self needs, so they are more likely to express their views, and hence, engage more openly in a conflict. Gudykunst et al. (1996) found that those regardless of the culture of their sample, with high independent self-construal were more likely to use open and precise communication styles, while those with high interdependent self-construal were apt to be more sensitive, and more indirect.

Another theoretical framework to explain non-salient is face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005). According to Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998), people try to maintain and negotiate face in interactions, and such face concerns are self-oriented, as well as other-oriented. They contend that individualistic persons emphasize self-face concerns, while collectivistic people consider mutual face concerns. Oetzel et al. (2001) tested this premise, and found that independent self-construal strongly influences self-face concerns, while interdependent self-construal positively affects mutual-face concerns, as well as other-face concerns. From these theories, it is apparent that culture plays an important role in determining what conflict approaches are taken in interpersonal relationships.

5. Objectives

Existing theories, including the dual concern model, have not distinguished between salient and non-salient strategies. Therefore, in this study we have proposed a new model based on the salient—non-salient axis, and placed a particular focus on non-salient conflict communication, and the intents behind it. Based on the arguments presented above, we formulated the following hypotheses:

>   *H1*:   Interpersonal considerateness intent positively relates to non-salient conflict strategies
>   *H2*:   Avoidance intent positively relates to non-salient conflict strategies
>   *H3*:   Both considerateness and avoidance intents are negatively related to salient conflict strategies

6. Method

6.1. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in order to determine reasons why people would avoid confrontation

in a conflict, and to gather necessary information for subsequent scale development. Free-response questionnaires were collected from a total of 362 participants: 257 first-, second-, or third-year Japanese students at a private university, and 53 first year and 52 second year students at a private junior college in Central Japan. There were 352 valid responses (165 men (46.9%), 187 women (53.1%); 97.2% valid response rate).

The meaning of conflict as relevant to this study was defined for respondents in the instructions of the questionnaire: "Think about an actual situation when someone said or did something that bothered you (e.g. differences in opinions or values, or one-sided accusations), and answer the following questions. Have you ever been unable to say or do what you wanted to in response to something that bothered you?" Respondents who circled "yes" were asked to write down the initials and sex of the actual person they had in mind, and then describe the relationship and explain the reasons why they did not assert themselves at the time.

Out of 352 valid responses, there were 316 (89.7%) respondents who reported being unable to speak their mind freely in a conflict. A total of 313 (145 men and 168 women) of these respondents provided an explanation about their intents at the time. We categorized these intents using content analysis into groups based on the reasons why one may not relate to the other about the issues they may have about him/her. The content analysis was performed using the KJ (Kawakita-Jiro) method (Kawakita, 1967), a popular method often utilized by Japanese social scientists, in which coders write individual pieces of ideas of the subject's response onto cards and then group cards according to similarity in ideas. The coders consisted of two social psychologists who were university faculty. The inter-coder reliability showed a match of 76.4% between coders in their grouping of items, and where they did not match, they conferred upon common groupings. This resulted in the following 10 categories: (a) avoiding a negative response from the partner, (b) avoiding trouble, (c) discounting the importance of the matter, (d) maintaining dignity and pride, (e) preventing escalated friction, (f) considering the partner's status and circumstance, (g) relationship maintenance, (h) considering effects of personal clashes on the group environment, (i) consideration toward the other person, and (j) other. Including the 47 (15.0%) respondents who named multiple (two-three items) intents, the categories with the greatest number of responses overall were avoiding a negative response from the partner (74, 23.6%) and considering the partner's status and circumstance (73, 23.3%). The categories are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Non-Salient Intent Categories and Example Responses

Categories	Example Responses
1. Avoiding a negative response from the partner	"I would have been attacked if I said anything."
2. Avoiding trouble	"I was too much a burden to say anything."
3. Discounting the importance of the matter	"I didn't think there would be any point in saying anything back."
4. Maintaining dignity and pride	"I thought I would be inappropriate to say anything."
5. Preventing escalated friction	"It would only make the situation worse if I said anything back."

6. Considering the partner's status and circumstance	"I wasn't in a position to say anything to someone who was superior to me."
7. Relationship maintenance	"I didn't want to hurt our relationship."
8. Considering effects of personal clashes on the group environment	"I would have made things awkard for my friends if I said anything."
9. Consideration toward the other person	"I would have made the other person feel bad if I said something."
10. Other	"The timing wasn't right." "I didn't say my true feelings."

There were a variety of relationships named by the respondents, but more than half were "friend" or "boss at work." We grouped acquaintances, friends, close friends, teammates, and classmates together as equal status relationships, and boss, coach, professor, and senior classmate/teammate together as higher status relationships. We then compared differences by intent categories. For equal status relationships (139, 44.0%), the greatest number of responses fell under the categories of relationship maintenance (31, 22.4%) and avoiding negative response from the partner (29, 21.0%). For higher status relationships (84, 26.6%) the greatest number of responses fell under the categories of considering the partner's status and circumstance (42, 50.6%) and avoiding negative response from the partner (22, 26.5%). Table 2 shows a breakdown of responses.

Table 2. Non-Salient Intent Categories and Number of Responses

	Total		Equal Status Relationships		Higher Status Relationships	
	Responses	%	Responses	%	Responses	%
1. Avoiding a negative response from the partner	74	23.6	29	21.0	22	26.5
2. Avoiding trouble	40	12.8	22	15.9	3	3.6
3. Discounting the importance of the matter	35	11.2	14	10.1	8	9.6
4. Maintaining dignity and pride	31	9.9	17	12.3	6	7.2
5. Preventing escalated friction	7	2.2	5	3.6	0	0.0
6. Considering the partner's status and circumstance	73	23.3	16	11.6	42	50.6
7. Relationship maintenance	51	16.3	31	22.4	5	6.0
8. Considering effects of personal clashes on group environment	13	4.2	7	5.1	4	4.8
9. Consideration toward the other person	19	6.1	11	8	0	0
10. Other	18	5.8	6	4.3	4	6.0

Note. Total is greater than 100% due to multiple responses

6.2. Main Study

6.2.1. Participants

Questionnaires were collected from 319 students at a private university in central Japan. Analyses were conducted on 309 valid responses (210 men (68.0%), 99 women (32.0%); 96.9% valid response rate; average age 19.4 years).

6.2.2. Procedure

The questionnaire consisted of the two sections described below (see Appendix).

Non-salient conflict intent scale. One item was devised for each of the nine non-salient conflict intents that emerged from the pilot study. An additional item was included dealing with, "trying not to disturb the group atmosphere," along with "considering the partner's status and circumstance" for a total of two items for this category, because we deemed it necessary to distinguish between the partner's position and his/her circumstance. Responses were collected on a five-point scale (1= *not at all* to 5= *very much*) toward the question: "When someone says or does something that bothers you, how much do you consider the following in your response?"

Strategy scale. Existing conflict strategy scales tended to mix both intent and behavior in their items. We decided to focus only on behavior, and selected items from Folger, Poole, & Stutman's (2005) conflict tactics list describing possible initial responses to an infringement. Our grounds for the selection of items was based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) off-record strategies which do not convey FTA (face threatening acts). Responses were collected on a five-point scale (1= *never*, 5= *very often*) to the question: "When someone says or does something that bothers you, how often do you react in the following ways?"

7. Results

7.1. Non-salient Conflict Intent Categories

We calculated averages and standard deviations for the 10 non-salient conflict intent items, and found that none had ceiling or floor effects. We then did maximum likelihood factor analysis on all of the items. Eigen value dissipation was 4.25, 1.37, .94, .67… and with percentage variance explained of 42.54%, 13.70%, and 9.39%, respectively, indicating that a two-factor structure was warranted. The two-factor cumulative percentage was 56.24%. Assuming a two-factor structure, we then conducted maximum likelihood factor analysis with promax rotation. After excluding one item that did not meet a 0.35 factor loading criterion, we ran a factor analysis a second time. Table 3 shows the final factor structure and correlations after promax rotation. Factor 1 was called "Considerateness intent" (α= .83), consisting of six items relating to respect for the other person's point of perspective or feelings, a desire not to damage a relationship, efforts toward maintaining relationships, and consideration toward the partner. Factor 2 was

constructed from three items about not wanting to deal with tedious interactions, attacks, or accusations. We named this factor "Avoidance intent" (α= .72), since it had high loadings for the avoidance of imagined negative consequences from making a conflict salient.

Table 3.   Factor Analysis of Non-Salient Intent Scale

	I	II
Considerateness intent (α=.83)		
7. I respect the other person's position or status.	**.76**	-.30
9. I try not to agitate relationships with people around me.	**.72**	.13
8. I try not to damage the relationship with the other person.	**.69**	.15
10. I try not to hurt the other person's feelings.	**.68**	-.04
6. I try not to upset the atmosphere.	**.65**	.08
4. I try not to be seen as an unpleasant person.	**.45**	.24
Avoidance intent (α=.72)		
2. I try to keep things from becoming troublesome.	-.23	**.95**
1. I try to avoid attacks or accusations from the other person.	.07	**.56**
5. I try not to make the situation worse.	.35	**.48**
Factor correlation .54		

Deleted Items:
3. I tell myself that it is meaningless to protest or object to the other person.

Confirmatory factor analysis using structural equation modeling was conducted to check for the validity of the factor structure. The results indicated that adequate fit was attained with our factor structure (χ^2=40.84, p=.006; GFI=.972, $AGFI$=.940, CFI=.940, $RMSEA$=.055).

7.2. Strategy Categories of the Salient—Non-salient Axis

We calculated averages and standard deviations for the 20 non-salient conflict strategy items and found no ceiling or floor effects. We then ran maximum likelihood factor analysis for all of the items. Eigen value dissipation was 3.59, 2.58, 1.94, 1.44, 1.15… and the percentage of variance explained for the first four factors were, respectively, 17.92%, 12.92%, 9.72%, and 7.18%, suggesting that a three factor structure had the best fit, given that each factor should explain around 10% of variance. The three-factor cumulative percentage was 40.58%. Assuming a three-factor structure, we then conducted maximum likelihood factor analysis again with promax rotation. We ran it a second time on the 17 items that remained after excluding two items that did not meet a 0.35 factor loading criterion, or with double loadings. We ran the factor analysis a third time using the same criteria, resulting in 15 items in the final factor structure. Table 4 shows this structure, and correlations after promax rotation. Factor 1 was called "Active Non-Salient strategy" (α=.74), consisting of seven items related to agreeing, conforming, apologizing, patronizing, and other active efforts to prevent the other person from realizing that there is a conflict. Factor 2 was called "Salient strategy" (α=.69) composed of five items describing assertive efforts to make a conflict salient.

Factor 3 was called "Passive Non-Salient strategy" (α=.60), consisting of three items dealing with using facial expressions, being silent, or withdrawing. Depending on the situation and the people involved, these behaviors may convey displeasure.

Table 4.   Salient/Non-Salient Conflict Management Strategy Scale

	I	II	III
Active Non-Salient strategy (α=.74)			
4. I hold back and agree with what the other person says.	.74	.01	.06
6. I do not say that I am bothered and I do as the other person pleases.	.72	.00	.07
5. I pretend to agree with the other person and just let it go.	.56	-.09	.16
7. I apologize just to keep the situation calm.	.56	.06	-.02
10. I say or do something that the other person would like.	.48	.21	-.16
3. I continue the conversation as if nothing bothered me.	.43	-.16	.02
8. I tell the other person that I understand his/her circumstances without expressing dissatisfaction.	.37	.16	-.21
Salient strategy (α=.69)			
18. I express my dissatisfaction, insisting strongly on my opinion.	-.10	.72	.06
20. I calmly express my dissatisfaction and discuss it with the other person.	.05	.66	-.16
19. I tell the other person that s/he is wrong.	.01	.61	.23
9. I do not say that I am bothered, but I ask why the other person said or did what s/he did.	.04	.44	-.14
15. I do not say anything on the spot, but I tell the other person how I feel later.	.17	.40	.09
Passie Non-Salient strategy (α=.60)			
14. I say nothing and show that I am bothered through my facial expressions.	-.14	.15	.70
12. I say nothing and I keep silent and expressionless.	.03	-.05	.70
2. I do not say that I am bothered and I just leave.	.17	-.14	.37

Factor correlation	I	II	III
I	-	-.28	-.06
II		-	.22
III			-

Deleted Items:
1.   I do not say that I am bothered an I change the subject.
11. I say a joke to hide that something bothers me.
13. I say nothing and I grin or laugh.
16. I do not say anything but I tell others how I feel later.
17. I hint that I am botheredd, but I do not say it directly.

Confirmatory factor analysis using structural equation modeling was conducted to check for the validity of the factor structure. The results indicated that adequate fit was attained with our factor structure (χ^2=155.85, p<.001; *GFI*=.937, *AGFI*=.907, *CFI*=.920, *RMSEA*=.055) .

7.3. Relationships Between Intent and Strategy

From the exploratory factor analyses above, we divided non-salient conflict intents into the two categories of self-other Considerateness, and Avoidance, and strategies into the three categories of Active Non-Salient, Passive Non-Salient, and Salient. In order to test our hypotheses, we conducted path analysis to investigate the relationship between non-salient conflict intent and the three salient—non-salient strategies. The path diagram is shown in Figure 1. Goodness of fit indicated a satisfactory model: χ^2=9.65, p=.047; GFI=.988, $AGFI$=.955, CFI=.972, and $RMSEA$=.068. There was a significant positive path (.37) from Considerateness to Active Non-Salient, a significant negative path (-.15) from Considerateness to Passive Non-Salient, a significant positive path (.16) from Avoidance intent to Active Non-Salient, and a significant negative path (-2.5) from Avoidance intent to Salient strategy. From these results, it appears that Hypothesis 1, which stated that considerateness intent positively relates to non-salient conflict strategies, was supported for Active Non-Salient strategy, but the relationship was negative for the Passive Non-Salient strategy. For Hypothesis 2, which claimed that avoidance intent positively relates to non-salient conflict strategies, was held for Active Non-Salient strategy, but no relationship was found for Passive Non-Salient strategy. Hypothesis 3, which assumed both considerateness and avoidance intents are negatively related to salient conflict strategies, was held only for avoidance intents, but not for considerateness intents.
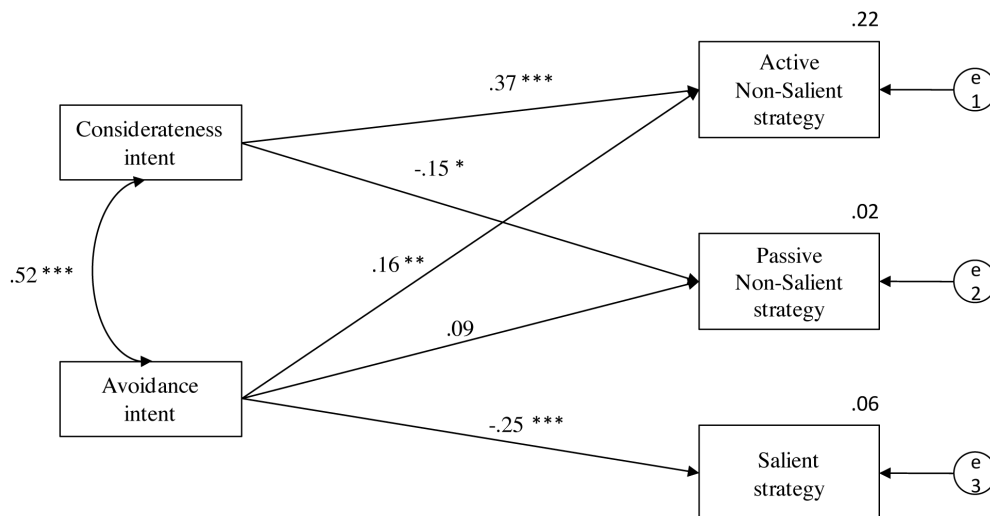

Figure 2. Path Analysis of the Relationships of Non-salient Intent on the Three Salient/Non-salient Strategies

Note: χ^2=9.65, p=.047, GFI=.988, $AGFI$=.955, CFI=.972, and $RMSEA$=.068
   *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

8. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to categorize interpersonal conflict management strategies by focusing particularly on non-salient conflict intent categories and the selection process of salient or non-salient strategies. We first conducted a pilot study survey of people's intents in leaving a conflict intact based on Ohbuchi's (1991) findings on the reasons for avoiding confrontation. This data formed the basis for our design of a non-salient conflict intent scale to be used in the main study. Our exploratory factor analyses of data from the main study produced the two intents of Considerateness and Avoidance.

The results of the pilot study suggested that (a) non-salient behaviors may have several intents, (b) non-salient conflict behaviors cannot be explained by the dual concern model's definition of avoidance strategy as both low self-oriented and low other-oriented, and (c) intents may differ depending on whether the other person has equal or higher status. The first issue supports findings by Ohbuchi and Fukushima (1997) that there are "multiple goals in conflict resolution" (p.159). With respect to the second issue, avoiding a negative response from the partner was the most common intent category in our survey, which essentially is highly self-concerned, because it protects self-face by avoiding situations in which may threaten it. The dual concern model would assume that avoidance is both low self- and other-concerned. Furthermore, avoiding a conflict with the intent of "considering the partner's status and circumstance" can be construed as being highly other-oriented. Moreover, relationship maintenance, which requires emotional control, can be viewed as both highly self-oriented and highly other-oriented because the objective is collaboration. This is in accordance to Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory (1988; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991), and the idea that avoidance styles reflect both self- and other-face maintenance strategies (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). There was also a large number of responses for "considering the partner's status and circumstance" particularly toward higher status relationships. We speculate that this may reflect the vertical propensities of Japanese society (Nakane, 1972), where social and moral standards warrant that a superior be respected and not challenged.

The exploratory factor analyses we conducted in this study did not confirm the self-other bi-dimensional structure of the dual concern model, since there was no distinction between self-oriented and other-oriented non-salient conflict intent factors. We named the first factor "Considerateness" because it included both self-face maintenance items about not wanting to be regarded by others unfavorably, and other-face maintenance items about considering the partner and other people in the surroundings. The second factor was named "Avoidance" to describe the active aversion of the trouble that lies inherent in problem resolution. The item for avoiding trouble had the highest factor loading, and is synonymous to the "avoidance strategy" in the dual concern model. In fact, this avoidance factor includes the self protective intent in avoiding attacks or accusations, which is obviously highly self-concerned, thus the dual concern model, which lays claim to avoidance as being low in self-concern (as well as other-concern) falls short in explaining Japanese intentions within interpersonal conflict. In studying the process of choosing salient/non-salient behaviors, we were able to identify some new perspectives in conflict management that goes beyond the dual concern model.

Our exploratory factor analyses produced Active Non-Salient strategy, Passive Non-

Salient strategy, and Salient strategy. Active Non-Salient strategy is conscious efforts to prevent the partner from perceiving discord within the relationship. These strategies include actions like agreeing, conforming, apologizing, and patronizing, and are comparable to the politeness strategy from Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Compared to Passive Non-Salient strategy, which relies on non-verbal messages in the form of silence or physical withdrawal, these Active Non-Salient strategies require a high level of communication skills. Furthermore, the agreement and conformity items in our strategy scale subsumes non-salient behaviors, which is typical before conflict is made salient, and this suggests the Active Non-Salient strategy that incorporate them are distinct in nature from Fukushima and Ohbuchi's (1997) avoidance and conformity strategies. These strategies do not differentiate between non-salient and salient conflicts, nor do avoidance and submission strategies in the dual concern model, nor do avoidance and accommodation strategies as defined by van de Vliert and Euwema (1994). Passive Non-Salient strategy often is executed nonverbally rather than verbally, and this maybe cause for ambiguity, hence the conflict may go unnoticed. Passive Non-Salient strategy in this study could also be described as direct/unilateral using Falbo and Peplau's (1980) two dimensional model of direct/indirect and unilateral/bilateral power strategies. Ohbuchi and Kitanaka (1991) have argued that this type of strategy is irrational and ineffective. Given that a person neither states his or her feelings nor makes an effort to cooperate with the other person, it shares the qualities of low self- and other-orientation and ineffectiveness associated with avoidance strategy in the dual concern model.

In order to probe for the relationship between conflict strategies and non-salient intents, we conducted a path analysis. Our results indicated some significant relationships. Considerateness intent positively associated with Active Non-Salient strategy, and negatively with Passive Non-Salient, clearly indicating the difference between active and passive strategies. Avoidance intent, on the other hand, was positively associated with Active Non-Salient strategy, and negatively with Salient strategy. We were, thus, able to identify the characteristics of each of the strategies. Given the fact that Active Non-Salient strategy is associated with both Considerateness and Avoidance intents, we can surmise that they are used strategically for the purpose of maintaining social harmony or of self-defense. In contrast, Passive Non-Salient strategy lacks consideration for others, and more likely reflects poor communications skills rather than lack of any strategic planning. Finally, we found that Salient strategy is unrelated to Considerateness, and chosen if Avoidance intent is low. While these results indicate the relationships between intents and strategies, more work needs to be done to gather evidence on whether these relationships are consistent enough to claim that they are causal in nature. Perhaps this study can be replicated over specific relational targets and situations to determine whether the model holds over situational variation.

One major limitation of this study was the sampling, which included only student samples. A working adult population may serve as better representatives of the culture, as their relationships can be expected to be more permanent, and more power-based, hence the conflicts within may be more complex. Our future studies aim to involve this working population, and perhaps a cross-cultural comparison to determine whether the results we attained were exclusive to Japanese, or common to other cultures.

9. Conclusions

While much light has been placed on the use of avoidance behaviors, there are still a number of unanswered questions. From our findings, Japanese students appear to have not only intents toward avoiding an ugly situation, but they have concerns toward the welfare of others and their self-face which are demonstrated in their having Considerateness intent. Active Non-Salient strategy is similar to Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness strategy, having being related to Considerateness intent, suggesting that it is used less due to self-interests but due more to the needs of the social context. Because of this, Active Non-Salient strategy would appear to be an automatic response to the social context, consisting of normative communication behavior. Keeping conflict hidden toward another of higher status is traditionally considered not only a norm, but as a social skill in Japanese culture. According to Moriizumi and Takai (2006), an example of normative communication behavior is to refrain from self-asserting, and avoiding conflict by accommodating to the opinions of a higher status acquaintance. In our study, it would appear that Active Non-Salient strategy is more typical of the conflict management strategies of Japanese than Passive Non-Salient strategy. For this reason, people may be acting more in accordance to social norms rather than their self-will, thus, a closer examination of contextual factors, such as relational intimacy, power discrepancy, mutual roles, nature of conflict, and other situational factors, is warranted. These crucial parameters need to be identified in future attempts to pinpoint how non-salient conflict behaviors are dependent on the situation and relationship.

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Appendix

Non-salient Intent Scale (10 items) and Salient/Non-Salient Conflict Management Strategy Scale (20 items) in Japanese with English translations

Non-Salient Intent Scale (10 items)
1. 相手から攻撃や非難が返ってこないようにする
   I try to avoid attacks or accusations from the other person.
2. 面倒くさいことにならないようにする
   I try to keep things from becoming troublesome.
3. 不満を伝えても意味がないと自分に言い聞かせる
   I tell myself that it is meaningless to protest or object to the other person.
4. 自分が嫌な人間だと思われないようにする
   I try not to be seen as an unpleasant person.
5. 事態が悪化しないようにする
   I try not to make the situation worse.
6. その場の雰囲気を壊さないようにする
   I try not to upset the atmosphere.
7. 相手の立場や地位を尊重する
   I respect the other person's position or status.
8. 相手との人間関係を壊さないようにする
   I try not to damage the relationship with the other person.
9. 周りの人間関係が気まずくならないようにする
   I try not to agitate relationships with people around me.
10. 相手の気持ちを傷つけないようにする
    I try not to hurt the other person's feelings.

Salient/Non-Salient Conflict Management Strategy Scale (20 items)
1. 不満を言わず、話題を変える
   I do not say that I am bothered and I change the subject.
2. 不満については何も言わずに話を終わらせ、その場を立ち去る
   I do not say that I am bothered and I just leave.
3. 不快なことを言われなかったこととしてそのまま会話を続ける
   I continue the conversation as if nothing bothered me.
4. 自分を抑えて、相手の言ったことに同意する
   I hold back and agree with what the other person says.
5. 相手の言い分に同意したふりをして、受け流す
   I pretend to agree with the other person and just let it go.
6. 不満を言わず、相手の望み通りにする
   I do not say that I am bothered and I do as the other person pleases.
7. とりあえず謝ることで、その場をおさめる
   I apologize just to keep the situation calm.
8. 不満は言わず、相手の事情を自分が理解していることを伝える

I tell the other person that I understand his/her circumstances without expressing dissatisfaction.

9. 不満は伝えずに、なぜそんなことを言うのか理由をたずねる

I do not say that I am bothered, but I ask why the other person said or did what s/he did.

10. 相手が喜ぶようなことを言ったり、したりする

I say or do something that the other person would like.

11. ジョークを言っておどけて、不満が伝わらないように隠す

I say a joke to hide that something bothers me.

12. 何も言わず、無表情でおし黙る

I say nothing and I keep silent and expressionless.

13. 何も言わず、苦笑いやごまかし笑いをする

I say nothing and I grin or laugh.

14. 何も言わず、不満を表情で表わす

I say nothing and show that I am bothered through my facial expressions.

15. その場では不満を口に出さず、後で本人に伝える

I do not say anything on the spot, but I tell the other person how I feel later.

16. 相手には何も言わず、後で別の人に話す

I do not say anything but I tell others how I feel later.

17. 不満をはっきりと言わず、ほのめかすように言う

I hint that I am bothered, but I do not say it directly.

18 不満を口にして、自分の意見を強く主張する

I express my dissatisfaction, insisting strongly on my opinion.

19. 相手のほうが間違っていると責める

I tell the other person that s/he is wrong.

20. 冷静に自分の不満を伝え、話し合いをしようとする

I calmly express my dissatisfaction and discuss it with the other person.