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Pers Soc Psychol Bull 2012 38: 798 originally published online 27 February 2012
DOI: 10.1177/0146167211436320

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://psp.sagepub.com/content/38/6/798
The Implications of Value Conflict: How Disagreement on Values Affects Self-Involvement and Perceived Common Ground

Marina Kouzakova¹, Naomi Ellemers¹, Fieke Harinck¹, and Daan Scheepers¹

Abstract
This article presents two studies demonstrating the implications of having different values (vs. interests) in a situation where people take opposite positions. Study 1 examined how people respond to a range of conflict issues that were framed either as referring to conflicting values or as referring to conflicting interests. Study 2 used a more immersive methodology, in which participants were led to consider either their values or interests in taking up a particular position, after which they were presented with a confederate who took up the opposite position. Results of both studies converge to demonstrate that framing a particular conflict issue in terms of values causes people to experience more self-involvement and to perceive less common ground. This result can be seen as a potential explanation of why value conflicts tend to escalate more easily than conflicts of interests and also offers scope for interventions directed at value conflict resolution.

Keywords
value conflict, conflict of interests, morality, self-involvement, perceived common ground

Received May 27, 2011; revision accepted December 18, 2011

Due to sociocultural diversity in modern societies, interpersonal conflicts are often characterized by differences in core values (De Dreu, Harinck, & Van Vianen, 1999; Harinck, De Dreu, & Van Vianen, 2000). Values refer to central aspects of people’s self-identities and self-perceptions (Aquino & Reed, 2002). They differ from related constructs such as moral attitudes, which refer to specific issues and do not necessarily reflect broader values (Lester, 2000; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). Value conflicts emerge when parties disagree about normative convictions and arguments about what is appropriate, reasonable, or just in a particular situation. In this respect, value conflicts differ from conflicts about the distribution of concrete material interests such as time, space, money, or natural resources (conflict of interests; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

Value conflicts are widespread and can emerge in a variety of situations, ranging from the endorsement of different general (cultural) value systems, for instance in international organizations (Faure, 1995; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990), to more domain-specific disagreement about the most appropriate course of action in a particular context (Druckman, Rozelle, & Zechmeister, 1977; see also Douglas & Lubbe, 2010). Complex conflict situations can include references to both types of differences. For instance, conflicts of interests can be exacerbated when preferences refer to differences in personal values or moral standards, resulting in so-called “mixed” conflicts (Druckman et al., 1977; Harinck, 2004). In such mixed conflicts—as for instance deep-seated disagreements about geopolitical issues in the Middle East—it is difficult to separate the effect of value differences from the impact of different interests. At the same time, we know relatively little about value conflicts or the way these develop, because the majority of research on conflict development and conflict resolution has focused on conflicts of interests (Bazerman, Curhan, Moore, & Valley, 2000; De Dreu et al., 1999). Thus, an experimental approach is needed to disentangle the effects of value differences from the effects of diverging interests, as a way to identify factors that specifically contribute to the development and escalation of value conflicts. The main goal of the present research, therefore, is to compare whether people respond differently to the same conflict issue, depending on whether reference is made to differences in material interests or to different values. This allows us to keep constant all other conflicts aspects (such as

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degree of uncertainty), while examining whether these two types of conflicts are characterized by initial differences in the level of self-involvement and perceptions of one’s opponent, both of which are highly relevant for the way the conflict develops.

Value Conflicts Versus Conflicts of Interest

Whereas standard conflicts (e.g., conflict of interests) can often be resolved by means of negotiation about the allocation of resources to different parties (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993), differences in values that people endorse revolve around their notions of justice and convey their convictions about the way they relate to others (Aquino & Reed, 2002). This is why value conflicts not only lead to great tension and escalate easily but also tend to be seen as non-negotiable. As such, parties involved in value conflicts are hardly receptive to recognized conflict resolution techniques. As a result, typical conflict solutions such as give and take, compromises, or tradeoffs do not offer a feasible solution when different values are at stake (Druckman et al., 1977; Harinck & De Dreu, 2004; Harinck et al., 2000; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000; Wade-Benzoni et al., 2002).

In the conflict literature, self-involvement and perceived common ground are seen as important determinants of the further development of conflicts and their potential for resolution versus escalation (for an overview, see Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). However, research to date has not addressed whether these factors can help account for the different implications of value conflicts as compared with conflicts of interest. We aim to extend earlier insights by examining how the awareness of opposite values—instead of opposite interests—affects participants’ self-involvement in the conflict, and their perceptions of common ground with the other party, as important factors in conflict development and resolution.

Self-Involvement

Self-involvement in a conflict indicates the tendency to take the disagreement personally and to experience a difference in position as indicating lack of appreciation for the self. Self-involvement generally increases the likelihood that a conflict escalates and impedes conflict resolution (De Dreu & van Knippenberg, 2005; Steinel, Van Kleef, & Harinck, 2008). Because values are central to people’s self-identities and self-perceptions (Aquino & Reed, 2002), we expect value conflicts to more easily raise self-involvement than conflicts of interest. Indeed, disagreements based on differences in values strike at the core of people’s moral identity and typically lead to the perception of one’s own position as being inherently more just and reasonable than the position of the other party (Wade-Benzoni et al., 2002). Although both value conflicts and conflicts of interest indicate a concern with maintaining one’s current position (De Dreu & van Knippenberg, 2005), we anticipate value conflicts to induce more identity involvement than conflicts of interests (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999) and to raise more emotional engagement. We thus expect parties involved in a value conflict to report more identity involvement and emotional involvement than parties involved in a conflict of interest, indicating greater self-involvement in value conflicts than in conflicts of interests.

Perceived Common Ground

Perceptions of common ground are another crucial factor in the way conflicts develop. As long as parties realize they have certain things in common and can understand each other’s point of view, there is scope to move toward a mutually acceptable solution or to reach some form of agreement (Rubin et al., 1994). In the negotiation literature, perceived common ground refers to the estimated likelihood of reaching a mutually acceptable conflict resolution (Pruitt, 1983). Lack of perceived common ground has been found to reduce the tendency to engage in generally successful “problem solving” negotiation strategies. Instead, it increases the inclination to force one’s will on the other party, which often leads to conflict escalation. As a result, integrative agreements seem less feasible when there is little perceived common ground (Thompson & Kim, 2000).

In the absence of information to the contrary, people often assume others to share their own traits, beliefs, and values (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Krueger, Acevedo, & Robbins, 2005; Müssweiler & Bodenhausen, 2002). Moreover, people are more inclined to expect similarity in values than in interests (Harinck et al., 2000). When the other party takes a different position, this violates prior similarity expectations. As a result, perceived differences between the self and the other party are enhanced, and the perceived likelihood of being able to reach a mutually acceptable solution is diminished, indicating decreased perceptions of common ground. Because similarity expectations tend to be more pronounced in the case of values than in the case of interests (Harinck et al., 2000), we expect value conflicts to show these effects to a greater extent than conflicts of interest, resulting in less perceived common ground in the case of value conflicts than in the case of conflicts of interest.

The Present Research

In practice, conflicts of interest and value conflicts tend to be raised by different types of issues and are qualitatively different from each other (Druckman et al., 1977; Harinck & De Dreu, 2004; Harinck et al., 2000; Wade-Benzoni et al., 2002). This makes it difficult to assess which aspects of these different types of conflict determine their further development. To be able to directly compare the impact of different values versus interests on self-involvement and perceptions of common ground, in the present research we...
will use the same conflict issue and frame it either as stemming from different values or as stemming from different interests. This is an important aspect of our experimental approach, as it allows us to test our predictions regarding specific factors that differentiate between these two types of conflict, while keeping constant conflict issue and conflict intensity.

In Study 1, we assess the impact of value versus interest framing on self-involvement and perceived common ground across a range of conflict issues. In Study 2, we ask participants to reach an agreement with a confederate taking the opposite position in a conflict that is framed in terms of different values versus interests. The use of these different methodologies allows us to examine the consequences of interest versus value framing of the same conflict at different conflict stages: both in anticipation of a conflict (Study 1) and during the emergence of a conflict (Study 2).

In addition, we examine support for our predictions regarding self-involvement and perceived common ground with different measures across the two studies. Specifically, in Study 1, we assess participants’ self-involvement with self-reports of emotional involvement and identity involvement. We examine perceptions of common ground by asking participants to indicate their understanding of the opponent’s position and to explicitly assess the perceived feasibility of conflict resolution. In Study 2, we broaden the scope of these measures and make their purpose less intrusive. That is, we examine self-involvement by assessing the extent to which participants identify with others who share the same position. We assess the expectancy of shared values relating to the conflict issue as well as more generalized perceptions of similarity of the other party as indicators of perceived common ground.

Study 1

In Study 1, we aimed to examine the consequences of value versus interest framing on anticipated self-involvement and perceived common ground across a variety of conflict issues.

Participants and Design

A total of 266 undergraduate students (103 males) with the mean age of 21.24 (SD = 2.69) from the Radboud University Nijmegen participated for 1 credit or 3 euros in an experiment with a single factor (conflict frame: value vs. interest) between-subjects design with self-involvement and perceived common ground as dependent variables.

Materials

Procedure. Each participant evaluated two different conflict issues. One conflict issue was evaluated at the beginning of the experimental session; the other conflict issue was evaluated after they completed a number of unrelated filler tasks for 30 min. One of the two issues was framed as a conflict of interests; the other was always framed as a value conflict—the order in which value versus interest conflicts were presented was counterbalanced. Two out of six possible conflict issues were randomly assigned to each participant. Each participant thus rated two different conflict issues, which were also framed differently. We used between-participants comparisons to examine whether the same conflict issue was rated differently depending on whether it was framed as a conflict of interest or as a value conflict.

Conflict Issues. We used descriptions of six different conflict issues. The issues concerned the choice of the travel means, participation in extra experiment, choice of medical insurance, apartment rental, studying for exams with another student, and making a donation. Each conflict issue was available in two versions, in which it was construed either as a value conflict or as a conflict of interests, making a total of 12 conflict descriptions. Thus, while the topic of each conflict remained the same, the underlying reasons addressed either opposite values or opposite interests. The conflict of interests descriptions always referred to conflicting material interests (different budgets or bonuses), whereas the value conflict descriptions always concerned conflicting principles (environmental, charity, helping, and fair treatment). For example, in the “apartment rental” issue, the participants were asked to imagine they wished to rent an apartment together with another student. The apartment they found was quite luxurious. The participants were asked to imagine they wished to turn down this apartment offer either because they do not care about abundant luxury in a student apartment, whereas the other person did value luxury (value conflict), or because they expected they would personally receive a financial bonus for doing so—whereas the other person would not receive such bonus and thus did not want to donate some of the fraternity’s funds (focus on interests). In the “making a donation” issue, the participants were asked to imagine they managed their fraternity’s funds and wished to donate some of it to a charity either because they believed it was important to support charities—whereas the other person did not value charity support and, therefore, did not wish to donate (focus on values)—or because they would personally receive a financial bonus for doing so—whereas the other person would not receive such bonus and thus did not want to donate some of the fraternity’s funds (focus on interests). The participants were asked to imagine that they would have to negotiate with the other person and would subsequently have to resolve this issue by reaching a joint decision on the issue. The participants were then requested to answer questions about how they would experience this situation. All conflict descriptions were matched with respect to sentence construction and length of the description to ensure similarity in every respect except the conflict framing (values vs. interests).

Dependent Measures. All questions were answered on scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Self-involvement. We assessed the influence of the conflict frame on self-involvement by asking how emotionally
immersed the participants felt in the conflict and whether they felt personally offended during the conflict. The mean of these two questions indicated participants’ self-involvement, \( r(266) = .46, p < .001 \).

**Perceived common ground.** We assessed the extent to which the participants perceived common ground with their opponent by asking participants to indicate their sympathy for the opponent’s position and the perceived potential for reaching a joint solution in the conflict. The mean of these two questions measured perceived common ground, \( r(266) = .42, p < .001 \).

**Manipulation Checks**

**Conflict type manipulation check.** We checked the extent to which the conflict descriptions were seen to tap into either different values or different interests. Two questions asked participants to provide separate judgments of the extent to which the described conflict reflected different values and different interests. With the third question, participants were asked to indicate on a single bipolar scale whether the conflict more strongly reflected different interests (1) or values (7).

**Conflict intensity check.** To ensure that framing the same conflict in terms of values versus interests did not affect perceptions of conflict intensity, we asked participants to judge the extent to which they experienced the situation as a conflict between themselves and the other person and to what degree they experienced the situation as indicating disagreement between themselves and the other person. The mean of these two questions indicated conflict intensity, \( r(266) = .48, p < .001 \).

**Results**

Participants’ gender neither did correlate with any of the dependent measures nor did it differ between the conditions (\( F < 1, \text{ ns} \)) and was therefore excluded from further analyses.

**Manipulation Checks**

**Conflict type manipulation check.** The two separate manipulation check questions were entered as a within-subjects factor in a repeated measures ANOVA with experimental condition (value vs. interests) and conflict issue as between-subject factors. As intended, the results show a significant interaction between experimental condition and the evaluation of the conflict as a value conflict versus a conflict of interests, \( F(1, 254) = 41.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14 \). Analysis of the separate questions reveals that participants in the value conflict condition experienced the conflict more as a conflict of different values (\( M = 5.07, SD = 1.38 \)) than participants in the conflict of interests condition (\( M = 3.81, SD = 1.60 \)), \( F(1, 254) = 49.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16 \). Conversely, participants in the conflict of interest condition experienced the conflict more as a conflict of different interests (\( M = 5.28, SD = 1.37 \)) than participants in the value conflict condition (\( M = 4.78, SD = 1.43 \)), \( F(1, 254) = 7.88, p = .005, \eta^2 = .03 \). On neither of these questions did we observe an interaction between experimental condition and conflict issue, \( F(5, 254) = 1.09, p = .364, \) and \( F(5, 254) = 0.40, p = .848 \). The bipolar question revealed similar results. Participants in the value conflict condition evaluated the conflict more as a value conflict than as a conflict of interests (\( M = 4.65, SD = 1.75 \)), whereas the participants in the conflict of interests condition showed the reversed evaluation (\( M = 3.18, SD = 1.70 \)), \( F(1, 254) = 46.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16 \). There was no interaction between experimental condition and conflict issue on the bipolar manipulation check, \( F(5, 254) = .87, p = .502 \).

**Conflict intensity check.** The participants in the value conflict condition (\( M = 4.94, SD = 1.07 \)) and the participants in the conflict of interests condition (\( M = 4.91, SD = 1.11 \)) evaluated the conflict to be equally intense, \( F(1, 254) = 0.70, p = .490 \). There was no interaction between the conditions and the conflict issue, \( F(1, 254) = 1.92, p = .090 \).

Thus, these different checks confirm that the experimental manipulations had the intended effects, that these consistently emerged across the six different conflict issues, and that value versus interest conflict conditions did not differ from each other in terms of experienced conflict intensity.

**Dependent Measures**

**Self-involvement.** An analysis of variance with condition and conflict issue as between-subject factors revealed a main effect of condition, indicating that participants in the value conflict condition experienced significantly greater self-involvement (\( M = 3.83, SD = 1.38 \)) compared with the participants in the conflict of interests condition (\( M = 3.31, SD = 1.35 \)), \( F(1, 254) = 10.24, p = .002, \eta^2 = .04 \). There was no interaction between experimental conditions and conflict issue, \( F(5, 254) = 1.53, p = .182 \).

**Perceived common ground.** Analysis of variance revealed a main effect of experimental condition, showing that participants in the value conflict condition perceived less common ground (\( M = 4.56, SD = 1.31 \)) compared with the participants in the conflict of interests condition (\( M = 5.23, SD = 1.04 \)), \( F(1, 254) = 23.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08 \). There was no interaction between experimental condition and conflict issue, \( F(5, 254) = 1.48, p = .198 \).

**Discussion**

The results of Study 1 confirm our predictions that the mere perception of a conflict either as a value or as a conflict of interests affects one’s self-involvement and conflict appraisals. Specifically, across different conflict issues, we found that framing the same conflict in terms of different values compared with different interests enhances one’s self-involvement, but decreases one’s perception of common ground with the opponent.
These results suggest that value conflicts may affect self-involvement and perceived common ground irrespective of other conflict properties such as the specific conflict issue or conflict intensity. That is, despite similar ratings of conflict intensity and across six different conflict issues, having one’s values at stake enhances subjective involvement in the conflict situation and, at the same time, lessens the amount of perceived common ground with the opponent compared with when one’s (material) interests are at stake. Despite these strengths of Study 1, it is important to note that participants evaluated conflict situations, in which they were not actually taking part. The way participants rated these conflicts does not necessarily predict their responses to a situation in which they are actually immersed in the conflict, if only because they have limited ability to forecast their own behavior (see also Osberg & Shrauger, 1986; Wilson & LaFleur, 1995). This is why we used a different experimental procedure in Study 2, to complement the results of Study 1. In Study 2, we focus on a single conflict issue that is framed either as a conflict of interest or as a value conflict, to place participants in a situation where they actually disagree with another party (a confederate) and are asked to resolve this conflict.

**Study 2**

In Study 2, we also aimed to extend the scope of the findings from Study 1 by further examining how specific aspects of self-involvement and perceived common ground are affected by different types of conflict. To this aim, we developed more elaborate predictions about the processes that underlie each of the differences observed in Study 1 and expanded our dependent measures to assess these in more detail.

**Overview**

**Self-Involvement.** In Study 1, we measured self-involvement by asking participants to directly indicate their emotional involvement and personal involvement. In Study 2, we build on the notion that people construe the disagreement in value conflicts as calling into question the validity of their own values. Due to greater identity threat in value conflicts (Ellemers et al., 1999), we argue that participants will attempt to manage their experience of a value conflict via recruitment of social validation of their viewpoint through affiliation with others who share the same values and will be more likely to do so than participants in the conflict of interests condition (Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011). Thus, we predict that participants in the value conflict condition will identify more strongly with others who share their viewpoint on the conflict issue, than those who experience a conflict of interests.

**Perceived Common Ground.** In Study 1, we measured perceived common ground via self-reports of potential for conflict resolution and sympathy for the other’s position. In Study 2, we elaborate on these findings, first, by examining more specifically how people respond to the other party’s position when they realize it deviates from their own position (violation of shared value expectancy). Second, we assess whether broader perceptions of the opponent in relation to the self—beyond the issue under consideration (generalized attitude similarity)—are affected by framing the conflict in terms of diverging values versus interests. As people tend to see their own values as true and just, they are likely to project the same values onto others—as long as they do not have concrete indications that this might not be the case (Krueger & Clement, 1994). If interests are at stake, people are more likely to anticipate that others might have conflicting interests (Harinck et al., 2000). Following this line of reasoning, we predict that framing the issue in terms of values will cause participants to expect the other party to hold values similar to the self, whereas this is less likely to be the case when the issue is framed in terms of interests. Hence, the discovery that the other party endorses the opposite position is more likely to violate prior expectations in the case of a value conflict than in the case of a conflict of interest. The unanticipated emergence of value differences and the resulting feelings of expectancy violation thus raised disrupted further interactions and indicate decreased perceptions of common ground (Bettencourt, Dill, Greathouse, Charlton, & Mulholland, 1996; Pruitt, 1983; Rink & Ellemers, 2007).

The disruptive nature of value differences for perceptions of common ground should also be evident from the fact that people are more likely to anticipate dissimilarities in other domains, based on the current disagreement in values compared with a disagreement about interests. Thus, in Study 2, we again hypothesize that participants are less likely to perceive common ground in a value conflict compared with a conflict of interest. We argue that this is indicated by greater initial similarity expectations resulting in an intensified experience of expectancy violation when the other party turns out to differ from the self. In addition, we predict the overall perceived attitude similarity with the opponent to be lower in the value conflict condition compared with the conflict of interests condition.

**Method**

**Participants and Design.** Seventy-seven undergraduate students (65 females) with the mean age of 20.78 (SD = 1.94) from the Leiden University participated for 2 credits or 6 euros in an experiment with a single factor (value conflict vs. conflict of interests) between-subjects design with the measures of social identification, conflict specific similarity, and generalized attitude similarity as dependent variables.

**Manipulation and Procedure.** Upon arrival, participants were led into individual cubicles where the experiment took place. First, the participants’ negative emotions were pretested. Then, participants were informed that they would discuss a specific issue with another participant. They were told they would have to reach a joint decision with respect to that issue.
by the end of the experiment, but first they would prepare for the discussion by exchanging information with their interaction partner via the webcam. In reality, no discussion took place and the experiment ended after this "preparation phase." Next, participants watched their interaction partner introducing himself or herself to them via the webcam and they also introduced themselves. Then, the conflict issue was introduced as the topic for the participants’ discussion at the end of the experiment. The conflict issue (a choice pro or against air travel to reach a vacation destination) was the same for all participants. Participants read the description of the conflict issue and were informed of the viewpoint they would defend during the upcoming discussion. All participants were assigned to defending a viewpoint against air travel to ensure that there would be no confound with naturally held preferences. However, in the value conflict condition, the participants defended their viewpoint (the choice against an airplane as travel means) based on a proenvironmental value. In the conflict of interests condition, the participants defended the same viewpoint based on a limited budget. At that point, participants’ expectations about their opponent’s viewpoint were assessed. Then, participants received the message that their interaction partner actually disagreed with them and would defend the opposing viewpoint. Specifically, the participants in the value conflict condition received the message that their opponent chose an airplane as travel means disregarding the environmental value. In the conflict of interests condition, the participants received the message that their opponent chose to take an airplane as travel means disregarding its costs. Subsequently, participants indicated the extent to which their prior expectations about the other’s position were violated. To reinforce the experience of a conflict, the participants were asked to prepare and write down at least five arguments in defense of their viewpoint, which they would exchange with their interaction partner via the webcam. Participants in all conditions were equally able to provide these arguments, even though their viewpoint had been assigned to them by the experimenter. Next, the participants watched their interaction partner arguing for the opposite viewpoint before they communicated arguments in favor of their own viewpoint via the webcam (for the maximum of 2 min). After a reminder of the discussion to follow, participants indicated their own attitudes on a variety of issues unrelated to the conflict issue, to provide an anchor for the generalized attitude similarity measure. Next, the degree of identification with others sharing their viewpoint were assessed, after which participants gauged their interaction partner’s attitudes on a range of issues unrelated to the current conflict, to complete the generalized attitude similarity measure. Afterwards, participants completed the manipulation checks and indicated the ease with which they defended the assigned viewpoint. Participants were also asked to report what viewpoint on the conflict issue they would have chosen if they could choose their viewpoint themselves. We checked and ruled out the possibility that differences in participants’ a priori preferences did not alter the effects of our experimental manipulations. Then, participants evaluated their interaction partner and filled in the negative emotions posttest and demographic background questions. Finally, participants were thanked, paid, and debriefed. None of the participants had accurately guessed the actual purpose of the experiment.

Confederates. All communications supposedly representing responses from “another participant” were voiced by a confederate and were recorded beforehand. The same confederates represented the opposite position in the values and interests conditions. Confederate’s gender was counterbalanced across conditions, to correct for possible gender effects in the interaction.

Dependent Measures

Social identification. We asked participants to indicate their self-involvement with the conflict issue by assessing the extent to which they affiliate with others who share their viewpoint (see also Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2009). For this purpose, we adapted the Social Identity Scale (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999) to assess three aspects of identification with the (imaginary) group of people who share the same viewpoint: group self-esteem (e.g., pride in belonging to that group), self-categorization (e.g., seeing the group as reflecting an important part of the self), and commitment (e.g., the desire to remain in the group). The 10 questions were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The mean of the 10 items (Cronbach’s α = .64) indicated the degree of self-involvement in the conflict.

Violation of similarity expectations. Participants’ expectations about their interaction partner’s viewpoint (What viewpoint do you think your interaction partner will take on this issue?) was measured dichotomously (the same vs. the opposing viewpoint to that of the participant) immediately after the participants were informed of the viewpoint they would defend, but before the interaction partner’s viewpoint was revealed. In addition, two statements assessed the extent to which the interaction partner’s opposing viewpoint violated the participants’ initial expectations. These two statements (I was surprised by my interaction partner’s viewpoint and I did not expect my interaction partner to take this viewpoint on the issue) were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all to 7 = very much). The mean on the two expectancy violation question represented participants’ shared value expectancy, r(77) = .56, p < .001.

Generalized attitude similarity. As an implicit measure of the perceived attitude similarity to the interaction partner, participants first indicated their own attitudes toward six issues, unrelated to the conflict issue (e.g., shopping is fun, computer games are good for one’s general development, there are too many immigrants allowed into Europe). The participants then gauged their interaction partner’s attitudes on the same issues. Participants rated these questions on an
8-point scale (1 = not at all, 8 = very much). The degree of overlap between their own attitudes and the attitudes they expected their interaction partner to have (across these six issues) indicate the extent of perceived attitude similarity with one’s interaction partner. We calculated this by correlating the attitude ratings for self and partner across the six items for each participant. The resulting single value for each participant indicates generalized attitude similarity. A higher correlation indicates greater perceived similarity.

**Manipulation Checks.** We used the same questions as in Study 1 to check for the type of conflict.

**Control Variables.** We assessed a number of control variables to rule out alternative explanations for any differences between the experimental conditions. We included two questions asking participants to indicate how easy it was for them to defend the given viewpoint (1 = very difficult to 7 = very easy) and to indicate who had a stronger starting point in the conflict (1 = me to 7 = my interaction partner, reversed), r(77) = .68, p < .001. After completion of the study, we asked participants to indicate how likeable, friendly, and warm (Cronbach’s α = .63) they found their interaction partner on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all to 7 = very much) and how smooth they found the interaction. Negative emotions such as anger and fear may affect conflict perception and conflict development (Steinel et al., 2008; Van Kleef, 2008). To rule out that the two types of conflict differentially affected participants’ negative emotions, we asked participants to indicate at the beginning and at the end of the experiment how angry and fearful they felt on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all to 7 = very much) and how smooth they found the interaction. These were combined into separate negative emotions scales for the pretest (r = .32, p = .005) and for the posttest (r = .29, p = .009).

**Results**

There was no interaction between the condition and the confederate’s gender on any of the dependent measures (F < 1). Data obtained with the male and female confederates were therefore collapsed. Participant gender was equally distributed across conditions, did not correlate with any of the dependent measures, and was therefore excluded from further analyses.

**Control Variables.** Participants in the value conflict condition (M = 3.68, SD = 1.64) and participants in the conflict of interests condition (M = 3.61, SD = 1.46) reported similar ease of defending their assigned viewpoints, F(1, 75) = 0.04, p = .835. There was no interaction between experimental condition and the extent to which the participants agreed with their assigned viewpoint, F(1, 77) = .349, p = .583. Equal number of participants in both experimental conditions (values vs. interests) indicated that they would have spontaneously chosen the given viewpoint; this ruled out an alternative explanation for the differences between the experimental conditions. In both conflict conditions, the overall evaluation of the confederate was the same, F(1, 75) = 1.33, p = .252, and the interaction was rated as equally smooth, F < 1, ns. Participants in the two experimental conditions did not differ in the negative emotions they reported on the pretest (F < 1) or on the posttest (F < 1).

**Manipulation Checks**

**Conflict type manipulation check.** As we did in Study 1, we entered the two conflict type manipulation check questions as a within-participants factor in an analysis of variance, with conflict condition as a between-participants factor. As intended, this revealed a significant interaction between experimental condition and value versus interests rating, F(1, 75) = 22.15, p < .001, η² = .23. In the value conflict condition, participants evaluated the conflict more as a conflict of different values (M = 4.31, SD = 1.73) than in the conflict of interests condition (M = 3.05, SD = 1.41), F(1, 75) = 12.08, p < .001, η² = .14. In the conflict of interests condition, participants evaluated the conflict more as a conflict of different interests (M = 5.16, SD = 1.22) than in the conflict of interests condition (M = 4.15, SD = 1.68), F(1, 75) = 8.98, p = .004, η² = .11.

**Conflict intensity check.** Participants in the value conflict condition (M = 3.94, SD = 1.14) evaluated the conflict to be equally intense as participants in the conflict of interests condition (M = 4.34, SD = 1.23), F(1, 75) = 2.27, p = .136.

**Dependent Measures**

**Social identification.** As predicted, participants in the value conflict condition reported more identification with others sharing their position (M = 3.32, SD = 0.58) than participants in the conflict of interests condition (M = 2.85, SD = 0.83), F(1, 75) = 8.32, p = .005, η² = .10.

**Violation of similarity expectations.** Participants in the value conflict condition were more inclined to expect their interaction partner to hold similar views on the conflict issue than participants in the conflict of interests condition, χ²(1, N = 77) = 10.86, p = .001. Accordingly, participants experienced more violation of similarity expectations when they were confronted with their interaction partner’s dissenting viewpoint in the value conflict condition (M = 3.13, SD = 1.10) than in the conflict of interests condition (M = 2.15, SD = 1.14), F(1, 75) = 6.07, p = .016, η² = .08.

**Generalized attitude similarity.** As predicted, participants in the value conflict condition indicated less overlap between their own and their interaction partner’s attitudes on a range of issues unrelated to the conflict at hand (M = 0.23, SD = 0.46) compared with the participants in the conflict of...
interests condition ($M = 0.45, SD = 0.37), F(1, 75) = 5.51, p = .022, η² = .07.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 confirm our predictions that framing a particular conflict issue in terms of different values—rather than interests—induces more identification with those who share the same viewpoint, elicits more violation of similarity expectations, and raises less perceived attitude similarity with the interaction partner. This is in line with our reasoning and again indicates that the experience of a value conflict induces more self-involvement, and decreases perceived common ground, compared with a conflict of interests.

Thus, converging results were obtained across the two studies, even though there were some important changes in the design of Study 2 compared with Study 1. First, in Study 2, the participants were placed in a more immersive conflict situation—as they were led to believe that they would discuss this issue with another participant whom they interacted with via webcam—to examine whether the predicted responses also occur when participants actually engage in the conflict. Second, this time we examined more specific attitudinal implications of the initial differences in self-involvement and perceived common ground that we found in Study 1. Third, in Study 2, we included a number of control variables, to rule out various alternative explanations for the observed differences between conditions, such as differences in mood, or general evaluations of the interaction and the interaction partner.

General Discussion

In the present research, we investigated specific factors that contribute to the development and escalation of value conflicts as compared with conflicts of interest. Specifically, we focused on self-involvement and perceived common ground as two key concepts that play a crucial role in further conflict development and conflict resolution. In accordance with our central hypothesis, we found that when a particular conflict issue is framed as referring to different values, this leads to greater self-involvement and less perceived common ground compared with when the same disagreement is framed as a conflict of interests.

In Study 1, we included six different conflict issues, each framed either in terms of conflicting values or in terms of conflicting interests. Participants were asked to imagine being in disagreement with another person about this issue and indicated the extent of self-involvement and perceived common ground with the opponent. Consistent with our expectations, when a conflict was perceived to be rooted in underlying value differences, this enhanced participants’ ratings of self-involvement and lowered perceived common ground with the opponent compared with when the same conflict was perceived to be rooted in differences of interests.

We corroborated and extended these results in Study 2, with a more immersive methodology and more elaborate measures. In the second experiment, we selected one of the six conflict issues from Study 1 and framed it either in terms of different environmental values or in terms of different financial interests as underlying reasons for the conflict. Consistent with the results from the first study, we found that a value frame led people to identify more strongly with those who share the same position—presumably as a way to validate and anchor their own values. This indicates self-involvement in the conflict and reflects a primary concern with maintaining one’s current position and guarding against loss of social ground—which are known to impede constructive conflict resolution.

In addition, we found that framing the conflict in terms of values led participants to emphasize the dissimilarity with their conflict opponent. This was not only the case when we asked about the conflict issue under consideration but also generalized into an overall decrease in perceived similarity to the other in a range of attitudinal domains that were unrelated to the conflict issue. This emphasis on differences rather than similarities with the other party, extending beyond the conflict issue itself, provides another reason why value conflicts will tend to escalate and are harder to resolve than conflicts of interest. In real life, value conflicts often involve multiple disagreements with holders of opposite value systems or political ideologies. The present results may help to explain how such disagreements may carry-over into other domains, as we have documented that a value disagreement about a specific issue raises inferences about additional differences between the conflict parties. In this context, it is also important to note that framing the conflict in terms of values heightened initial expectancies that the other party would share one’s viewpoint on the conflict issue despite the fact that this particular viewpoint was assigned to participants and did not necessarily reflect their own convictions.

On one hand, this accurately reflects the reality of political representatives, who may be required to defend “the party line” on a particular issue, regardless of their personal views. At the same time, this suggests that the degree of self-involvement and impact of value differences may be even more pronounced in conflicts where more central and personally meaningful values are at stake.

Thus, results of these two studies suggest that value conflicts and conflicts of interests tend to develop differently because of their diverging implications for the amount of self-involvement and perceived common ground with the other party. The present research contributes new insights to the study of value conflicts. First, our research addresses the perceptions and expectations relevant to the emergence and initial development of different types of conflict, as it addresses the self-directed and other-directed processes that arise both in anticipation of a conflict (Study 1) and during the emergence of a conflict (Study 2), instead of focusing on conflict outcomes. Even the few experimental studies that compare the development of different types of conflicts (e.g., Harinck
et al., 2000) mainly examine the negotiation process and conflict outcomes instead of addressing these initial stages in conflict development. Our current findings not only demonstrate the differential impact of diverging values versus interests in the process of conflict development but also suggest that there may be scope to intervene in emerging conflicts by emphasizing instrumental concerns and de-emphasizing value issues. Such interventions should help reduce the amount of self-involvement and enhance perceptions of common ground, which should both facilitate more constructive conflict resolution.

Second, by examining the impact of referring to diverging values or interests in the context of the same specific conflict issue, our methodology allows for a direct and clean comparison between the two conflict types. That is, keeping constant the conflict issue but framing it differently to induce different types of conflict yields unambiguous findings and enhances our understanding of the specific factors that differentiate between these two types of conflict. This methodology allows us to rule out the possibility that these are caused by a range of other aspects that are likely to covary with different types of conflicts and that we could not control for, such as the specific nature and intensity of the conflict. Finally, the consistency of the results from both studies with different methodologies and measures attests to the robustness of our findings, across different conflict issues as well as for different indicators of self-involvement and perceived common ground.

Of course, the present findings also raise novel questions. For instance, a further examination of the interplay between self-involvement and perceived common ground of value conflicts on one hand and the outcomes of value conflicts on the other hand may represent one possible avenue for future research. To test this, future research might assess initial value conflict development as well as subsequent value conflict resolution stages over time. Another future research issue concerns people’s responses to a confrontation with someone holding different values. The use of self-reports in the present studies implies that we only have access to participants’ explicit reactions—even though the purpose of at least some of the questions asked in Study 2 was more masked than in Study 1. It would be interesting to further explore this issue by the use of more implicit measures of the conflict experience such as cardiovascular indicators of threat and challenge experiences or measures of hormonal changes (e.g., cortisol levels) in future research. Such future research endeavors may provide further insights regarding people’s responses on a nonconscious level as well as regarding the relationship between self-reports and these physiological correlates. Finally, our findings indicate that in value conflicts, people experience more identification with those who share the same values. Future research might explore how self-enhancement and other protective strategies that people may use in value conflicts operate to help them validate their own position.

Conclusion

Conflict is often rooted in our perception of another’s actions and intentions. How we view and interpret the behavior of one another can determine our attitude toward the shaping and the resolution of a conflict. The present research increases our understanding of perceptual and motivational processes specific to value conflicts by examining the different effects that a single conflict issue has for self-involvement and perception of common ground, depending on whether it is framed in terms of opposing values versus opposing interests. Our data show that when values are involved, conflicts develop differently compared with when (material) interests are involved. This offers scope to improve our understanding of the sociocognitive implications of value conflicts, which will not only advance the development of conflict theory but can also improve the effectiveness of concrete interventions that can be implemented in emerging conflicts.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (432-08-016). This grant was awarded to Naomi Ellemers, Fieke Harinck, and Daan Scheepers.

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