Validation of the French-Canadian Adaptation of the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory for Adolescents in Dating Relationships

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BRIEF REPORT

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The emergence of dating relationships in adolescence is often a source of intense emotions, which may lead to more frequent conflicts between partners than in adulthood. It is particularly important that adolescents learn constructive conflict resolution strategies so they can react appropriately when conflicts arise. Conversely, destructive strategies can contribute to the escalation of conflicts as well as many consequences for their psychological well-being. In Canada, there is no French instrument available for measuring conflict resolution strategies used by adolescents in their dating relationships. The objective of this study was to validate a French-Canadian adaptation of the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI) within an adolescent population. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on 2 samples of adolescents ($n_1 = 262$; $n_2 = 221$). In Study 1, results of the exploratory factor analysis suggested a 3-factor structure that included positive problem solving, conflict engagement, and withdrawal. Results further revealed evidence of reliability for all subscales ($\alpha = .70–.92$) and evidence of convergent validity. In Study 2, the results of a second-order confirmatory factor analysis confirmed 3 first-order factors nested in a higher 2-factor model of constructive and destructive strategies ($\alpha = .71–.85$). In sum, these findings provide evidence of reliability and validity for the French-Canadian adaptation of the CRSI, which will be useful for future research and clinical practice with French-speaking populations of adolescents.

Public Significance Statement
Several strategies can be used when managing conflicts with a romantic partner. Adolescents tend to use three different types of strategies: positive problem solving, conflict engagement, and withdrawal. These results provide a better understanding of how adolescents manage conflicts in their dating relationships and will help identify strategies for promoting healthy relationship among teenagers.

Keywords: conflict resolution strategies, adolescence, dating relationships, French-Canadian adaptation

During adolescence, dating relationships become increasingly important until they come to represent a central source of support and affection (Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchey,

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2002). Although they may contribute positively to adolescents' social and affective development, these relationships are distinguished from those in adulthood by higher levels of negative interactions, jealousy, and control (Lantagne & Furman, 2017). Adolescents are still developing their relationship skills and may not yet know the best way to deal with the difficulties experienced in their dating relationships. When a conflict arises between partners, several strategies may be used to resolve it. Constructive strategies (e.g., negotiation, compromise), which promote conflict resolution, are associated with better psychological adjustment (Kansky & Allen, 2018), whereas destructive strategies (e.g., conflict engagement, withdrawal) are associated with the escalation of conflicts, which increases the likelihood of experiencing teen dating violence (TDV; Johnson, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2015). TDV has been associated with major negative consequences for the mental health of adolescents, including the presence of depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts (Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, & Rothman,

2013). Furthermore, adopting destructive strategies increases the risk of continuing to use these behaviours in subsequent relationships (Cui, Ueno, Gordon, & Fincham, 2013). The determinant influence of first dating relationships raises the relevance of validating a French-Canadian instrument for measuring conflict resolution strategies. This instrument could facilitate early identification of those who use destructive strategies and who are more at risk of experiencing TDV.

Currently, the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994) is one of the most suitable instruments for measuring conflict resolution strategies used in dating relationships. It is designed to identify four categories of strategies: positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance. The items in the instrument were developed empirically based on the results of an observational study (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), which focused on the changes in adults' intimate relationship satisfaction over time. After developing the initial instrument (Kurdek, 1994), Kurdek tested two alternative structures of the CRSI (Kurdek, 1995, 1998). In his last revision of the instrument (Kurdek, 1998), he proposed to remove the Compliance subscale and that the remaining three factors could be grouped into broader categories of constructive (i.e., positive problem solving) and destructive (i.e., conflict engagement and withdrawal) strategies (Kurdek, 1998). Bonache, Ramírez-Santana, and Gonzalez-Mendez (2016) used confirmatory factor analyses to compare these three models, and their results suggested that the three-factor model excluding the Compliance subscale (Kurdek, 1998) was the most suited for adolescents' reality.

Considering the positive influence of constructive strategies on the development and maintenance of dating relationships (Flora & Segrin, 2015), it would be relevant to distinguish between various constructive ways for adolescents to resolve conflicts. In 1977, Kilmann and Thomas developed the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) to differentiate the way individuals manage their workplace conflicts according to five dimensions. Whereas three of their constructs correspond to the conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance strategies of the CRSI, they also differentiated two distinct constructive strategies (i.e., collaboration and compromise). Collaboration is defined as the attempt to find a solution that satisfies both parties while compromise involves mutual concessions to find an acceptable solution that partially satisfies both. While these conflict management strategies have been developed specifically for organisational contexts, the typology of the TKI (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977) has also been applied to other interpersonal contexts, such as family, peer, and intimate relationships (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000; Hammock, Richardson, Pilkington, & Utley, 1990; Tezer & Demir, 2001). For example, a study on marital satisfaction used the TKI typology, and their results suggested that collaboration was associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000). Given that the CRSI provides only one subscale of constructive strategies (i.e., Positive Problem Solving), it could be valuable to add a few items to differentiate compromise and collaboration.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to adapt a French-Canadian version of the CRSI (Kurdek, 1994) to the specific context of adolescence. With this questionnaire, consisting of the original CRSI items along with additional items to measure constructive strategies inspired by the TKI (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977), French-Canadian researchers will gain access to a measure of conflict resolution strategies in dating relationships with documented validity and reliability.

Development of the Instrument

The 16 original CRSI items (Kurdek, 1994) were combined with 4 items inspired by the TKI (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). To increase the range of constructive strategies in accordance with the TKI typology, the Positive Problem Solving subscale of the CRSI was divided in two (i.e., compromise and collaboration). The items were translated through a back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1970; Vallerand, 1989) from English to French and then from French to English. The two English-language versions were then compared to ascertain their correspondence. A preliminary version of the questionnaire was reviewed by two certified mediators specialized in conflict resolution, and the final version of the instrument was administered to five adolescents to ensure clarity of the proposed items. The initial French-Canadian adaptation of the CRSI consisted of 20 items to which the participants responded twice on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* to *always* to indicate how often each partner used the various strategies during a conflict, resulting in two parallel versions of the instrument. Five strategies could theoretically be distinguished: compromise, collaboration, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance. To validate the French-Canadian adaptation of the CRSI, two studies were conducted, first to explore the factor structure and psychometric properties and then to replicate these findings in a different sample.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure.   The sample of 262 adolescents (M_{age} = 17.14 years, SD = 1.51, range = 14–19 years) was selected according to the following inclusion criteria: (a) being aged between 14 and 19 years and (b) having experienced a dating relationship lasting at least 1 month without cohabiting with their partner. Given an established age of consent of 14 years in Quebec, parental consent was not required. The sample consisted of 159 girls (60.7%) and 103 boys (39.3%), most of whom were of Canadian origin (83.9%) and spoke French at home (82.1%). Recruitment was conducted on a voluntary basis in high schools, colleges, and universities from Montreal, as well as through social networks. In the educational institutions, a research assistant presented the study and the consent form in class, and youth who wanted to participate could fill out the questionnaires directly online using their cell phone, computer, or electronic tablet. When recruited through social networks, youth were required to read and approve the electronic consent form before accessing the questionnaires. Ethical approval of the project was granted by the institution's human research ethics committee of the University of Quebec in Montreal.

Measures.   In addition to the French-Canadian adaptation of the CRSI and sociodemographic information, two other questionnaires were included to measure the convergent validity of the CRSI. Quality of the dating relationship was measured using an instrument developed and validated in French by Mallet and

Vrignaud (2000) measuring support and psychological proximity in the adolescents' friendships. The questionnaire instructions were reworded to apply to a current or past dating relationship. The questionnaire consists of 18 items answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all true* to *completely true*. The mean of all items represents the total score ($\alpha = .94$). Emotion regulation difficulties were measured using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Côté, Gosselin, & Dagenais, 2013; Gratz & Roemer, 2004), consisting of 36 items answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *almost never* to *almost always*. The sum of all items represents the total score ($\alpha = .93$), where a higher score indicates more difficulties. We expected a positive relationship between constructive strategies and quality of the relationship and a negative association of constructive strategies with emotion regulation difficulties. Opposite findings were expected for destructive strategies.

Results

Exploratory factor analyses. Two exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) with oblique rotation and unweighted least squares estimation were conducted on both the respondent and the partner items. Parallel analyses were conducted to determine the number of factors to retain (O'Connor, 2000). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) index and the Bartlett sphericity test were used to verify the adequacy of the factor structure and the interitem correlations. Early on, analyses suggested the removal of the four compliance items given their complex saturations on other factors and the poor internal consistency of the subscale. Therefore, in concordance with Bonache et al. (2016), who confirmed that the three-factor structure of the CRSI (Kurdek, 1998) excluding the Compliance subscale was the best solution, the subsequent EFA were conducted on the 16 remaining items of the questionnaire. The EFA converged toward a three-factor model, reflecting the Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, and Withdrawal subscales. Table 1 presents the saturation coefficients of the items in the three-factor models. The respondent model explained 58.37% of the variance, and the partner model explained 64.54%. In the respondent version, the KMO index of .86 indicated good sampling adequacy (KMO individuals: .77–.92), and the Bartlett sphericity test was significant ($\chi^2 = 1{,}743.39$, $p < .001$). Although the factor loading revealed three items presenting complex saturations (Items 4, 11, and 15), they loaded more strongly on their preassigned factor. In the partner version, the KMO index was .90 (individual KMO: .82–.94), and the Bartlett sphericity test was significant ($\chi^2 = 219.05$, $p < .001$). The saturation coefficients indicated that all items now loaded on a single factor. The internal consistency of the respondent and partner subscales was adequate, varying from .70 to .92 (see Table 1).

Convergent validity. Analyses conducted to measure convergent validity indicated that, for the respondent, the reported quality of the relationship was positively associated with their use of positive problem-solving strategies ($r = .48$, $p < .001$) but negatively associated with withdrawal strategies ($r = -0.18$, $p = .005$). No significant association was found in the case of conflict engagement strategies ($r = -0.06$, $p = 0.39$). As expected, emotion regulation difficulties were found to be positively related to conflict engagement ($r = 0.32$, $p < .001$) and withdrawal ($r =$

0.38, $p < .001$) strategies but negatively associated with positive problem solving ($r = -0.15$, $p = .04$).

Study 2

Method

Participants and procedure. The sample consisted of 221 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 17$ years, $SD = 1.5$, range $= 14$–19 years), including 129 girls (57.6%), most of whom were of Canadian origin (71.9%) and spoke French at home (85.3%). The eligibility criteria were the same as those applied in Study 1 with the exception that teens had to be in a current dating relationship to participate. The adolescents were again recruited in high schools and colleges from Montreal, as well as through social networks. Research assistants would approach students in the schools' common areas and present the study and consent form. When recruited online, youth had to leave their contact information so a research assistant could reach them and go through the procedure over the phone. After consenting, adolescents were invited to fill out a questionnaire online using a link that was sent to them via short message service (SMS) or e-mail.

Measures. Conflict resolution strategies were measured using the French-Canadian adaptation of the CRSI used in Study 1 (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977; Kurdek, 1994).

Results

Confirmatory factor analyses. The factor models extracted by the EFA on the respondent and partner items were cross-validated using confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs). Second-order CFA was then used to explore whether the distinct but related first-order factors (i.e., Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, and Withdrawal) could be accounted for by two second-order constructs (i.e., Constructive and Destructive strategies). The analyses were conducted with MPLUS software (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) using the robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator, which takes into account nonnormal data distribution. Table 2 presents the fit indices of the first- and second-order respondent and partner models. Because the variance of the withdrawal factor was nonsignificantly different from 0 and otherwise negative, it was fixed to 0 in the second-order respondent model. The indices examined to assess correspondence between the theoretical and observed models suggested a good fit of the first- and second-order models compared with the expected values: $\chi^2/df \leq 3$, root mean square error of approximation ≤ 0.06, standardized root mean square residual ≤ 0.08, comparative fit index ≥ 0.95, and Tucker–Lewis index ≥ 0.95 (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999). The internal consistency values were adequate for the respondent and the partner, varying from .71 to .85 on the first-level subscales and from .81 to .85 on the second-level subscales.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to validate the French-Canadian adaptation of an instrument for measuring conflict resolution strategies used in adolescents' dating relationships (CRSI, adapted from Kurdek, 1994), to which were added four positive items to

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Factor Loadings From Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Self and Partner Models (n = 262)

	Factor loadings							
	Self				Partner			
Items	M (SD)	F1	F2	F3	M (SD)	F1	F2	F3
8. Identify the concerns and worries of each other and take them into account [*Identifier les préoccupations et les inquiétudes de chacun et les prendre en compte*].	3.36 (1.25)	.795			2.96 (1.27)	.769		
14. Negotiating and compromising [*Négocier et faire des compromis*].	3.18 (1.15)	.794			2.89 (1.23)	.821		
10. Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us [*Trouver des solutions acceptables pour chacun*].	3.34 (1.15)	.761			3.11 (1.25)	.797		
6. Sitting down and discussing differences constructively [*S'asseoir et discuter des désaccords de façon constructive*].	3.35 (1.18)	.745			3.04 (1.30)	.778		
4. Openly discuss the problem in order to find a solution that really suits each other [*Discuter ouvertement du problème pour trouver une solution*].	3.60 (1.18)	**.719**			3.13 (1.30)	.755		
2. Focusing on the problem at hand [*Se concentrer sur le problème en question*].	3.47 (1.14)	.693		−.307	3.07 (1.23)	.639		
16. Try to find the right balance between the two positions [*Trouver le juste milieu entre sa position et celle de l'autre*].	3.19 (1.13)	.672			2.87 (1.25)	.781		
12. Agree to make some concessions [*Accepter de faire des concessions*].	3.11 (1.09)	.549			2.75 (1.10)	.666		
13. Throwing insults and digs [*Insulter ou faire des remarques blessantes*].	1.51 (0.78)		.802		1.60 (0.90)		.802	
9. Getting carried away and saying things that aren't meant [*S'emporter et dire des choses qu'on ne pense pas*].	2.05 (1.05)		.767		2.10 (1.15)		.758	
1. Launching personal attacks [*Attaquer l'autre dans ses faiblesses*].	1.54 (0.74)		.600		1.74 (0.90)		.689	
5. Exploding and getting out of control [*Exploser et perdre le contrôle*].	1.66 (0.92)		.595		1.78 (1.03)		.616	
11. Tuning the other person out [*Ignorer l'autre*].	1.78 (0.95)		.375	**.413**	1.84 (1.07)			−.765
15. Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested [*Se retirer, être distant.e et se montrer désintéressé.e*].	2.00 (1.00)		.365	**.496**	1.88 (1.00)			−.641
3. Remaining silent for long periods of time [*Rester en silence pendant une longue période*].	2.11 (1.09)			.617	2.08 (1.14)			−.720
7. Reaching a limit, "shutting down," and refusing to talk any further [*Se fermer et décider de ne pas discuter davantage*].	1.90 (0.96)			.592	2.05 (1.12)			−.612
Eigenvalue		4.92	3.09	1.57		6.04	2.98	1.31
Variance explained (%)		30.75	19.32	9.81		37.73	18.60	8.21
Cronbach's alpha		0.89	0.79	0.70		0.92	0.82	0.81

Note. Values in boldface indicate the factor loading retained for each factor of the scale. French translation is provided in brackets. F1 = positive problem solving; F2 = conflict engagement; F3 = withdrawal.

Table 2

Goodness-of-Fit Statistics of the First- and Second-Order Models (n = 221)

Variable	$\chi^2(df)$	χ^2/df	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	CFI	TLI
First-order self	165.18 (101)	1.60	0.05 [0.04, 0.07]	0.06	0.93	0.92
Second-order self	149.50 (101)	1.48	0.05 [0.03, 0.06]	0.05	0.95	0.93
First-order partner	175.60 (101)	1.74	0.06 [0.04, 0.07]	0.06	0.92	0.90
Second-order partner	158.48 (101)	1.47	0.05 [0.04, 0.07]	0.06	0.93	0.92

Note. χ^2/df = normed chi-square. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

differentiate two constructive strategies inspired by the TKI typology (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977).

Three clearly distinguishable factors were found, corresponding to Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, and Withdrawal. Contrary to our expectation, the two distinct constructive strategies, compromise and collaboration, fused to form a single factor (Positive Problem Solving). These results are consistent with those obtained by Hammock et al. (1990), who reported that the compromise and collaboration strategies formed one undifferentiated factor among young adults. However, an adult sample in the same study showed this distinction, thus suggesting that the experience young people gain in conflict management as they grow older could increase their effectiveness in distinguishing between constructive resolution strategies. Given that adolescents continue to develop conflict resolution skills as they approach adulthood, they may have more difficulty distinguishing between similar constructive strategies, such as compromise and collaboration. The confirmed three-factor structure is consistent with the most recent version of the CRSI (Kurdek, 1998) and validated by Bonache et al. (2016) in a Spanish adolescent population. We also found evidence that the three first-order factors of the models were accounted for by two second-order constructs, suggesting that constructs of constructive and destructive strategies can be used when studying conflict resolution strategies in teen dating relationships.

Regarding convergent validity, all the correlations were in the expected direction, except for the use of conflict engagement strategies and quality of the relationship, where no significant association was observed. Dating relationships are known to present higher levels of negative interactions than in adulthood (Lantagne & Furman, 2017). Thus, adopting destructive behaviours (e.g., getting carried away or making hurtful comments) might be considered a normative way of resolving conflicts during adolescence and could possibly be confused with commitment or love. Although the levels of conflict engagement observed in the current sample were rather low and did not show much variation, it is possible that they were not common enough to adversely affect the quality of the relationship.

Although this study provides support for the psychometric soundness of the French-Canadian adaptation of the CRSI (Kurdek, 1994), some limitations must be considered. As the items were not codeveloped with adolescents, they might not reflect their reality adequately. Moreover, the sample was not representative of the entire Quebec's adolescent population. Therefore, in future studies, efforts should be made to recruit a larger representative sample to confirm the factor structure. A larger sample would also make it possible to test for gender invariance of the instrument and

to examine the developmental changes occurring between early and late adolescence. Furthermore, a test–retest study should be conducted, since the present cross-sectional design limited our ability to draw conclusions regarding the temporal stability of the instrument.

In sum, the results of this study provide preliminary evidence of the reliability and validity for the French-Canadian adaptation of the CRSI (Kurdek, 1994). The use of the CRSI will help further the knowledge in this field by providing a better understanding of how youth deal with conflicts in their dating relationships and by offering relevant information that can be integrated into TDV prevention programs. For example, with this instrument, it will be possible to have a better understanding of how adolescents manage conflicts in their dating relationships, to target adolescents who need help developing more positive problem solving, and to evaluate the improvement of their resolution skills after they participate in a prevention or intervention program (Antle, Sullivan, Dryden, Karam, & Barbee, 2011).

Résumé

L'émergence des relations amoureuses à l'adolescence est souvent une source d'émotions intenses, qui peuvent entraîner des conflits plus fréquents entre partenaires qu'à l'âge adulte. Il est particulièrement important que les adolescents apprennent des stratégies constructives de résolution de conflits afin qu'ils puissent réagir de façon appropriée en cas de conflit. Inversement, les stratégies destructrices peuvent contribuer à l'escalade des conflits ainsi qu'à de nombreuses conséquences pour le bien-être psychologique des adolescents. Au Canada, il n'existe aucun instrument français permettant de mesurer les stratégies de résolution de conflits utilisées par les adolescents dans leurs relations amoureuses. L'objectif de cette étude était de valider l'adaptation canadienne-française du répertoire des styles de résolution de conflits (CRSI) au sein d'une population d'adolescents. Des analyses exploratoires et confirmatoires des facteurs ont été effectuées sur deux échantillons d'adolescents ($n_1 = 262$; $n_2 = 221$). Dans l'étude 1, les résultats de l'analyse exploratoire des facteurs ont suggéré une structure à trois facteurs qui comprenait la résolution de problème positive, l'engagement en matière de conflit et le retrait. Les résultats ont également révélé des preuves de fiabilité pour toutes les sous-échelles (C x = 0,70 à 0,92) et des preuves de validité convergente. Dans l'étude 2, les résultats d'une analyse confirmatoire des facteurs de deuxième ordre ont confirmé trois facteurs de premier ordre imbriqués dans un modèle de deux facteurs plus élevé de stratégies constructives et destructives (C x = 0,71 à 0,85). En résumé, ces résultats témoignent de la fiabilité et de la

validité de l'adaptation canadienne-française du CRSI, qui seront utiles pour les recherches futures et la pratique clinique auprès des populations d'adolescents francophones.

Mots-clés : stratégies de résolution de conflits, adolescence, relations amoureuses, adaptation canadienne-française.

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