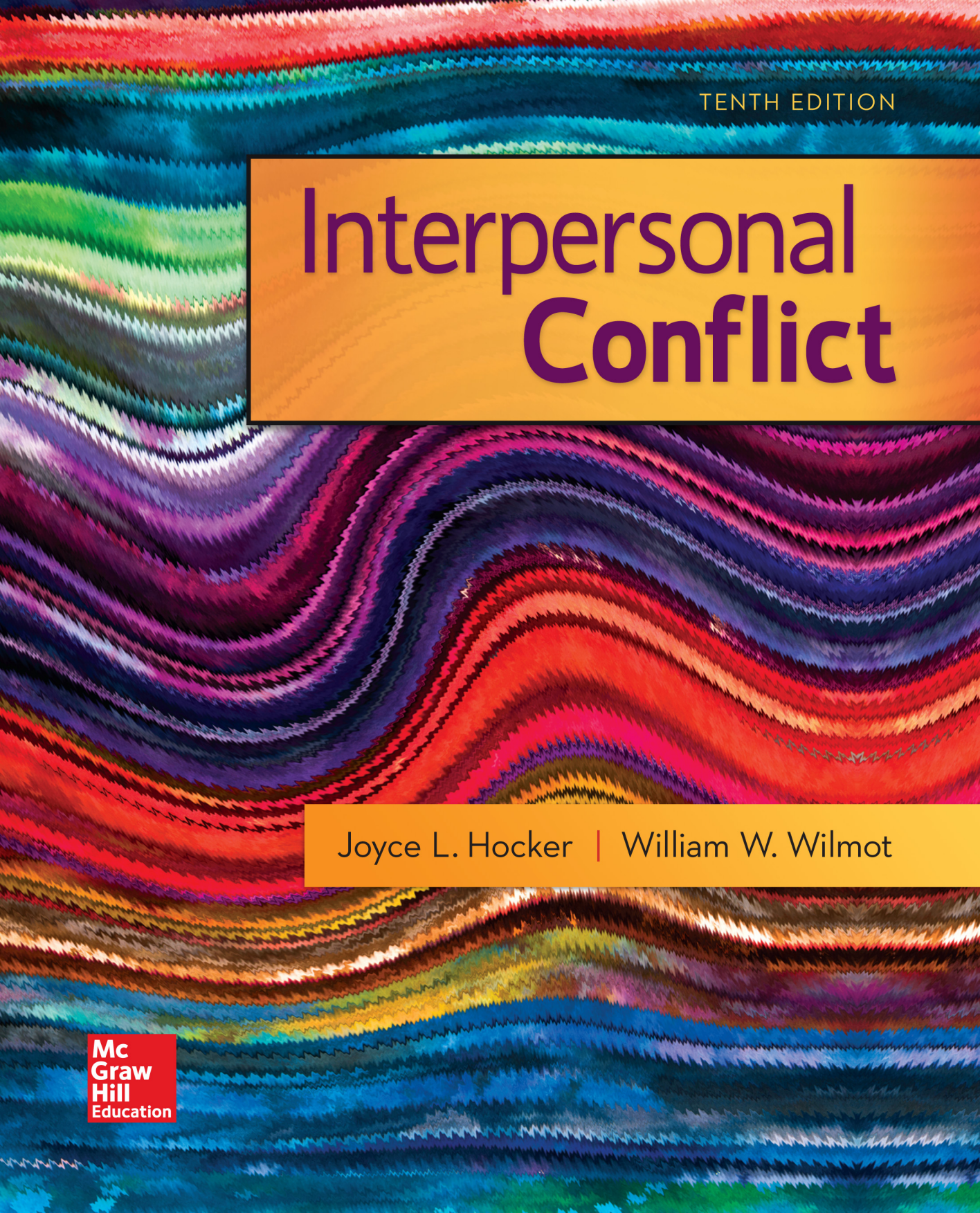
TENTH EDITION
Interpersonal
Conflict
Joyce L. Hocker | William W. Wilmot
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Interpersonal Conflict

Tenth Edition

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Tenth Edition

Joyce L. Hocker

William W. Wilmot

Mc Graw Hill Education

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With great appreciation
for the life and scholarship
of
William W. Wilmot
1943–2013

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Preface

Revising this, the tenth of edition of *Interpersonal Conflict,* brought me the opportunity to reflect on how the field has changed since I first began to research the field for my dissertation at the University of Texas in 1973. Since our first edition in 1978, conflict resolution has transformed into many subfields: peacemaking, third-party intervention, prevention of conflict, and the integration of personal transformation with interpersonal communication choices. This edition reflects many of the recent changes in the field.

All chapters reflect recent research on interpersonal conflict. As has been our practice, I have removed earlier citations that are so foundational that they need not be specifically cited. All chapters have been revised and in some cases, reorganized and rewritten for readability and clarity. New additions of "How would this sound?" give examples of dialogue the students may use to enlarge their conflict communication. Clearer organization and subheadings guide the reader through the text. The book still contains the 10 chapters in the same order.

Chapter One, "The Nature of Conflict," retains the resilient definition of conflict that has gained acceptance and use for more than three decades. This definition is now where it belongs, at the beginning of the chapter. Added emphasis on transforming the elements of conflict, with a special focus on perception, reflects the trend in the wider field to view elements as capable of transformation. The chapter includes activities on intrapersonal conflict, introducing the student to self-reflection as a basic first step. Examples and cases referring to same-sex relationships are added throughout. The chapter presents a persuasive case for studying conflict.

Chapter Two, "Perspectives on Conflict," retains the popular section on worldviews that influence one's approach to conflict. The metaphors of conflict section retains the simplified approach, organizing metaphors around danger and opportunity, used in the last edition. A new section on how narratives frame conflict has been added, with an extensive case study that illustrates the approach. The previous "lens view" of conflict has been removed, since it was redundant with new material on perception.

Chapter Three, "Interests and Goals," retains the popular teaching tool of the TRIP acronym (Topic, Relationship, Identity, and Process goals), which helps students analyze layers of any conflict. Several cases are extended to further exemplify the changing nature of goals.

Chapter Four, "Power: The Structure of Conflict," is extensively reorganized, rewritten, and clarified. All sections relating to high and low power and how to deal with imbalances have been reorganized. Many older citations are removed. A new definition of interpersonal power is presented, which focuses on influence. The shifting nature of power is emphasized (power depends on changing relationship dynamics). The power bases section has been updated. Some cases have been expanded and made more challenging. The section on bullying, including cyberbullying, has been revised and expanded. A new classroom activity on bullying and sexual assault has been added.

Chapter Five, "Conflict Styles," retains the popular Rahim styles assessment, with needed corrections in scoring, thus making the section accurate and useful. The section on verbal aggressiveness and verbal abuse is expanded, and placed in the "dominating" section. Integrating or collaborating is presented as the default style of choice, toward which the

teaching in this book is oriented. Violence is presented not as a kind of style, but as an approach that always leads to negative outcomes (along with bullying and verbal violence). References to violence scales are included in this edition.

Chapter Six, "Emotions in Conflict," benefits greatly from a surge of research and writing about the place of emotion in conflict resolution. New class activities that will guide students in the analysis of their emotional life have been added. While most researchers agree that no emotion is, in and of itself, positive or negative, the research literature continues to designate emotions in this way; the chapter reflects language in the research. A new "feeling words" inventory, simpler and more applied to conflict resolution, has been added. Humiliation is added as a separate, powerful emotion, tied to the experience of bullying. Material on how emotions transform as the conflict becomes more integrative is added. Mindfulness is presented as a necessary part of the transformation of conflict.

Chapter Seven, "Analyzing Conflicts," has been reorganized into macro-level analysis and micro-level analysis, which simplifies the approaches. The Comprehensive Guide, which assists students in writing a major conflict analysis paper, is updated to reflect changes in the book.

Chapter Eight, "Interpersonal Negotiation," includes new research on gender, culture, and negotiation. While all the approaches to negotiation covered before are still covered, the perspective of the chapter now clearly guides students toward integrative negotiation in most situations. Integrative negotiation uses all the communication theory upon which most of the book rests.

Chapter Nine, "Third-Party Intervention," presents current writing on communication coaching in an expanded manner. Coaching is presented as a part of many different kinds of third-party intervention, ideally suited for the student of communication. Updates on gender and third-party intervention have been added. The approaches to third-party intervention are presented as they actually occur in the workplace—dynamic and changing forms of interpersonal conflict resolution.

Chapter Ten, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," written by Gary Hawk at the authors' request five editions back, is updated with new, current cases dealing with sexual violence, trauma, social media, and racial bias. Gary has added a section on cautions when there is an imbalance of power. He has rewritten and retained the popular section on apology, pointing the reader toward examples of excellent apologies.

I welcome your comments, both from students and adopters of this book. Your responses help guide my choices for the future. I will respond to every comment. You may reach me at JoyceHocker45@gmail.com or joyhocker@aol.com. Best wishes as you begin or continue the journey of discovery about interpersonal conflict and the promotion of peaceful relationships.

Joyce L. Hocker,
Fall, 2016
Missoula, Montana

Acknowledgments

To the reader from Joyce Hocker

What a privilege to be working on this tenth edition of a project I began in the early seventies. These days, in semi-retirement, I teach peace and conflict resolution in the Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Montana, and at the Red Willow Learning Center, a nonprofit devoted to serving the needs of trauma survivors and those who serve these clients. I continue to find a sense of purpose as we work together for greater skill in creating peaceful relationships.

The tenth edition is the first revision without my longtime colleague Bill Wilmot, who died in the summer of 2013. His work pervades this book; I missed his wit and perspective as I revised the chapters. I appreciate all his contributions to this project over the years.

My husband, Gary Hawk, not only revised his excellent chapter on forgiveness and reconciliation, but he also supported me through the summer as I worked in our home each day. He helped me move into a large, lovely study affording a view of whitetail deer, birds, Ponderosa pines, mountain ash trees, and the peaceful rock garden he maintains in our backyard. He warmly encouraged me through the whole process. Our cat, Lonestar, maintained his practice of walking on the keyboard and letting me know when it was time to pay attention to him. Keegan Olson, a graduate student in Communication Studies at the University of Montana, served as my research assistant. He found just the right research updates for each chapter. I outlined what I hoped to find each week, and he perceived accurately what would be helpful and sent the citations to me. Additionally, Keegan tutored me in the online library system, organized the references, and made everything look easy. In addition to his technical expertise, Keegan shared a keen enthusiasm for the ideas he found, sharing his own perspectives with me. I could not have asked for a finer research assistant.

Just before this revision, I studied memoir writing with friends Sally Thompson, Cyndy Aten, and Gladys Considine. Novelist Richard Fifield, our teacher, helped sharpen our writing skills. I hope some of his expertise shows up in rewritten sections of this book. Sally Thompson kept track of my progress and shared her wise perspective on aspects of this revision.

Lillian Davis encouraged me during the time we were doctoral students at the University of Texas. She continues to be my dear friend, taking interest in this project. She and I are the only continuing witnesses of my early effort. In many ways, she is responsible for the inception of the conflict resolution project in my early years. I am deeply grateful to her.

My family members, the late Janice Hocker Rushing, my sister, and Jean Lightfoot Hocker and Lamar Hocker, our parents, continue to live in memory. Our parents taught us equality, fairness, and justice in a loving family environment where our individuality was welcomed. My brother Ed and I carry on their values and live with their love for us. I am grateful to Ed for encouraging me in this and my other writing projects. Anne de Vore, Jungian analyst and life guide, continues to enrich my life with her wisdom and counsel.

I am humbled to have worked with clients in my practice for decades now; they and all my former students have truly taught me the meaning of all these practices of interpersonal peacemaking.

May we learn to live in peace.

To the reader from Gary Hawk

As we complete this tenth edition I feel deeply grateful for 18 years of students in The Davidson Honors College, the way they trusted me with their stories, demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity, and showed kindness toward one another in the circle of our mutual instruction. Also, I remain truly grateful that Joyce Hocker gave me an opportunity to harvest my experience in the field of forgiveness and reconciliation and allowed me to express my own discoveries and the insights of others in a language that makes sense to me.

Supplements

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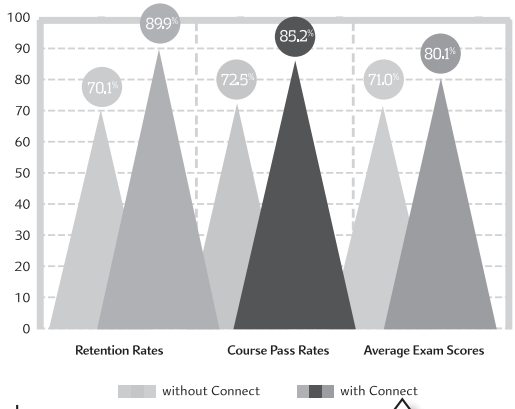

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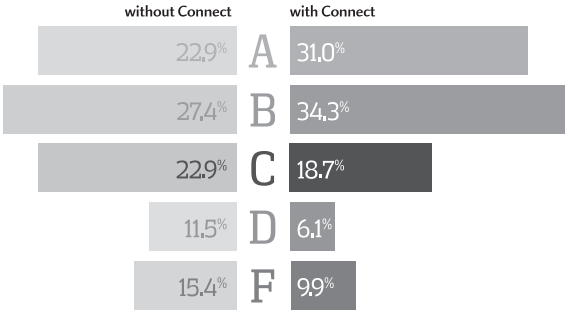

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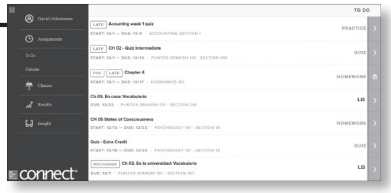

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Part One

Conflict Components

Chapter 1

The Nature of Conflict

Interpersonal Conflict Depends on Interpersonal Communication

Welcome to the study of communication during conflict. Communication is the medium for conflict management, whether face-to-face, written, or with technology. When we transform communication itself, we begin to engage the process of conflict resolution. Constructive communication shifts potentially destructive conflict into an arena of resolution (Fisher-Yoshida 2014).

Conflict participants communicate in an effort to generate shared meaning, solve problems, and preserve the relationship to accomplish shared goals. Effective communication in conflict management propels the twists or shifts in the direction of a conflict best described as transformations, or "aha" moments (Putnam 2010). In this book we focus on communication that is primarily:

- *Face-to-face* most of the time
- *With people you know* or who are *important to you*
- *Complicated and difficult.* If it were not so, you would not be in conflict.
- *Shaped by the context* in which the conflict takes place—romantic, family, work, or friends
- *Oriented toward constructing and sharing meaning*
- *Goal directed*

As you proceed throughout the book and class exercises, you will be challenged to alter your cherished habits of doing conflict. The goal is to teach you to become a more effective communicator in future conflict situations. Conflict is a fact of human life. It occurs naturally in all kinds of settings. Nations still struggle, families fracture in destructive conflicts, marriages face challenges and often fail, and the workplace is plagued with stress, bullying, avoidance of real communication, and blaming.

Conflict Defined

Perception is at the core of all conflict analysis. In interpersonal conflicts, people react as though there are genuinely different goals, there is not enough of some resource, and the other person actually is getting in the way of something prized by the perceiver. Sometimes these conditions are believed to be true, but sorting out what is perceived and what is interpersonally accurate forms the basis of conflict analysis.

Careful attention to the elements that make up conflict will help you understand an apparently unresolvable conflict. When conflicts remain muddled and unclear, they cannot be *resolved.* When you first perceive that you are in conflict with others, you may want to immediately get them to change. Usually, that initial attempt fails. You may feel hopeless. Instead, you will need to learn to change your own behavior (Miller, Roloff, and Reznik 2014). That's where conflict resolution begins.

Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.

An Expressed Struggle

An *interpersonal* approach to conflict management focuses on the communicative exchanges that make up the conflict episode. **Intrapersonal conflict**—internal strain that creates a state of ambivalence, conflicting internal dialogue, or lack of resolution in one's thinking and feeling—accompanies **interpersonal conflict.** One may endure intrapersonal conflict for a while before such a struggle is expressed communicatively. If you are upset with your father yet you do not write him, or you phone him less often and avoid expressing your concern, do you have a conflict?

Application 1.1 My Intrapersonal Conflicts

Think of an intrapersonal strain you may be feeling right now, or felt for a while in the past. What is the struggle you feel? Think of a picture or metaphor to describe what you are feeling. What words describe the internal strain? Have you ever lived through an intrapersonal conflict that did not ever become expressed? If you answered yes to this question, ask yourself if you might have expressed the conflict ever so slightly in some way. How might you have expressed the internal conflict nonverbally, or by actions you did not take?

Conflict is present when every person's perception of the struggle is communicated. The verbal or nonverbal communication may be subtle—a slight shift in body placement by Jill and a hurried greeting by Susan—but it must be present for the activity to be interpersonal conflict. Therefore, although other conditions must also exist before an interaction is labeled "conflict," Jandt (1973) asserts, "Conflict exists when the parties involved agree in some way that the behaviors associated with their relationship are labeled as 'conflict' behavior" (2). Often, the communicative behavior is easily identified with conflict, such as when one party openly disagrees with the other. Other times, however, an interpersonal conflict may be operating at a more tacit level. Two friends, for instance, may both be consciously avoiding the other because both think, "I don't want to see him for a few days because of what he did." The interpersonal struggle is expressed by the avoidance. **Intrapersonal perceptions** are the bedrock upon which conflicts are built; but only

when there are communicative manifestations of these perceptions will an "interpersonal conflict" emerge.

Communication is the central element in all interpersonal conflict. Communication and conflict are related in the following ways:

- *Communication behavior often creates conflict.*
- *Communication behavior reflects conflict.*
- *Communication is the vehicle for the productive or destructive management of conflict.*

Thus, communication and conflict are inextricably tied. How one communicates in a conflict situation has profound implications for the impact of that conflict. If two work associates are vying for the same position, they can handle the competition in a variety of ways. They may engage in repetitive, damaging rounds with one another, or they may successfully manage the conflict. Communication can be used to exacerbate the conflict or to lead to its productive management.

The following example explains how to move a conflict from an internally experienced strain to an interpersonal communication:

Leslie: (To new husband, Greg, referring to Greg's 15-year-old son.) I've noticed Brennan is using my towels and other stuff from our bathroom instead of the things from his bathroom. Do you think he's annoyed because he can't share our bathroom any more? Or he is just being thoughtless? I don't want to share our bathroom and I can't stand it when he leaves damp towels all over the place!

Greg: I don't know. He hasn't said anything. Do you want me to check it out, or do you want to?

Leslie: (Sigh.) Well, I'm uncomfortable, but it's my job to check it out. I won't make assumptions. I'll just ask him.

This situation could have escalated into a "war of the towels," or been handled unproductively by the stepmom leaving curt notes, the stepson avoiding contact, and both building up negative assumptions about the other. As it happened, the boy did admit to his new stepmother that he was irritated. He and his father had lived together for years without bothering much about which towel was whose, and he resented being told which bathroom and towels to use. Leslie had a chance to say what privacy and neatness meant to her. The three of them talked it through, defusing what could have been a big conflict that would have been over the wrong things (towels instead of the new relationships).

Another example demonstrates how you might make an intrapersonal conflict into an interpersonal conflict:

Greg, your co-worker, looks up briefly when you settle at your desk, but looks down quickly.

You: What's up, Greg?

Greg: Nothing.

Notice your choices here. You could say nothing, while wondering what might be going on with Greg. Your avoidance might start an avoidance spiral. Or, you might say,

You: We haven't checked in since I was added into your work/life balance project. Any concerns I should know about?

Greg: Not at all. (He is not engaging yet.)

You: I have some ideas. I'll write them up and bring them to our team meeting Tuesday.

Greg: We don't have management buy-in yet. Seems like we might be wasting our time.

Notice that Greg appears to be worrying about the entire project, not your involvement. If you had taken his nonresponse personally, you would have misperceived his thoughts. This is a good place to stop until the next meeting.

Most **expressed struggles** become activated by a *triggering event.* A staff member of a counseling agency is fired, setting off a series of meetings culminating in the staff's demand to the board that the director be fired. Or, in a roommate situation, Jon comes home one night and the locks are changed on the door. The triggering event brings the conflict to everyone's attention.

Interdependence

Conflict parties engage in an expressed struggle and interfere with one another because they are **interdependent.** "A person who is not dependent upon another—that is, who has no special interest in what the other does—has no conflict with that other person" (Braiker and Kelley 1979, 137). Each person's choices affect the other because conflict is a mutual activity. People are seldom totally opposed to each other. Even two people who are having an "intellectual conflict" over politics are to some extent cooperating with each other. They have, in effect, tacitly agreed, "Look, we are going to have this verbal argument, and we aren't going to hit each other, and both of us will get certain rewards for participating in this flexing of our intellectual muscles. We'll play by the rules, which we both understand." Schelling (1960) calls **strategic conflict** (conflict in which parties have choices as opposed to conflict in which the power is so disparate that there are virtually no choices) a "theory of precarious partnership" or "incomplete antagonism." In other words, even these informal debaters concerned with politics cannot formulate their verbal tactics until they know the "moves" made by the other party.

Parties in strategic conflict, therefore, are never totally antagonistic and must have **mutual interests,** even if the interest is only in keeping the conflict going. Without openly saying so, they often are thinking, "How can we have this conflict in a way that increases the benefit to me?" These decisions are complex, with parties reacting not in a linear, cause–effect manner but with a series of interdependent decisions. Bateson (1972) presents an "ecological" view of patterns in relationships. As in the natural environment, in which a decision to eliminate coyotes because they are a menace to sheep affects the overall balance of animals and plants, no one party in a conflict can make a decision that is totally separate—each decision affects the other conflict participants. In all conflicts, therefore, interdependence carries elements of cooperation and elements of competition. In true conflicts, the parties are "stuck with each other."

Even though conflict parties are always interdependent to some extent, how they perceive their mutuality affects their later choices. Parties decide, although they may not be aware of this decision, whether they will act as relatively interdependent agents or relatively independent agents. Both or all may agree that "we are in this together," or they may believe that "just doing my own thing" is possible and desirable. A couple had been

divorced for 3 years and came to a mediator to decide what to do about changing visitation agreements as their three children grew older. In the first session, the former husband seemed to want a higher degree of interdependence than did the former wife. He wanted to communicate frequently by phone, adopting flexible arrangements based on the children's wishes and his travel schedule. She wanted a monthly schedule set up in advance, communicated in writing. After talking through their common interest in their children, their own complicated work and travel lives, the children's school and sports commitments, and their new spouses' discomfort with frequent, flexible contact between the former partners, they worked out a solution that suited them both. Realizing that they were unavoidably interdependent, they agreed to lessen their verbal and in-person communication about arrangements while agreeing to maintain e-mail communication about upcoming scheduling. They worked out an acceptable level of interdependence.

An example of negotiating interdependence occurred with Katie, a junior in college, and her mother, Sharon. Katie wanted to set up a 30th anniversary party for her parents, who live just 2 hours from her college. Her mother, Sharon, kept saying on the phone, "Don't bother. Don't go to any trouble. It's not worth it." Katie persisted that she and her younger sister really wanted to do this (she insisted that they were interdependent). Mom stopped answering the phone and returning e-mails. Katie drove home the next weekend and asked Mom to talk the whole thing through with her. Katie learned that Mom was so angry with Dad for ignoring the upcoming event that she wanted to withdraw. She couldn't imagine enjoying a party that came only from her kids while she was simmering with resentment at her husband. So Katie talked to Dad about helping plan the party. Mom told her husband that she had been feeling hurt and slighted. They all got involved and had a good time. Now, notice that it was *not* Katie's role to play therapist with her parents—but she helped by asking them to talk to her and to each other. In a healthy family, everyone can talk to every other member. This builds healthy interdependence.

Sometimes parties are locked into a position of **mutual interdependence** whether they want to be or not. In some cases, interdependent units do not choose to be interdependent but are so for other compelling reasons. Some colleagues in an office, for instance, got into a conflict over when they were to be in their offices to receive calls and speak with customers. One group took the position that "what we do doesn't affect you—it's none of your business." The other group convinced the first group that they could not define themselves as unconnected, because the rest of the group had to be available to fill in for them when they were not available. They were inescapably locked into interdependence. If a working decision had not been made, the parties would have almost guaranteed an unproductive conflict, with each party making choices as if they were only tenuously connected.

When you are stuck in unproductive interdependence, these conflicts turn into **gridlocked conflicts.**

You Know You're in Gridlock When . . .

- The conflict makes you feel rejected by your partner.
- You keep talking but make no headway.
- You become entrenched and are unwilling to budge.
- You feel more frustrated and hurt after you talk than before.
- Your talk is devoid of humor, amusement, or affection.

- You become more entrenched over time so you become insulting during your talks.
- More vilification makes you more polarized, extreme, and less willing to compromise.
- Eventually you disengage emotionally or physically or both (Gottman 1999, 132–33).

Think about how you feel when you are gridlocked in traffic. You may feel full of road rage, derisive of the stupid other drivers, furious at the system, defeated and hopeless, or numb and tuned out. The same emotions happen in a gridlocked interpersonal conflict. Trying harder often doesn't work. That's when you need to try smarter instead of harder. When nothing is working, try something different. Destructive conflicts rely on the same old (unproductive) strategies.

Most relationships move back and forth between degrees of independence and interdependence. At times there will be an emphasis on "me"—what I want—and on separateness, whereas at other times "we"—our nature as a unit—becomes the focus. These are natural rhythmic swings in relationships. In productive conflict relationships, dissonance (clashes, disharmony) and resonance (harmony, deep positive response) become balanced in a natural rhythm (Putnam 2010). Just as we all need both stability and change, conflict parties have to balance their independence and dependence needs.

Relationship and interdependence issues precede other issues in the conflict. Actually, these negotiations over interdependence permeate most conflicts throughout the course of the relationship, never becoming completely settled. Address the interdependence issue openly in ongoing, highly important relationships. In more transient and less salient relationships, the interdependence may be primarily tacit, or understood.

Perceived Incompatible Goals

What do people fight about? (We use the word *fight* to mean verbal conflict, not physical violence.) People engage in conflict over *goals that are important to them.* One company had an extreme morale problem. The head cashier said, "All our problems would be solved if we could just get some carpet, because everyone's feet get tired—we're the ones who have to stand up all day. But management won't spend a penny for us." Her statement of incompatible goals was clear—carpet versus no carpet. But as the interviews in which we discovered intrapersonal strains progressed, another need emerged. She began to talk about how no one noticed when her staff had done good work and how the "higher-ups" only noticed when lines were long and mistakes were made. There was a silence, then she blurted out, "How about some compliments once in a while? No one ever says anything nice. They don't even know we're here." Her stated goals then changed to include not only carpet but also self-esteem and increased attention from management—a significant deepening of the goal statement. Both goals, carpets and self-esteem, were real, but the first goal may have been incompatible with management's desires, whereas the second might not; the need for recognition may have been important to both the cashiers and management.

We do not support the overly simple notion that if people just communicated they would see that their goals are the same. Opposing goals remain a fact of life. Many times, people are absolutely convinced they have opposing goals and cannot agree on anything to pursue together. However, if goals are reframed or put in a different context, the parties can agree. Recently a student teacher's supervisor outlined her goals for the student. Included in the list was the demand that the student turn in a list of the three most and least positive experiences in the classroom each week. The student asked to be transferred to another

teaching supervisor. The chair asked why, saying, "Ms. Barker is one of our best supervisors." The student said, "That's what I've heard, but I can't be open about my failures with someone who's going to give me my ending evaluation. That will go in my permanent files." In a joint discussion with the supervisor and the student, the chair found that both were able to affirm that they valued feedback about positive and negative experiences. Their goals were more similar than they had thought; the means for achieving them were different. The supervisor agreed to use the list as a starting point for discussion but not to keep copies; the student agreed to list experiences so the supervisor would not feel that the student was hiding her negative experiences. Trust was built through a discussion of goals. Perceptions of the incompatibility of the goals changed through clear communication. *Are you noticing that it's difficult to resolve conflict without talking with each other?*

Goals are perceived as incompatible because parties want (1) the same thing or (2) different things. First, the conflict parties may want the same thing—for example, the promotion in the company, the one available scholarship, or the attention of the parents. They struggle and jockey for position in order to attain the desired goal. They perceive the situation as one where there "isn't enough to go around." Thus, they see their goal as incompatible with the other person's because they both want the same thing.

Second, sometimes the goals are different. Mark and Tom, for example, decide to eat out. Mark wants to go to Bananas and Tom wants to go to Pearl's. They struggle over the incompatible choices. Sometimes the goals are not as opposed as they seem. Two roommates would like to move out of the dorm and into an apartment. After looking around, Janet tells Allison that she thinks she'd "better just stay put." Allison was, naturally, hurt. As they talked about the situation, Janet told Allison she was afraid Allison wanted to spend more than Janet was able to. They found an acceptable budget and agreed to stick with it, thus resetting their goals more clearly. Of course, many times the content goals seem to be different (like which restaurant to go to), but beneath them is a relational struggle over who gets to decide. Regardless of whether the participants see the goals as similar or different, **perceived incompatible goals** are central to all conflicts.

Perceived Scarce Resources

A resource can be defined as "any positively perceived physical, economic, or social consequence" (Miller and Steinberg 1975, 65). The resources may be objectively real or perceived as real by the person. Likewise, the scarcity, or limitation, may be apparent or actual. For example, close friends often think that if their best friend begins to like someone else too, then the supply of affection available to the original friend will diminish—a **perceived scarce resource.** This may or may not be so, but a perception that affection is scarce may well create genuine conflict between the friends. Sometimes, then, the most appropriate behavior is attempting to change the other person's perception of the resource instead of trying to reallocate the resource. Ultimately, one person can never force another to change his or her valuing of a resource or perception of how much of the resource is available, but persuasion coupled with supportive responses for the person fearful of losing the reward can help.

Money, natural resources such as oil or land, and jobs may indeed be scarce or limited resources. Getting a class you need for graduation might be a scarce resource, if the class is closed. Intangible commodities such as love, esteem, attention, and caring also may be perceived as scarce. Information can be perceived as a scarce resource. If you are lost

because you wandered away from the marked ski trails, and you don't have a map, you need to know where to go, and how to reach the ski patrol. If your cell phone won't work, you desperately need people to come along and help you. All these are, for this desperate moment, scarce resources because of the situation you are in, not because cell phones, maps, and friendly strangers are inherently scarce. When rewards are perceived as scarce, an expressed struggle may be initiated.

*And sometimes resources really **are** scarce.* No amount of effort to change the perception will make the resource abundant. Some other conflict strategy will have to be employed.

In interpersonal struggles, two resources often perceived as scarce are **power** and **self-esteem.** Whether the parties are in conflict over a desired romantic partner or a change in work hours, perceived scarcities of power and self-esteem are involved. People engaged in conflict often say things reflecting power and self-esteem struggles, such as in the following scenarios:

> "She always gets her own way." (She has more power than I do, and I feel at a constant disadvantage. I'm always one down.)
>
> "He is so sarcastic! Who does he think he is? I don't have to put up with his attitude!" (I don't have ways to protect myself from biting sarcasm. It feels like an attack. I feel humiliated. The only power I have is to leave or try to compete with equal sarcasm, which makes me feel awful.)
>
> "I refuse to pay one more penny in child support." (I feel unimportant. I don't get to see the children very often. I've lost my involvement with them. Money is the only way I have to let that be known. I don't want to feel like a loser and a fool.)
>
> "I won't cover for her if she asks me again. She can find someone else to work the night shift when her kids get sick." (I feel taken advantage of. She only pays attention to me when she needs a favor.)

Regardless of the particular subjects involved, people in conflict usually perceive that they have too little power and self-esteem and that the other party has too much. Since each person thinks and feels convinced this imbalance is "true," something needs to be adjusted. Often, giving the other person some respect, courtesy, and ways to save face removes their need to use power excessively. *Remember, people usually think the other person has more power and self-esteem. We don't perceive other people the way they perceive themselves.*

Interference

People may be interdependent, perceive incompatible goals, want the same scarce resource, and still may not experience what we call conflict. *Interference,* or the perception of interference, is necessary to complete the conditions for conflict. If the presence of another person interferes with desired actions, conflict intensifies. Conflict is associated with blocking, and the person doing the blocking is perceived as the problem. For instance, a college sophomore worked in a sandwich shop the summer before her junior year abroad. She worked two jobs, scarcely having time to eat and sleep. She was invited to a party at a cabin in the wilderness, and she really wanted to go. She worked overtime on one day then asked for a day off from the sandwich shop, but the employer was reluctant to say yes, because the student was the only one the employer trusted to open the shop and keep the till. For an angry moment, the employer, who was interfering with what the student wanted

to do, seemed like the main problem. Goals appeared incompatible, no one else was available to open (scarce resource), and the two parties were interdependent because the student needed the job and the owner needed her shop opened and the cash monitored. She was about to say, "No. I'm sorry, but I can't cover you." The student volunteered to train someone else, on her own time, to cover for her. The problem was solved, at least for this round, and the conflict was avoided. But if the student had quit in disgust or the employer had said no, both would have sacrificed important goals.

Another example of **perceived interference** involves Kelly, who prizes time alone in a lookout tower each summer. She plans for the weeks and looks forward to that solitude each year. When her two college-age daughters asked to join her, Kelly hesitated, saying she didn't think there was enough room. The daughters were disappointed and hurt, because they had been away at college and thought this would be a wonderful way to all be together. Mom could have told them she loved solitude and asked whether they could figure out some way so they could be together, but her quiet time could be maintained. For instance, the daughters like to hike and might have been glad to plan several days of hiking. Instead, the situation stayed unresolved and hurt feelings simmered.

Being blocked and interfered with is such a disturbing experience that our first "take" is usually anger and blame. We will discuss later the difference between *intent* and *impact.* For now, we suggest you adopt this radical idea:

You do not know what other people are thinking unless you enter into honest dialogue. You don't know their intention without dialogue. You can't read minds. Conversation is the best approach.

The study of conflict should be viewed as a basic human requirement and the practice of constructive conflict as an essential set of interpersonal skills (Sillars 2009). We have confidence that your lives will be enriched by what you will learn in this course, and what you will continue to learn for the rest of your lives. Welcome to the process!

Why Study Conflict?

Mental health and overall happiness improve with a constructive conflict process. When people experience conflicts, much of their energy goes into emotions and strategizing related to those conflicts. They may be fearful, angry, resentful, hopeless, preoccupied, or stressed. Adding to one's repertoire for resolving conflicts reduces a common stressor. Ineffective resolution of interpersonal disputes adds to pessimism and hopelessness. Eating disorders, physical and psychological abuse of partners, and problem drinking (Murphy and O'Farrell 1994) also are associated with destructive conflict environments.

Family Relationships

Our **family of origin** socializes us into constructive or destructive ways of handling conflict. How did your family approach difficult conversations? Did everyone avoid tough topics, or was your family oriented toward conversation (Keating et al. 2013)? You will be given a chance to reflect on your family's approach in Chapter 2. However your family dealt with difficult conversations, the responses to such topics set the course for any future

conversations. For instance, if a young person discloses that he or she is sexually active, parental response will determine how free that person feels in the future. If disagreements remain respectful, even if forceful, the young person will engage much more easily in the future. Your experiences in your family predict how romantic relationships are later handled (Koerner and Fitzpatrick 2002). Sadly stepfamilies' conflicts are destructive 95% of the time (Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson 1999).

Family research is quite clear about the systemwide effects of **destructive marital conflict.** Negative conflict between the parents reduces the family's network of friends and creates more loneliness (Jones 1992). Conflict between the parents tends to both change the mood of household interactions and shift the parents' attention to the negative behaviors of their children. Parental conflict has a direct negative impact on the children. You probably remember the most negative conflicts in your family of origin, while you may not remember specific instances of conflicts that were handled constructively. Communication patterns between fathers and their young adult children seem to follow a circular relationship—the young adults treat their fathers the way they were treated (Dumlao and Botta 2000). Conflict between parents predicts well-being of the children, with more conflict associated with maladaptive behavior on the part of the children (Dunn and Tucker 1993; Garber 1991; Grych and Fincham 1990; Jouriles, Bourg, and Farris 1991). Finally, the effects of destructive conflict patterns suggest that "ongoing conflict at home has a greater impact on adolescent distress and symptoms than does parental divorce" (Jaycox and Repetti 1993, 344). Parents who either avoid conflict or engage in negative cycles of mutual damage directly influence the children's subsequent lives. A modest relationship exists between mothers who avoid conflict and their daughters' marital satisfaction (VanLear 1992). On the other end of the continuum, children who are exposed to harsh discipline practices at home (which coincides with a negative and hostile relationship between the parents) are more at risk for aggression, hyperactivity, and internalizing by withdrawing, having somatic complaints, and experiencing depressive symptoms (Jaycox and Repetti 1993). When children experience or witness child physical abuse or domestic violence between parents, they often develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This diagnosis is especially complicated when children witness these events many times. While trauma may be the cause, other disorders may develop as well (Margolin and Vickerman 2007).

Children and adults who were physically and sexually abused as children face significant difficulties in their later conflicts. It is not possible to generalize completely, because many people exhibit remarkable resilience and effectiveness in their lives despite terrible abuse. Yet common responses to abuse, including the verbal abuse of yelling and the silent treatment, are hypervigilance; difficulty relaxing; withdrawal at the first sign of tension or conflict; floating away, or dissociating; and not knowing or expressing what one really wants.

Children's own attitudes toward marriage are directly affected by the conflict between their parents. If their parents have frequent conflict, children have a much less favorable attitude toward marriage (Jennings, Salts, and Smith 1991). A child's general feeling of self-worth is directly affected by interparental conflict (Garber 1991). This means that it isn't primarily a question of whether parents divorce or not that affects the children; rather, it is the level of conflict present in either the intact family or the restructured family that impacts the children.

When parents and adolescents think the other person intended to hurt them, the effects of the conflicts are destructive, and make it less likely that adolescents will learn to repair relationships and engage in constructive conflict (McLaren and Sillars 2014).

The number of conflicts experienced does not seem to predict poor health and well-being as much as whether the individuals perceive the conflict to be resolvable (Malis and Roloff 2006). Through studying the practices presented in this book, and learning about constructive conflict, you will gain hope, which will reduce your overall stress and pessimism.

Simply stated, the level of conflict and how destructive it is affect all areas of family well-being. If you, as a present or future parent, change your own conflict resolution skills, you will affect everyone in your families, present and future. As you look back on your own family history, you probably know the truth of this statement.

The study of conflict can pay big dividends in your personal relationships. If you are an adolescent or a parent of an adolescent, it will come as no surprise to you that it takes about 10 years after an adolescent leaves home for parents and children to negotiate roles that bring them closer to equality than they were in their earlier parent–child relationship (Comstock 1994). At the heart of this negotiation is the conflict process. The study of conflict can assist in this process of redrawing family boundaries, letting you see which styles backfire, and which ones work best.

Love Relationships

We all know that love relationships provide a rigorous test of our ability to manage conflict. Siegert and Stamp (1994) studied the effects of the "First Big Fight" in dating relationships, noting that some couples survive and prosper, whereas others break up. These communication researchers tell us quite clearly that "the big difference between the nonsurvivors and survivors was the way they perceived and handled conflict" (357). "What determines the course of a relationship . . . is in a large measure determined by how successfully the participants move through conflict episodes" (Wilmot 1995, 95). Couples must learn to process fights and other disagreeable events rather than repeating them. Processing an argument means that the partners discuss the argument without redoing the fight. In order to achieve this difficult task, partners must take turns talking about what they were feeling and thinking during the incident, listening carefully and validating what the other says, admitting one's own role in the conflict, and exploring ways to make the difficult conversation run more smoothly next time (Gottman and Gottman 2008). This ability to process takes restraint and skill. Much of the book will discuss how to achieve this ability to process.

While married individuals are generally healthier than unmarried persons, if you are married and in conflict, your health is likely to be poorer than that of single people (Burman and Margolin 1992). People in same-sex relationships remain at greater risk for breakups, due to gender identity distress, lack of other relationship options, and less social support than different-sex couples enjoy (Khaddouma et al. 2015). Hostile behavior during conflictual interactions seems to relate to changes in one's immune system, resulting in poorer overall physical health (Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 1996). Wives appear to suffer more from hostile conflictual situations than do husbands (Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 1996).

One key skill in all long-term committed relationships is conflict management—certainly, the data on marriages suggest this is true (Gottman 1994). The presence or absence of conflict does not determine the quality of a marriage; rather, how the couple handles conflictual situations determines the quality of the relationship (Comstock and Strzyzewski 1990). Even beliefs about conflict are more important to marital happiness than whether or not the two partners actually agree with one another (Crohan 1992).

How you handle conflict spreads to other members of your family. For example, it has been noted that adult children who are taking care of their parents usually have high levels of conflict with siblings (Merrill 1996). Learning effective skills for dealing with your younger brother or sister is far better than engaging in a family dispute that will affect your children and subsequent generations as well.

The Workplace

So far, we have presented the reasons for studying conflict in personal relationships. In addition, **conflicts at work** present important challenges that affect your career development. "Conflict is a stubborn fact of organizational life" (Kolb and Putnam 1992, 311). We carry our interpersonal relationships into our workplaces; work life and private life intertwine. Effective communication in couple relationships helps moderate these inevitable workplace conflicts (Carroll et al. 2013). One study surveyed workers and found that almost 85% reported conflicts at work (Bergmann and Volkema 1994). With an increasing awareness of cultural diversity and gender equity issues, it is imperative that we become familiar with issues surrounding promotions and harassment. In fact, one can see communication training in organizations as a form of preventive conflict management (Hathaway 1995). Managers need to learn conflict skills to intervene in disputes in their organization.

Conflict pervades many different work settings. One study reviewed the causes and pervasive impact of conflict in nursing, suggesting different interventions to help prevent and manage conflict (Brinkert 2010). Nursing involves so much communication between other nurses, doctors and physician assistants, patients and families, that conflicts naturally emerge. Often these interactions take place in confusing, stressful, understaffed, and even life-threatening situations. Conflict among nurses in team situations is viewed more positively in situations where high-quality patient care and an emphasis on communication processes is present (Kim, Nicoters, and McNulty 2015). This means that training in good communication will affect nurses' willingness to engage in conflict, and that the conflict is more likely to be judged as constructive. Nurses perform tasks requiring a high degree of emotional intelligence; and those who manage their emotions well experience less job stress and thus enjoy more well-being (Karimi et al. 2013). Learning a high degree of emotional intelligence means you will handle conflict and stress well, no matter what professional realm you enter.

Ongoing, unresolved workplace conflict also presents negative effects that reach far beyond the principal parties. If the executive director of a nonprofit agency and her board cannot get along, employees tend to take sides, fear for their jobs, and, like those above them, wage a campaign discrediting the other group. Health care environments present the probability of damaging conflicts. For instance, when doctors and nurses engage in destructive conflict, the patient suffers. When nurses, who often know the patient's situation most intimately, withdraw, patient illness and death rises (Forte 1997). Serious interprofessional conflict results in an alarmingly higher number of medical errors than when teamwork is not in conflict (Baldwin Jr. and Daugherty 2008).

Ignoring workplace conflict sets destructive forces in motion that decrease productivity, spread the conflict to others, and lead to lower morale. In one organization, the CEO was on the verge of reorganizing the structure, affecting 600 people, so that two vice presidents would not have to talk to one another! Organizations depend on leaders to become

expert conflict managers. They should develop the skills to lead task-related conflicts with conflict resolution skills. When the conflict centers around relationship issues, they must be skilled enough not to be afraid to dive into the relationship issues that are driving the conflict. When leaders ignore relationship issues, the conflict will go underground and get more toxic (Curseu 2011).

In college, you may experience conflicts with friends, roommates, romantic partners, professors, teaching assistants, your employer, and even your parents. One study showed something that won't surprise you: When parents and students agree on the relative importance of goals, less conflict evolves. Students often value independence, control of their emotional environment, health, social relationships, and financial concerns. Parents often value moral, religious, or educational goals (Morton and Markey 2009). When conflict arises with your parents, a good strategy is to make sure what you are disagreeing about. You may be talking past each other, or you may agree on many issues but be in disagreement on only one or two. In one situation, Kristin and her parents argued over whether she should go to summer school. Kristin did not want to; rather, she wanted to be with her friends after work and relax from the rigorous academic schedule she kept the previous year. Her parents wanted Kristin to attend summer school full time and work part time. For a while they went back and forth, arguing, until finally her parents said, "Our goal is for you to graduate in 4 years." Kristin replied, "I thought you wanted me to make as much of a financial contribution as I could." Her parents explained that graduating on time would far outweigh the value of money Kristin could make. Kristin showed her parents her advising packet, which indicated that she could graduate in 4 years if she took only two extra courses in the summer. By analyzing what the argument really was about, Kristin and her parents came to a good, negotiated plan—neither a compromise, capitulation, nor a forced and disliked plan for Kristin.

Teaching and the educational system provide many opportunities for difficult conflict. Principals who adopt transparent, enforced codes of interaction among their teaching staff help build trusting, less conflicting relationships. Trust enhances collaboration, or the ability to work together for commonly identified goals (Cosner 2011). We know of too many instances in which principals, deans, heads of schools, union representatives, department heads, and other educational leaders do not work in an open, trusting way. These educational institutions are very likely to experience damaging, expensive, and disruptive conflicts. In one situation in which we intervened, two staff members would not speak to each other, even about their shared tasks of supervising student interns, because their principal shared little of her thinking and decision making with the staff. She played favorites, only circulated certain information, broke agreements, and made each supervisor believe the other one was out of favor. As a result, the two internship supervisors saw no need to cooperate with each other. Often, as in this case, the root of the problem is with the principal, not the supervisors. When she changed to an open communication style, the extreme mistrust and uncivil behavior lessened almost completely between the supervisors. Teachers, whose jobs are usually quite stressful, suffer less burnout and stress when they turn to supportive teacher-colleagues and school counselors (Tatar 2009). Some advantages to studying organizational conflicts include:

- As an employee, you can learn how to get along with
  - Fellow employees

    - Your manager
    - The public
- You will be perceived as more skilled
- You will be able to help prevent workplace conflicts
- As a supervisor, you can begin to
    - Know when conflicts are likely to occur
    - Learn productive responses
    - Receive more cooperation from employees
    - Help employees resolve their disputes with one another
    - Keep interpersonal conflicts from spreading to other parts of the organization
    - Teach teams how to handle their own conflicts

Employees at all levels who are skilled in conflict resolution bring gifts to their workplace; their skills help them and other employees with job satisfaction, promotions, and effectiveness in the workplace.

As you will see in Chapter 9, you might study conflict so you can help others in interpersonal conflict. At a minimum, you must understand conflict dynamics, and coupled with specific intervention skills, you can be maximally helpful to children, friends, family members, and work associates.

The Importance of Skill Development

Conflict management skills require thoughtful practice. Few people seem to be natural conflict managers. Children, from toddlers to adolescents, can learn different levels of skills. Adults would be much better off if they were given appropriate training throughout their life development (Sandy 2014). If you were not offered any specific training, such as peer mediation programs in public schools, when you were younger, it's not too late to begin now. We hope you will then teach children in your lives more about conflict resolution skills. While you may admire couples who never seem to engage in conflict, couples who never engage in conflict are at long-term risk (McGonagle, Kessler, and Gotlib 1993, 398). Common myths of ideal relationships and happy marriages sometimes assume that conflict is a "bad sign." But this is not true. As always, *the way a conflict is handled* predicts whether the couple, the work group, or the manager–employer dyad will thrive. In conflict, we must learn to "do what comes unnaturally." If we do what we have always done, we will keep getting the results we have always gotten—results that may keep us mired in the same old patterns. Who would imagine, for instance, that moving *toward* bad news, instead of *away* from bad news, is often the better strategy? How many of us intuitively know to tell more of the truth when a conflict is becoming destructive rather than keeping quiet or yelling? In the middle of a conflict, if someone insists that "this is really simple!" they probably mean "this would be simple if you would adopt my perspective." As you will learn, conflict is anything but simple.

Adolescents without specific conflict resolution training or excellent modeling use naïve resolution strategies with friends. More than 50% of adolescent conflicts are resolved by either standoffs, where parties divert their attention to something else, leaving the conflict unresolved, or withdrawal, in which one person refuses to continue to engage (Sandy

2014). Consider which strategies remain barely used at all: third-party intervention, compromise, or listening-centered communication. Because young adults are only a few years past adolescence, it's not surprising that avoidance and withdrawal continue to describe many young-adult conflicts. Think of the last conflict in which you participated which ended in standoff or withdrawal, or worse yet, submission. How satisfying was that conflict for you?

Unresolved conflict has a tremendous negative impact. It directly affects the parties themselves. In personal relationships, unresolved conflict leads to drifting away from one another and sometimes jettisoning the relationship entirely. In the workplace, it leads to low productivity and being fired. In an organization known to us, one employee has been "on the radar" of the senior managers for several years. She will be given a performance review that details what she must change in 2 months. The senior manager has not been willing to confront the problem employee directly and effectively. Therefore, the employee will probably be fired or the employee will find another job, and the organization will be without an employee because of a hiring freeze. The conflict stayed unresolved for so long that negative perceptions became carved in the stone of disappointment. Everyone will lose.

The benefits of learning effective skills in conflict result in:

- Improvement in mental health—your own and others'
- Long-term satisfaction in your family, your love relationships, and at work
- People around you benefit from your improved skills

Conflict management draws upon the skills of **emotional intelligence.** This popular concept is defined as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships" (Goleman 1998, 317). Later in the book we will discuss management of emotions in detail. As you can see at this point, recognizing feelings, self-motivation, and dealing with feelings are skills that pervade all of conflict management. Workplaces now ask employees to be excellent with "people skills"—the precise skills useful in conflict management. One study showed that employees with emotional intelligence were able to mediate well with those who used negative "forcing" and "withdrawing" styles in their organization. Those with emotional intelligence helped foster good organizational citizenship (Salami 2010).

Why is emotional intelligence so important for conflict management? Let's look at the 20 competencies organized into four clusters that describe emotional intelligence.

SELF-AWARENESS

1. Emotional self-awareness
2. Accurate self-assessment
3. Self-confidence

SELF-MANAGEMENT

4. Self-control
5. Trustworthiness

(continued)

6. Conscientiousness
7. Adaptability
8. Achievement orientation
9. Initiative

SOCIAL AWARENESS

10. Empathy
11. Organizational awareness
12. Service orientation

SOCIAL SKILLS

13. Developing others
14. Leadership
15. Influence
16. Communication
17. Change-catalyst
18. Conflict management
19. Building bonds
20. Teamwork and collaboration

Notice that the first three clusters must be mastered before you can effectively operate within the Social Skills area. We will lead you through concepts and exercises that will help you develop skills in all these areas. This kind of skill development takes a lifetime, and underlies adult development. Emotional intelligence skills are needed in intimate relationships, family communication, workplace communication, and community and worldwide leadership. For example, you may have a long-standing conflictual relationship with one of your siblings. When you begin to see each other much less frequently, the daily irritations may well subside, giving you an opportunity to approach each other differently. Yet, hurts and fights from the past may make it difficult to create a new relationship. The ideas in this book will give you some starting places for finding new ground with your families.

Why study conflict? Because if we don't, we are more likely to repeat the damaging patterns we see on the job and in our homes. Examining the dynamics of conflict will allow you to unpack those dynamics, see what brings on destructive moves, and build more productive options for ourselves both at work and at home. Since the first edition of this book was published in 1978, writers have agreed that conflict is not different from "regular" communication but is a part of the ongoing flow of the communication between human beings. We might define ourselves as being "in conflict," of varying intensities, many times a day or week. Even people who vastly prefer peace, harmony, and calm interaction find themselves involved in situations that are tense, escalating, and uncomfortable. Truly, we do not have the option of staying out of conflict unless we stay out of relationships, families, work, and community. Conflict happens—so we had best be prepared for it.

Application 1.2

Discuss with a small group what you believe are your three key strengths from the list above. What are three areas that you believe, or have been told, need development? Give examples of the positive and "needs work" examples you describe. Then, name and describe some people you know who model certain areas of emotional intelligence. What do you notice that they do?

Application 1.2.1 Jon and His Mother

The following dialogue may be familiar to you in tone, if not in content:

TAKE I

Jon (Thinking through how to talk with his mother and make a request for more financial help until he goes to college in the fall term): *My graduation expenses cost a lot more than I thought they would. I had to pay for the senior trip, the dinner, and all kinds of things I didn't know would come up. I don't know how I'm going to pay for my car insurance this summer. I promised Mom that I would pay for my graduation expenses and personal expenses in June out of my summer job. But I haven't been able to find one yet. I'm kind of anxious. I know she hasn't planned on spending more money on my personal expenses. I guess I overestimated what I could earn, and how quickly. I'm kind of embarrassed to have to ask for help. But I don't know what else to do.*

Jon: Mom, I have not been able to save as much money as I hoped to for my graduation expenses and personal expenses in June. My job after school just didn't pay enough. And while I'm looking for work, as you know, I haven't found anything yet except for split-shift fast-food work, which we both agreed would be my last resort. So, while I hate to ask, I am wondering if you could help me financially until I get a full-time job. Then we can work out a payback schedule and a budget for me.

Mother (Thinking about how to respond to her son) : *I do realize that graduation cost more than we thought it would. And I've been surprised at how few jobs there are. But it's also true that I didn't budget any extra money, and my hours at the hospital have been cut back some. I don't know what to do. He's my son and I know he needs help, but on the other hand, I think he needs to take whatever job he can find right away, even if he changes later. I would have to borrow the money to pay for all those extra expenses. But I guess I should. He needs the help.*

Mother: I do know that everything costs more than both of us thought it would. I want to help you out, of course. You may not know that my hours have been cut and we are on a very tight budget here at home. Would you be willing to take whatever job you can find for now, and then switch when you find something better? I think we can work this out.

Jon: I didn't know your hours were cut permanently. I thought it was temporary. Sure, I'll take what I can get. When I find something we can work out a budget.

(continued)

Application 1.2.1 Jon and His Mother

TAKE II

The conversation might have gone something like this.

Jon (After the same reflection as above): You're going to have to pay for my car insurance this summer. There is no way I can pay for it after graduation. I have to have a car to work.

Mom: Well guess what? My hours at the hospital are permanently cut and I cannot afford one more expense. You'll have to take the bus or walk when you find a job. There's just no give in my budget. I think you could have avoided some of those expenses anyway. Did you have to go on that trip?

Jon: Of course I had to. It was the senior trip. Fine, then. I'll get by somehow.

Analysis: Discuss with your small group these questions:

Look at the second conversation first. What went wrong from the very beginning? What tone does each use in the negative example?

What kinds of ineffective communication are both Jon and his Mom using? How do they feel at this point?

Now look back at the first conversation. What was required for Jon and his Mom to have such a mature conversation? Can you imagine being in a conversation like this with one of your parents or adult children? Why or why not?

The mother and son are engaged in interpersonal conflict. Their conflict results from their particular communication choices. The son asks for extra help; the mother makes a decision first (in both examples) rather than asking questions. The next few interactions may well escalate toward damage of their ongoing relationship. The son may be uncertain how he will look for work if he can't drive. He may want to save money he was given for graduation for other purposes. Yet he also wants his mother's recognition of him as an adult, and he wants to be seen as responsible. The mother wants, presumably, to help her son find work, to teach him to manage money, and to preserve a give-and-take relationship between them. She doesn't want to alienate her son, but she doesn't want to feel taken advantage of

Application 1.3 My Basic Approach to Conflict

Where are you on the following ratings describing your approach to conflict?

I love peace and harmony and will go to great lengths to avoid conflict.

I sometimes will willingly engage in conflict, but only if I can see no other good choice.

I like the give-and-take of a good verbal conflict and am not particularly wary of getting involved.

I enjoy constructive conflict. My adrenaline gets going and I like to see what can come of it. I even seek out conflict at times.

I count on conflict to help clear the air, solve problems, and get us to a "different place."

or to go against an agreement. Their individual and relational goals can only be met through creative conflict interactions. When conflict is viewed as a problem to be solved instead of a battle to be won or interaction to be avoided, creative solutions can be found.

In the Chinese language the character for conflict is made up of two different symbols: one indicates *danger* whereas the other indicates *opportunity.* As you think about these two approaches, decide whether you respond first to conflict as a dangerous, obstructive dilemma or whether you experience conflict as a welcome opportunity for change. *The I Ching* teaches that the wise person in conflict remains clearheaded, inwardly strong, and ready to meet his or her opponent halfway (Wilhelm 1977). At the beginning of your study of conflict, we ask you to consider the possibilities inherent in conflict. By the end of the course, we hope you come to experience the activity as an important means of growth rather than a failure or a negative event to be avoided at all costs.

People can change their conflict behavior by studying this book and participating in class exercises. You will be able to understand your present conflict behavior, make choices to engage in new behavior during conflicts, and thus act as a change agent in times of crisis and turbulence. Your approach to conflict is not an inborn set of responses but a developed repertoire of communication skills that are learned, refined, and practiced. You don't have to remain the way you have been in the past.

Preventing Destructive Conflict

Prevention of conflict presents a paradoxical task. On the one hand, we now know that conflict is one of the normal states of human communication; on the other hand, we would like to do what we can to prevent destructive, time-wasting, relationship-harming conflict. We'd like to enhance the possibility of creative change and decrease the probability of destructive conflict. To prevent means *to anticipate, to forestall, to come before, to be in readiness for an occasion, to deprive something of power, to hold or keep back, and to deal with beforehand.* Prevention implies taking advance measures against something, to forestall something from its course. Prevention implies taking effective measures to ward off something destructive. We've all used the saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." How might we prevent destructive conflict?

The Rescue Crew: A Fable

Once upon a time, in a beautiful meadow close to town, a group of friends was having a picnic on a sunny spring day. They'd brought along a kayak and a canoe for playing in the river, some softball equipment, great food, and some music. They had several backpack tents and sleeping bags in case they decided to stay overnight. It was spring break and all the friends were elated to be out of classes and just hanging out. Jack and Stacey jumped in their canoe and began to explore the other side of the river. Suddenly Stacey saw what looked like a person floating downstream. Sure enough, it was a woman who had been battered by the river rocks and was almost dead. The group sprang into action: someone knew CPR and revived her, someone else made temporary bandages for her wounds, and they called the EMTs on their cell phones. Just as they were loading her into the ambulance, the whole scene was repeated, with two more people needing rescue. The whole sequence

(continued)

The Rescue Crew: A Fable

continued. The friends called for help, and people responded generously. Soon an emergency tent city was set up, people brought in food and water, medical personnel volunteered their time, and organizers raised money, for the bodies kept coming, and the sturdy group of volunteers was overwhelmed by the urgent needs of the wounded and drowning people. Not everyone could be saved.

After a few weeks, a construction crew had set up a more permanent shelter with emergency medical equipment and some basic housing for the volunteers. Media crews visited to document the extraordinary tragedy and generous helping response. Some conflicts began to develop among the leadership; the people who had been on the original picnic claimed that they knew the most about the situation and should be elected as leaders of the new rescue organization. Names were suggested for the group. One evening a young man from a different town arrived to help. He immediately began running at full speed up the river. The rescue crew yelled at him to get back and help with the food preparation for the volunteers and victims. "Where the heck do you think you're going?" one of the leaders yelled. "I'm going upstream to see who's pushing all these people in the river. Come help me see what's happening and get this stopped now!" the runner replied.

As the fable illustrates, there's no reason to spend all our energy taking care of disasters. We need to find out what's causing them, and then put energy into preventing further disasters.

Romances break up, families extend estrangements over years, and intractable conflicts damage people's enjoyment of work. Violence at home, at school, and in the wider society can be reduced by teaching people conflict resolution (Johnson and Johnson 1996). We mention "passion," which means *to suffer with.* Passionate conflict prevention involves staying with a situation long enough to make a difference rather than avoiding. Even with a wide repertoire of conflict resolution skills, most of us would rather prevent or avoid conflict than have to process it. On the international scene, conflict prevention could keep thousands or even millions of people from death or destruction. Our well-being as a globe depends on learning to prevent devastating conflict.

When you have experienced many conflicts that actually turn out better than you might have feared, you will become more hopeful and encouraged. We know that conflict resolution is a set of skills that can be learned; you can improve your skills and be a force for change in others.

Understanding Destructive Conflict

Conflicts move from episode to episode in a continually unfolding pattern of interaction between the prime parties. The moves and interpretations of each party influence those of the others. Nowhere can we more clearly see the interlocking effects of moves and countermoves than in **destructive conflicts.**

Conflict interaction can be productive or destructive depending on many factors, including the context in which it occurs (Camara and Resnick 1989) and the kinds of communication used. Conflict is potentially costly to all parties; these costs can exceed the gains if the conflict is drawn out before some kind of settlement is reached. If all participants are dissatisfied with the outcomes of a conflict and think they have lost as a result

(Deutsch 2014), then the conflict is classified as destructive. In one office two large men got into a loud, shouting and shoving match. After their boss called them into his office and talked through the conflict with them, the two men said, "It's over. It's nobody else's business." However, other office workers were upset. An outside facilitator was called in to talk through the situation, including pointing out to the "fighters" that they had spread a feeling of threat and fear throughout the office. Others were avoiding them, and as a result, not getting their work done. A married couple carries on a quieter, but no less destructive conflict. The husband uses ridicule when he doesn't like something the wife does. He might say, "Oh, great, that was our best knife and now you've completely ruined it because you can't remember how to sharpen it. Why don't we just throw money away since you seem incapable of taking care of what we have?" You can see that destructive conflict can look and sound differently, and still be destructive.

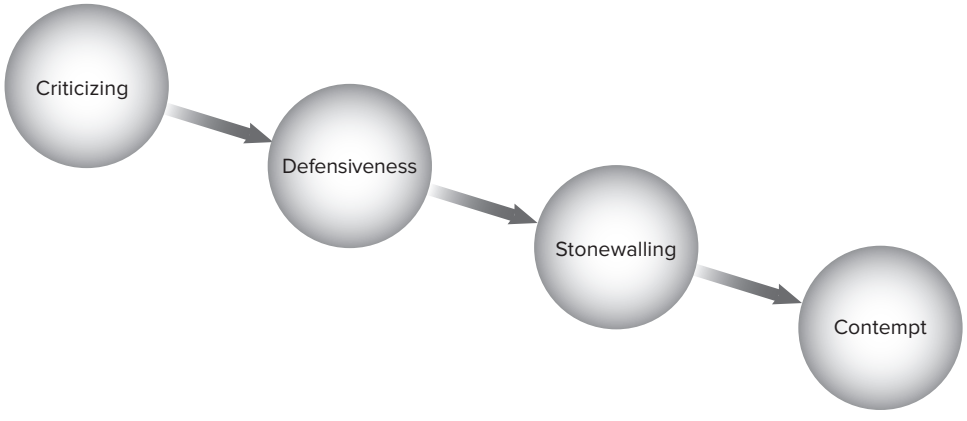
Several characteristics of destructive conflict can be identified. Participants can sometimes rescue a destructive interaction, making the overall effect more positive, but if the interaction continues to be characterized by the following descriptions, the overall result will be a destructive, win–lose experience for all parties. Gottman (1999) refers to the following four communication practices as the **four horsemen of the apocalypse,** meaning that when these four behaviors "ride in" to a relationship, the end is near (Figure 1.1).

The Four Horsemen

Critical Start-Up Sets the Tone for Any Conflict

The first moments of a conflict interaction—the **critical start-up**—can set the scene for a constructive or a destructive conflict. In fact, in Gottman's research (1999), the first minute of observed conflict with married couples predicts for 96% of the couples studied whether they will stay together or divorce. This amazing finding results primarily from the way the conflict is entered, or engaged. Criticism makes a harsh start-up. When wives escalate from neutral feeling to negative feeling quickly, right at the beginning, the outlook for the marriage remains bleak. Women criticize more than men do in marital conflicts. (We'll get to what men do that is equally destructive!) When a conflict begins with a critical

Figure 1.1 The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse



statement, the conflict is likely to escalate quickly. Any conflict that begins with "you always" or "you never" is likely to have a destructive effect. For instance, the following example shows a harsh start-up:

> Pamela: You are the most selfish man I know! My mother is sick, maybe terminally, and you can't stir yourself to drive 30 miles for her birthday. Great. Now I get to tell my Mom that I'm married to a narcissistic jerk! Could you think of someone else for a change?

Other examples of harsh and critical start-ups:

I am still furious and we have to talk!

If you could spare me a few minutes from your busy schedule, I'd like to talk to you. Would you just listen to me for once in your life?

You consider this a report I could send off?

You are skating on thin ice.

Here's your date for your performance review.

Right! As though I care what you think!

You get the idea. Critical start-ups set the other person on the defensive right away. They may also make the tone so negative that the conversation can't be rescued.

Another critical or harsh start-up might sound like this:

> Pamela: I knew you wouldn't remember to call your friend and tell him you have to visit my mother. I have to do all the social work around here.

Many times, one person will criticize to get the other person's attention, to indicate how awful she or he is feeling, to try to make the conflict important enough to resolve, or to vent frustration or despair. However, none of these reasons, though understandable, is a good enough reason to begin interaction with criticism. Instead, you can turn a harsh start-up into a constructive complaint.

A Constructive Complaint

- Use an "I" statement.
- Describe the undesirable behavior.
- Use neutral, not judgmental, language.
- Ask for a specific, behavioral change.

A constructive complaint can be helpful. A destructive complaint includes blame and the attribution that there is something wrong with the other person, not just the behavior. The following is an example of a *constructive complaint:*

> Pamela: I am upset that we are not going to see my Mom together. I have asked you three times to clear your weekend so we could both go see her. Next weekend is her birthday. She is sick and I want to see her, and I want you to come with me. I am frustrated and impatient with the excuses you've given me. I hope you will come. I don't want to have the kind of marriage where I have to see my folks by myself. This makes me feel sad and as though I don't have a partner. It would mean a lot to me if you would come, and let me know very soon so I can tell Mom.

How do you change the following critical comments into constructive complaints, ones that point the other person toward change in behavior?

A supervisor says, "You have a negative attitude. Our leadership team is looking for people with a can-do attitude."

Or, student to professor, "Your grading of my last paper seems really unfair. I followed your guidelines and worked very hard."

Or, employee to manager, "You play favorites with your shift assignments. Why am I always stuck with holidays?"

Application 1.4 From Criticism to Constructive Complaints

In your small group, practice changing criticisms to complaints. Think of destructive criticism, maybe that you have used, or that others have used against you, and practice brainstorming about how to change these critical comments to legitimate complaints. Don't be afraid to make the complaints strong and assertive—they need not be soft and wishy-washy. Remember to avoid blame, use I statements, describe instead of judging, and leave the door open for change. Practice transforming criticism into descriptive complaints, while remaining honest.

Defensiveness Characterizes Destructive Conflict

When people use defensive communication, they are communicating a desire to protect themselves against pain, fear, personal responsibility, or new information. In an emotionally charged issue, if a person can listen to learn about oneself and the other, defensiveness drops away (Paul and Paul 1987). When defensiveness predominates, many destructive outcomes occur, such as power struggles, boredom, lack of fun and joy, chronic fighting, emotional pain and distance, and a desire to retaliate (Paul and Paul 1983, 1987). Defensiveness implies that one is warding off an attack. Notice that the metaphor for conflict that underlies the need to defend is a negative metaphor, *war* or *attack*. When you are defensive, you might whine, deflect, attack, and further defend. The interaction can look and sound like Ping-Pong.

Barbara: Every time I try to talk to you about my day, you launch into complaints and whining about how bad life is for you. You never listen to me. (Notice that Barbara is in fact attacking, criticizing, and blaming.)

Mark: If I didn't get my two cents' worth in, you'd talk all evening. All you ever do is complain. I decided weeks ago that every time you come home with some "poor me" tale, I'll match you. Besides, I have a right to be heard too. You aren't the only important one in this family. (Mark is escalating, even though he calls it "matching" Barbara. He is also blaming and criticizing, and not listening.)

Barbara: If things are so rotten for you in this relationship, why are you sticking around? All I'm asking for is a little empathy, but I guess that's beyond you. (A major escalation!)

You can easily see that neither Barbara nor Mark is the least bit interested in learning, only in attacking and defending. This interaction will undoubtedly escalate or lead to hostile withdrawal.

Defensiveness comes from a misguided sense of righteous indignation, expressed poorly. Another word for defensiveness might be "contrariness." Some people seemingly can't help adopting a devil's advocate or contrary point of view. For them, conversation is a battle of wits. They enjoy the game of "batting ideas around" and are often very good at the performance. The pursuit of mutual understanding may seem boring and unchallenging (Yankelovich 1999, 141). Contrariness and defensiveness impede constructive conflict.

In the following complaint, Barbara and Mark do much better. Sure, this approach takes more time and care . . . but it's the only approach that works (Gottman 1999).

Barbara and Mark Try It Again

Barbara: I've been noticing something that troubles me and is making me upset. When I come home and tell you about my day, which I look forward to, it seems that you immediately start to tell me about your day, making it sound horrible. I don't feel heard. And I'm not listening to you, either. Something isn't working. I don't like the direction we're going, and I don't feel close to you.

Mark: I think you're right. I often feel that you get all the air time. I'm afraid that if I don't speak up, you'll talk all evening about your bad day. I'm not proud of this, but I really don't want to hear so much about your awful work situation.

Barbara: Thanks for being honest. It makes me feel less crazy. I do want to hear about you, good and bad things. I'd like for you to let me know you hear and understand me.

I can easily imagine doing the same thing for you. I do care about you.

Mark: I haven't liked myself very much, that's for sure. I've been trying to teach you not to complain—but I've been doing the same thing to you. Let's start over.

In this example, Barbara and Mark began to create a more supportive climate instead of a defensive climate. People in a defensive climate are touchy, irritable, quick-tempered, and harsh.

Creating a Supportive Climate Rather Than a Defensive Climate

One of the best descriptions of defensive communication was written by Jack Gibb in 1961. It is so useful we suggest you memorize the categories. This schema will help you moderate your own defensiveness very effectively—if you pay attention to your own language. First, learn to recognize your own and others' defensiveness for what it is. Then, practice the "support side" of the following suggestions. **Defensive climates**—rather than **supportive climates**—are created when people use the following kinds of language:

- *Evaluation rather than description.* Judgmental and evaluating language leads to a defensive response in the other person. No one enjoys being "graded," especially as inadequate. Instead, use neutral and nonblaming language. Rather than saying, "You are closed-minded on this . . ." say, "You really like the idea of going camping instead of kayaking. Are you open to some other options?"
- *Control rather than problem solving.* When you try to control the other person, you might insist on details, shut down communication, or simply say, "No way I'm

going to do that." Instead, say, "We can solve this problem. I'll listen to you; I ask you to listen to me." "Let's generate several possibilities."

- *Strategy rather than spontaneity.* In strategic communication, the other person feels manipulated and managed. When you are communicating spontaneously, you are free of deception and are communicating honestly, in a straightforward way. Rather than saying "I'll get back to you on that," say, "I'm not comfortable with that idea. Let's keep talking."
- *Neutrality rather than empathy.* No one likes to feel like a "case" or a "type." When a doctor says to a patient with cancer, "That's the protocol we use in this kind of cancer," the patient will feel dismissed or made into an object. Instead, the doctor could say, "This is my best advice based on my experience and the research. What do you think? Will this work for you?" A friend might speak neutrally, rather than empathically, when she says to her roommate, "It's simple. We need to alternate weeks of cleaning the room. That avoids conflict." Alternating might be a good idea, but not when she's just heard her roommate talk about how overwhelmed she feels and that cleaning the room just hasn't been a priority.
- *Superiority rather than equality.* No one likes to be talked down to. If you indicate that you are more powerful, smarter, or more experienced than the other person, you will create defensiveness. Rather than "You'll see that I'm right when you have more experience," say, "I feel strongly about this. What is your experience?" Rather than, "You have just about let this plant die from lack of water," say, "This plant looks dry." A comment based on equality assumes that the other person will know what to do.
- *Certainty rather than provisionalism.* Dogmatic, inflexible statements create defensiveness. Openness creates a supportive environment. Rather than "I am never going to drive at Christmas again," say, "Driving at Christmas is something I'm not wanting to do. I still want to see our family, but I hate being on the highway at Christmas. Let's talk about other options."

Support neutralizes defensiveness. As you learn to recognize your own and others defensiveness, you can practice *support.* Creating a supportive environment means you make it possible for the other person to be heard, and thus for the other person to hear you. Support does not mean agreement. Support means you see the other person as a worthwhile human being who deserves to be heard. Support means that you speak so the other knows she is being respected, and support means that listening takes as much time as talking. You can disagree and still be supportive.

Stonewalling—Withdrawal from Interaction

Usually, when people are engaged in conversation, they give nonverbal cues, as well as verbal cues, that indicate their involvement. They give eye contact, head nods, changes in facial expression, brief vocalizations, and so on (Gottman 1999). Turn-taking is regulated in a refined dance of interaction that shows that the other person is "there." Stonewallers don't do any of this. They show in every possible way that they are not "there." They glance only to see what the other person is doing, then glance away. They maintain a stiff neck and frozen facial features. They try to conceal what they are thinking and feeling. Men consistently stonewall more than women. In fact, in Gottman's study (reported in 1999), 85% of stonewallers were men. The combination of criticism and stonewalling predicted divorce

quite easily. Most women find this kind of "I'm not here" behavior on the part of men highly upsetting. Stonewalling is more than avoidance of conflict. It is an attempt to signal withdrawal from communication while, in fact, still being present in the conversation, but in a destructive way. Stonewalling also can mean a refusal to engage in a topic no matter how the other person brings it up. You can probably imagine the frustration and fury that accompanies stonewalling. One couple could never work out a mutual vacation because the wife would not respond in any way to her husband's suggestions. She would leave the room or change the subject. Thus a form of stonewalling occurred.

A less destructive form of stonewalling might be called *holding back*. When Yankelovich (1999) asked people why they were not more forthcoming in group discussions, they said they had to be comfortable enough to speak, or that they wanted to see what developed before they got involved. Men hold back in public discussions more than women do, although women also feel reserved when trust has not been built. People hold back when they sense hostility in a group or in the other. A good leader comments on quiet people in a supportive way, such as, "David, I'd like to hear your thoughts on whether this new project is a good idea." If David holds back by saying, "I haven't analyzed it yet," the leader could say, "We don't need all the data. I respect your opinion. What's your first take?"

Taking Down the Stone Wall People stonewall when they are afraid to be influenced or when they are so angry they no longer wish to engage. Sometimes people stonewall when they have lost respect for the other person. This is a toxic situation, calling for drastic measures. Here are several ways to take down the wall:

> She: You aren't responding at all to me. It's as though you aren't there. Please tell me what you actually are thinking. (Note to women—when someone is stonewalling, try asking about thoughts rather than feelings!)
>
> He: I'm not thinking a blinking thing.
>
> She: How can we get back into a conversation? Would you make a suggestion?
>
> He: Just shut up.
>
> She: That's what you've done, shut up. This is not helping us solve our problem. I want you to talk to me and listen to me. I'll start by listening.

This approach may not work. The stonewaller may be so punishing and harsh that nothing works for now. Still, this approach may change the conversation later.

If not, the relationship is functionally over. No one can stand being shut out forever. If the nastiness goes on for a while, the following might help:

> She: I feel hopeless and like going farther away. I hope you will let me in. This is a really bad situation. Please tell me what you want without making me the nag or hag. I can and will listen if I don't feel attacked.
>
> If he then attacks, she should stay, "Please stop. We'll talk later."

Contempt Contributes to Destructive Conflict

"Contempt is any statement or nonverbal behavior that puts oneself on a higher plane than one's partner" (Gottman 1999). Contempt often involves a nasty kind of mockery, putdowns, hostile corrections, and nonverbal expressions of contempt. The contemptuous look (mouth pulled over to one side) is "powerfully corrosive," according to Gottman and our own

experience. Many times we have heard people say the right words, but with an expression of contempt, which leads inevitably to more destructive communication. Often contempt is accompanied by sarcasm, ridicule, and outright hostile joking. In healthy relationships, contempt is almost never present. Contempt is never justified in a long-term, important relationship, since it functions as a powerful attack on the personhood of the other.

Softening Contempt Like stonewalling, contempt signals an emergency in a relationship. Whether in a marriage, friendship, or work situation, contempt calls for quick, effective action. In an architectural firm, a woman put a series of derisive, antimanagement cartoons on the bulletin board outside her office. Some of the cartoons were similar to the CEO's style, and most of her co-workers saw the cartoons as a thinly veiled attack on the older, male CEO. Unfortunately, the CEO matched contempt with contempt. He compiled a set of teamwork slogans, sent them out in a group e-mail, ending with, "Which person with a bulletin board might fit exactly into these sayings?" When a consultant was called in to facilitate less destructive communication, neither person would acknowledge being contemptuous. The consultant ended up saying, "I think both sets of messages are full of contempt. This is taking you nowhere good. That means you two and others need to talk. Are you willing to do this?"

If you are the victim of contempt, you may need to say something like:

"I won't let you talk to me this way. I am being treated without respect and I can't respect myself if I continue."

"Please don't treat me with contempt. Tell me what you want/need/feel instead."

"You are so furious that I can't talk with you right now. I'll try again later." (Then leave.)

"Please notice that you are speaking to me in a way that not one other person would tolerate. I need you to change the way you are talking to me."

"Nothing about this conversation is working for me so I am going to stop talking for now." (Then disengage, no matter how hard it is to do this.)

Full-blown, continuing contempt means that intervention of some kind is needed, or the relationship is over. Contempt can lead to abuse, and needs to be treated with great care. Try never to meet contempt with escalated contempt of your own. Disengage and seek counsel.

Application 1.5 Four Horsemen

Look back over the explanation of the "four horsemen." Answer the following questions, then discuss. This takes honest reflection. You can make a few notes before you talk with your group.

Which of the four communication modes has been used against you in harmful ways?

Which of the four do you use, and in what circumstances?

Choose an example of your own of one of the four destructive modes explained above.

Can you think of a way you could communicate more honestly and constructively?

Practice changing your communication when you are tempted to use one of the four horsemen. Keep track of your attempts for a paper on your communication style.

More Bad Habits for Your Analysis

When parties are unable or unwilling to adapt to changing circumstances, instead following rules "to a T" or "going by the book," potentially constructive conflict often deteriorates. One manager refused to discuss reprimands with employees, instead recording the incidents in letters that could later be used as part of a paper trail in case an employee needed to be fired. As a result, trust plummeted to zero in the office, and employees formed coalitions to protect each other from the inflexible boss. The supervisor, in addition to creating a hostile working environment, received "pretend change" instead of genuine change in employees' behavior. Everyone lost as the cycle of distancing and inflexible communication intensified.

Soften Rigidity with Flexible Options People become rigid when they feel threatened or feel afraid of losing something important. The supervisor who refused to talk with her employees may have been afraid of the feedback she would receive. She might not know how to bring up problems in a firm but respectful way. A peer manager could suggest different ways of creating change that are more likely to work than documenting behavior. These flexible options might be:

- Call each employee in to discuss positive and negative performance. Ask for feedback about how the manager can help the employee reach the joint goals that are set.
- For a while, the manager could focus on describing what she likes. The employees may not trust her at first, but focusing on positive behavior would soften the wall of mistrust that has been built in the office.
- The manager could hold team meetings saying something like, "Our conditions have changed so much that it's clear to me that some of your jobs are changing. I would like for us to talk about what is changing in our industry, and how we might adapt to the new needs."
- The manager could ask for a meeting with the person most likely to give helpful feedback, an internal "consultant," and say something like, "I'm not getting the change I would like. I can tell people are avoiding me. Do you have some suggestions for me that might get us working as a team again? I respect your judgment."

Again, when something is not working, try a new approach, not more of the old approach.

Dominance and Subordination Results in Destructive Conflict

"Authenticity and subordination are totally incompatible" (Miller 1986, 98). Dominant groups tend to suppress conflict, minimizing and denying its existence. This works reasonably well for those in power, because they can make and enforce the rules. In fact, a measure of the dominant group's success and security is often its ability to suppress conflict, to keep it hidden, unobtrusive, and unthreatening to the group's position of power. In a situation of unequal power, in which a myth of harmonious relationships is set forth, the subordinate person is put in charge of maintaining that harmony. Then any recognition of differences is treated as insubordination (Jordan 1990; Miller 1986). We will discuss how to deal with unequal power in Chapter 4.

More Examples of Destructive Habits

You can recognize other bad habits in the following list. Throughout the book, we will give suggestions for avoiding bad habits. For now, note which bad habits already discussed, and the ones following, you might resort to when you are frustrated or upset. Richo (2002) discusses in *How to Be An Adult in Relationships* (147–8) ways to recognize when you are being a "drama king or queen" rather than acting as an adult (one could be any age for this concept to apply).

- We use invective to dump our feelings on one another or engage in theatrical/histrionic displays meant to manipulate, intimidate, or distance the other.
- We explode, act violently, retaliate, or withdraw sullenly.
- One of us makes a unilateral or secret decision.
- The issue remains an open wound with lingering resentment and ongoing stress.
- We use cutthroat tactics.
- We insist this problem be fixed in accord with our timing, showing no tolerance for a time-out.
- We crowd the stage by bringing someone else or something else in as a distraction (e.g., an affair, drinking).
- We see only in black and white.
- We each insist on getting our own way.

Escalatory Spirals

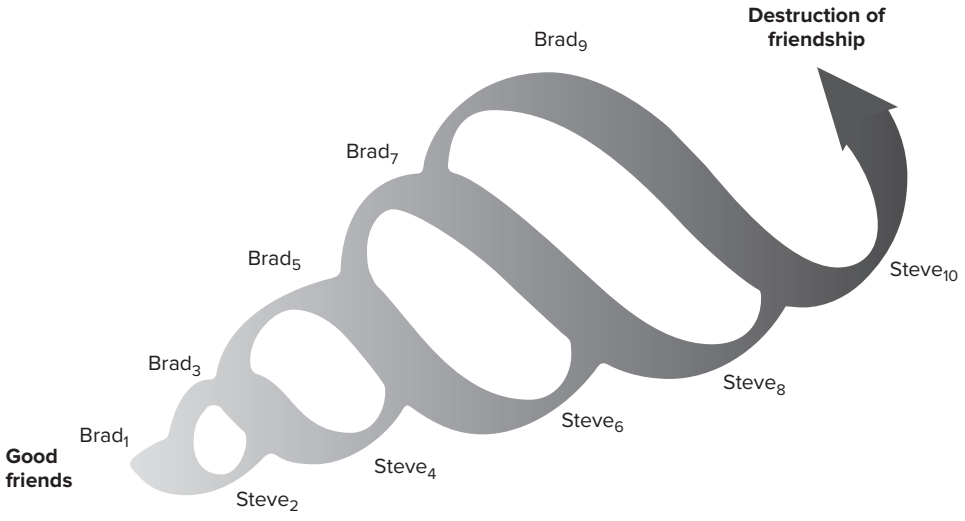
In the previous section we explored some of the most negative individual communication behaviors that lead to destructive conflict. Now, we will describe patterns of destructive conflict that require interaction.

Escalatory Spirals Pervade Destructive Conflict

Conflict often spirals out of control. What began as a careful exchange of opposing views deteriorated into an intense, careless exchange in which strong feelings, such as anger, revenge, despair, and fear were aroused. What happened? People who may have begun a reasonable discussion now want to harm the other person (Baron 1984). Perception dictates spirals. When one person interprets the other's communication as negative, threatening, interfering, and intense, a negative conflict spiral escalates rapidly. Such a spiral becomes extremely difficult to interrupt or change (Weingart et al. 2015). Once one person perceives that the other's emotional intensity is escalating, the negative spiral has begun. Figure 1.2 illustrates the runaway dynamics that occur in a typical destructive conflict spiral. In this example, two roommates begin with a misunderstanding that accelerates each time they communicate. Brad begins complaining about Steve's messiness. At each crossover point in the spiral, thoughts and actions might occur as they do in this version of an actual conflict:

1. Brad says to Steve, "Hey, why don't you do your part? This place is a hole."
2. Steve says, "Out of my face, dude!" (He then leaves the apartment.)

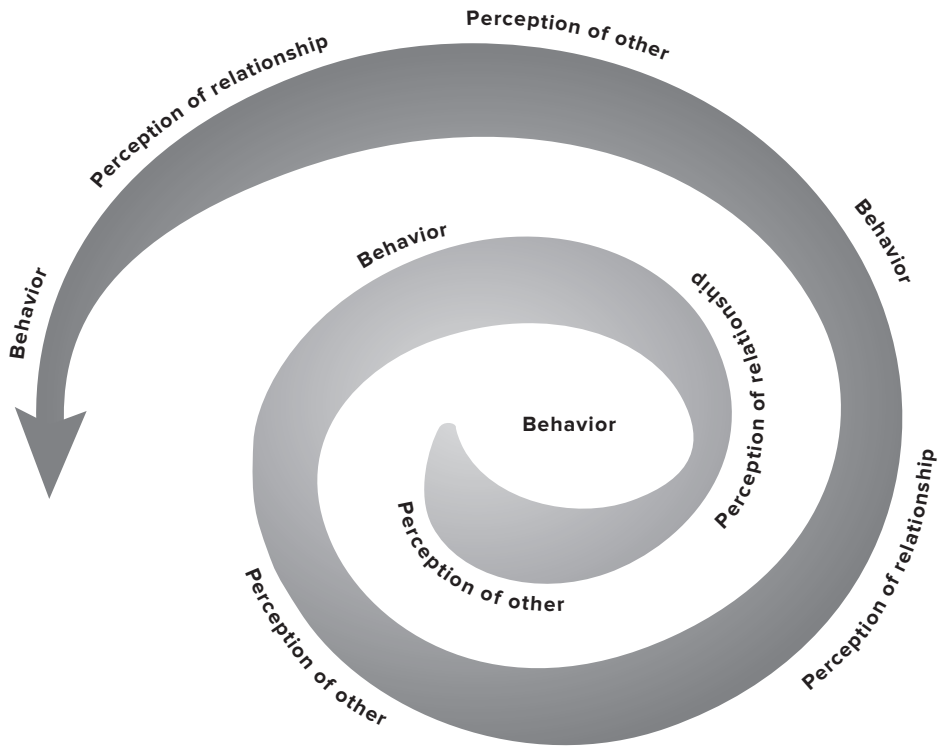
Figure 1.2 Conflict Spiral



3. Brad, still upset about the messy apartment, finds Steve's ex-girlfriend and says, "Has Steve always been such a slob? I can't stand living with him."
4. Steve, hearing from his ex-girlfriend that "even Brad knows that you are a slob," decides that he will get back at Brad for his meanness. So Steve begins deliberately messing up the bathroom, knowing that it will drive Brad crazy.
5. Brad comes home, sees the messy bathroom, and puts an ad in the campus newspaper that says, "If anyone sees Steve K., tell him to clean up his half of the apartment—it's a pigsty."
6. Steve, angered at the public announcement, comes home late one night and, while Brad is sleeping, lets the air out of Brad's tires.
7. Brad runs into a mutual friend the next day and hears that Steve is the one who let the air out of his tires. So Brad goes home, moves all of Steve's belongings into the hall, changes the locks on the door, and puts a sign on Steve's belongings that says, "Help yourself."

Brad and Steve's conflict escalated without much direct communication between the two of them—they let their actions speak instead of words. A destructive conflict in an intimate relationship, between spouses, for example, may be characterized by such features, in addition to the bad habits listed previously. Each person uses bad habits to damage the other person where it hurts most, emotionally. For instance, a woman may ridicule her husband for making less money than she does when she knows he is extremely sensitive to this issue. She may be trying to bring up an important topic, but the attempt will surely fail. The injunction "don't fight unless you mean it" is ignored in a destructive conflict, and the interlocking, damaging moves occur repeatedly. In a destructive conflict, one party unilaterally attempts to change the structure of the relationship, restrict the choices of the other, and gain advantage over the other.

Figure 1.3 The Spiral of Negativity



Probably the best index of destructive conflict is that one or both of the parties have a strong desire to "get even" or damage the other party. When you hear a friend say, "I'll get her back! She undermined me once, but never again!" you are overhearing one side of a destructive conflict in action. "If the conflict is responded to in destructive ways . . . it starts sequences of episodes that detract from relational quality" (Wilmot 1995, 95). The conflict continues unabated, feeds upon itself, and becomes a *spiral of negativity* (Figure 1.3). The three parts—the behaviors, the perceptions of others, and the perceptions of the relationship—mutually reinforce each other. As behavior becomes more destructive and one's view of the other and the relationship go downhill, each person continues to perceive himself or herself as free from blame. (i.e., "It is all his or her fault)." In an organization, for example, one person on the verge of firing an employee said, "Well, I'm a good supervisor. He just won't cooperate. It is all his fault. Besides, he will probably be better off if I fire him."

Escalatory spirals bring about a cascade of negative effects. Self-perpetuating dynamics create the (1) behaviors, (2) perceptions of the other, and (3) perceptions of the relationship, which continue to disintegrate (with each party viewing oneself as not responsible for any of it). Beck (1988) aptly summarizes the later stages of the process:

> When a relationship goes downhill, the partners begin to see each other through a negative frame, which consists of a composite of disagreeable traits ("He's mean and manipulative"; "She's irresponsible") that each attributes to the other. These unfavorable attributions color

> how the offended mate sees the partner; negative actions are exaggerated and neutral actions are seen as negative. Even positive acts may be given a negative coloring. (207)

Declines happen in all kinds of relationships—between social groups, between marriage partners, between roommates, within the work setting, and within families.

Avoidance Spirals

Avoidance Patterns Reduce the Chance for Productive Conflict

Escalatory spirals can be called "fight" patterns. Conflict parties also manifest "flight" patterns of avoidance of the conflict. For now, be aware that patterns of avoidance also create and reflect destructive conflict interaction. One form of avoidance is an active attempt to lessen dependence on each other. By making such an attempt, each party reduces the influence of the other on his or her choices. Both parties then become less invested in the relationship. Many long-term marriages, for example, become devitalized, with the spouses expecting less and less of one another. This is often the natural consequence of lessened interaction. Spouses who are prevented from enriching daily interaction by the pressure of jobs, children, and other stresses become estranged. The barrier between them becomes harder and harder to breach. **Avoidance spirals** occur in other contexts as well, such as with the employee who declares, "I don't care if they fire me—who needs them anyway?" The basic dynamics of all avoidance spirals are as follows:

- *Less direct interaction*
- *Active avoidance of the other party*
- *Reduction of dependence*
- *Harboring of resentment or disappointment*
- *Complaining to third persons about the other party*

Whereas escalatory spirals are characterized by *overt* and *implied* expression of the conflict, avoidance spirals demonstrate *covert* expression. At least one of the parties tries to impact the other through lack of cooperation. If you become irritated at your small group, your late report may get everyone into difficulty with the professor. Any form of withholding from someone who depends on you can bring negative consequences to the other. When you withdraw, the other party does not know what you want or are thinking. Often the other will say something like, "What is wrong?" Then you say, "Nothing," covering up anger, resentment, or disappointment.

Oddly enough, sometimes people want destructive conflict in their relationships (Neimeyer and Neimeyer 1985). Although escalatory and avoidance spirals may appear to be totally negative to outsiders, the conflict party may be getting something valuable from these spirals. For example, if John can stay locked in an overt struggle with Bill, the impasse may give John a sense of power and self-esteem: "I refuse to cooperate because I'll never forgive him for what he did. He was a sneak." Or, if you are in an avoidance spiral, then complaining about your supervisor, employee, spouse, or friend to others builds closeness between you and your listener. For example, a husband and wife may both complain

about the other to the children, each thereby building a close bond with the child who is the chosen listener. One can get locked into a position of complaining bitterly about a spouse or co-worker but not take any steps to alter the relationship directly. In short, people may be invested in not moving past the destructive conflict.

The Attack/Withdraw Pattern

This pattern is a destructive dance usually manifested in intimate relationships. It destroys chances for productive interaction. In the pursue/flee pattern, described in detail in Lerner's **Dance of Intimacy** (1989), one partner specializes in initiating conversation, commenting on the lack of closeness between the partners, bringing up feelings and issues to get them resolved, and drawing the other partner out by asking questions such as "You seem preoccupied—what's going on?" or "We don't seem close these last few weeks. Is something bothering you?" Then the "dance" of distance is engaged in as the other partner minimizes the problems, denies anything is wrong, promises to do better, comments on content problems only, avoids discussion of any relationship issues, or gives excuses such as "I've just been really busy," or "I'm distracted by what's going on at work," or "I'm just premenstrual. Don't take it personally." The conflict remains frustratingly unresolved because each partner specializes in a role that is so prescribed, whether initiating or fleeing, that the issues remain unexplored. These dynamics will be addressed in Chapter 5, but for now, as you begin to watch and analyze conflicts around you, pay attention to who initiates and who withdraws, or flees. As we discussed earlier, attacking leads to withdrawal, and withdrawal often leads to more attacks as the person who is avoided feels frustrated, choosing an attack as the only way to gain the other's attention (Reznik et al. 2015). A negative spiral results. One way to arrest this pattern is to make a comment about communication, such as "I notice that I'm the one who brings up problems, and you feel defensive. We need to do something different." The one who flees can own up to the discomfort caused by the pursuit by saying, for example, "I feel pounced on, especially about my feelings. I need time to sort out what's going on. I will talk to you; I just need to do it at a time when I'm not exhausted or frazzled."

Gottman (1994) discovered that the avoidance sequence described as attack/withdraw, or pursue/retreat, leads to relationship breakup because of its negative impact. Avoidance, or even worse, stonewalling, comes after some preliminary episodes. As we have discussed, for the marriages Gottman studied, the destructive sequence consisted of criticizing, defensiveness, stonewalling, and contempt. Thus, avoidance can be viewed within the overall spiral of conflict as leading to eventual dissolution of a relationship. One other feature of Gottman's work is noteworthy: If avoidance is accepted by both partners ("conflict-avoiding couples"), it can stabilize the marriage. Avoidance, coupled with dissatisfaction and disagreement (one person pursuing and the other fleeing), is damaging.

Reciprocity of Negative Emotion Can Lead to Destructive Conflict

Three kinds of reciprocity can be identified in communication: (1) low-intensity emotion is responded to in kind (e.g., anger is met with anger), (2) high-intensity emotion is met in kind (e.g., fury is met with fury), and (3) low-intensity emotion is met with high-intensity emotion (e.g., hurt is met with rage). Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that the escalation of negativity by husbands predicted divorce. When men refused to accept influence from their women partners, the relationship went downhill. It's important to understand just

what is being reported by this finding. Gottman and his researchers are not saying that men should do what women want, but that meeting negative emotion with more negative emotion predicts relationship breakup. Why would this be? *Escalating negativity on the part of men can lead to violent interactions.* A team of researchers watched videotapes of violent men interacting with their partners. They likened the experience to that of baseball players at automatic pitching machines who bat back every pitch. These violent men refused to be influenced by anything their wives had to say. Small requests or complaints were "batted back" regardless of their merit. In a companion study of 130 nonviolent couples, 80% of the men who did not accept any influence from their wives ended up divorced! Most women accepted influence from their husbands, and that acceptance did not predict anything about their marriages (Gottman 1994). The violent relationship is a one-way power struggle gone wild; the escalating spiral of negativity ends in verbal or physical violence. We will have more to say about the cycle of violence, but the important thing to note at this point is that meeting negative emotion with more negative emotion leads to big problems in relationships.

Retaliation Runs Rampant in Destructive Conflicts

Conflict participants destroy chances for change when they pile up grievances, hold grudges, and wait for opportunities to retaliate. "Don't get mad—get even!" is the watchword for this urge to get back at the other person. Retaliation often becomes paired with covert avoidance. One person acts as though everything is just fine while planning a payback move for later. You can probably think of many retaliatory moves that have either been made against you or been made by you yourself. Some examples of retaliatory moves are letters to someone's supervisor complaining about or pointing out some indiscretion that the employee committed; a snub such as not inviting someone to a function; a blatant move such as emptying out a partner's savings account, an ex-spouse refusing to agree to a reasonable request to change a parenting agreement because the former partner refused last time (thus setting up a revenge spiral which hurts the kids), or calling in sick at work when your colleague and you are scheduled to give a presentation, because you are angry at your colleague. Dirty tricks inevitably ruin the conflict atmosphere.

Humans in various cultures distinguish between the kind of aggression that can be directed against members of their own population and that directed toward other human groups. Stevens (1989) cites a tribe in Brazil, the Mundurucus, who distinguish between themselves, whom they call "people," and the rest of the world population, whom they call "pariwat." These in-group and out-group distinctions allow them to refer to others in the way they would refer to huntable animals (40–41). In North American and Western European cultures, the use of verbally demeaning and abusive communication serves a similar function (Evans 1992). Whole groups of minorities receive demeaning descriptions, and individuals in low-power positions in relationships suffer from pervasive demeaning, shaming, and blaming communication.

Your Opportunities

Conflict brings both danger and opportunity, and the dangerous aspects are well known. Changing our usual behavior, learning to "do what comes unnaturally," requires an examination of one's most deeply held values and spiritual beliefs. At its most effective, conflict

resolution can never be simply a set of techniques, put on or cast aside at will. You will want to think and feel through your own principles as you study this subject.

If people are to survive and thrive, working together is not an option but a necessity. Principles learned at the interpersonal level lead to collaborative principles at the global level. Because of this, what you learn about collaboration within relationships will affect a much larger plane of well-being. Breggin (1992) reminds us:

> In every aspect of life . . . we need better principles for resolving conflict and promoting harmony within ourselves and others. We need approaches that make personal and political sense, that connect us in a rational and caring manner to ourselves as individuals and to the world around us, including people and nature. We need a viewpoint that helps us understand and heal the pain of human conflict. (3)

We are connected human beings who must balance our need for personal autonomy with our need for interdependence. We can no longer live by the myth that somewhere out there is a place where we can be completely independent and do what we wish.

In conflict, no one set of principles will always work to keep you out of conflict altogether. Yet, people do change their orientation to conflict and amaze themselves with their ability to transcend formerly destructive situations. If enough of us are willing to weave webs of connection with others, all our shared hopes for the world can be realized. Longstanding stereotypes can be dissolved, mistrust can be overcome, understanding can be achieved, people previously at odds can work together on shared objectives, new levels of creativity can be reached, and bonds of community can be strengthened.

In order to find creative solutions, we must be willing to take our conflicts seriously. We need to find ways to manage our worst reactions and call on our best communication. When you improve your conflict skills, you will enrich your life.

Summary

Conflict happens. It is part and parcel of all our interactions—at work, with romantic partners, with friends, and with our families. Why would you want to study conflict? This study will help you learn new responses to situations that inevitably arise. Conflict management approaches help in love relationships, family interaction, and at work. Conflicts are defined as skills that can be learned, based on principles to contemplate. Principled skills create authentic conflict resolution approaches. Emotional intelligence remains a prerequisite for one's ability to engage in conflict effectively.

Conflict is defined as "an expressed struggle between at least two parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals."

Destructive conflict damages the parties and their relationship. In marriages, for example, the four horsemen of the apocalypse destructive pattern is criticizing, defensiveness, stonewalling, and contempt. Other negative patterns and individual bad habits are discussed in detail. We provide specific suggestions on alternatives to each one of these destructive responses.

In addition to these destructive patterns, it is helpful to understand escalatory spirals and avoidance spirals. The runaway spirals take on a life of their own and cannot be described by simply describing individual behaviors. After describing these, we suggest that you have opportunities for productive conflict management, and that these opportunities will enrich your life greatly.

Key Terms

perception 2
interpersonal conflict 3
intrapersonal conflict 3
intrapersonal perceptions 3
expressed struggles 5
conflict parties 5
interdependent 5
strategic conflict 5
mutual interests 5
mutual interdependence 6
gridlocked conflict 6
perceived incompatible goals 8
perceived scarce resource 8
power 9
self-esteem 9
perceived interference 10
mental health 10
family of origin 10
destructive marital conflict 11
conflicts at work 13
unresolved conflict 16
emotional intelligence 16
prevention 20
destructive conflicts 21
four horsemen of the apocalypse 22
critical start-up 22
defensive climates 25
supportive climates 25
escalatory spirals 33
avoidance spirals 33
dance of intimacy 34

Review Questions

1. What are the elements of a definition of interpersonal communication?
2. Explain how conflict management depends on a study of interpersonal communication.
3. Give reasons why we need to study conflict.
4. In what contexts do conflicts arise?
5. Define conflict.
6. What are common responses to abuse in one's history?
7. What are the interpersonal expressions of conflict?
8. What is the purpose of dialogue?
9. What do we depend on others for?
10. What do they depend on us for?
11. What is the role of perception in conflict?
12. How do power and self-esteem function in conflict?
13. What is the relationship between perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference?
14. How can you create a supportive climate?
15. What are intangible resources?
16. What characterizes destructive conflict?
17. What is a "good complaint"?
18. What are some common "bad habits" in conflict resolution, and how can they be changed into better habits?
19. What is a spiral?
20. What is an escalatory spiral?
21. What is an avoidance spiral?
22. Give an optimistic answer to "conflict always happens; therefore. . . ."

Chapter 2

Perspectives on Conflict

Your Personal History

Application 2.1 A Conflict Memory

Think of the most disturbing conflict you have experienced in the past half-year or so. What was your emotional response to this conflict? How does that compare to your usual response to conflicts? Do you generally like to get everything out in the open, even if such an effort creates tension and strong feelings? Or do you usually seek peace, harmony, and reduction of strong emotions? In small groups, listen to others' responses to these questions. Report back to the class how you are different from one another. The purpose of this activity is to notice the differences we bring to conflict.

Keep these recent interactions in mind as you read this chapter, reflecting on your own perceptions and experience of conflict.

In your family of origin you may have learned that to "blow up" was a normal, natural way for people to show they cared about each other. Perhaps your family was quiet, calm, and restrained. Fighting, if it happened at all, went on behind closed doors. Maybe you were punished for raising your voice, physically hurt for talking honestly to an adult, or told to keep your opinions to yourself. You may have been taught not to dwell on problems but to just move on. Or, maybe you experienced, as author Joyce did, hours of sitting around the family dinner table, catching up on the events of the day, talking over what was happening, and being asked we felt and thought. If so, you might bring a perspective to conflict that assumes, "we can work this out." Maybe you learned, as author Bill did, that conflict was not talked about and that "actions spoke more loudly than words." You may have been taught not to dwell on conflict but just to move.

Very early **attachment styles,** known as secure attachment or insecure attachment to parents, affect conflict resolution abilities 20 or so years later. Securely attached infants and children use their caregivers as a source of comfort in stressful situations. Insecurely attached infants don't use and can't rely on their caregivers to provide comfort. In one study (Simpson, Collins, and Salvatore 2011), children were videotaped at age 2, then ages 6 through 8 doing stressful tasks with their mother. At age 16 they completed interviews about the nature of their relationships with friends, how secure the friendships were, and how they resolved conflict. When they were 20 to 21 years old, they came to a lab with their romantic partners and completed a conflict resolution task and a conflict recovery task. At age 23, they were assessed to see if they were still dating the same romantic partners.

Subjects with an insecure attachment with their mothers at 12 months expressed more negative emotions when trying to resolve major relationship conflicts with their partners at age 21 or 22 (Simpson, Collins, Tran, and Haydon 2007). This effect, however, is offset by the good news. Those students who had good social skills in grade school and trusting relationships with friends at age 16 reduced the negative emotions experienced later with romantic partners. The "pathway" of good social relationships helps people recover from early negative experiences (Simpson et al. 2011). Working models of past relationships tend to carry forward in new relationships (Carson, Carson, Gil, and Baucom 2004). Not surprisingly, if both people were securely attached, their relationships were more positive. Further, another "pathway" to success emerged—one partner can help buffer the early life experiences of another (Salvatore et al. 2011). This means if one partner was fortunate enough to experience secure attachment, that person can help the other partner learn to trust and count on others.

You may be thinking, "This is all well and good, but I don't go around with a social science questionnaire before I decide to date someone." Of course not. The skills you will learn in this class will help transform you and assist others as well. This task takes practice, but over the years we have seen many students change from an automatic, reactive way of dealing with conflict, to a thoughtful, skilled approach. This helps you and everyone around you—romantic partners, colleagues, friends, and children.

More Reflections on Your Specific History

Personal and workplace history has taught you either to jump right into conflict or to strenuously attempt to reduce or avoid it. For most of us, the choice to avoid or confront a conflict is *difficult.* We all weigh the costs and benefits of bringing up something that may well be awkward, unpleasant, or frightening. We make choices every day about what conversations to avoid or initiate. We struggle about these choices, knowing that if we avoid a tough topic we might feel taken advantage of and experience resentment. If we confront a problem, we might make matters worse.

We hope you come to terms with your own life's learning—what to keep, what to challenge, what to change, and what to discard because it no longer fits your needs. Think also about your role in your family of origin, friendships, or romantic relationships in the workplace or in class. Do you want to change your usual role? Do you need to learn more about getting along rather than automatically challenging authority? Maybe you want to learn to speak up in your own clearly heard, authentic voice if you are usually silent or have been silenced by others.

Conflict can be either bad or good. As we noted in Chapter 1, conflict presents danger and opportunity. Whether conflicts seem worth it, or "good," depends on their frequency, the way the conflict takes place, and especially, the quality of the relationship where the conflict arises. Almost everything about the "was it worth it?" question depends on the relationship. Constructive conflicts in supportive relationships lead to beneficial outcomes (if the conflicts are not too frequent), while coercive, destructive conflicts in unsupportive relationships lead to negative and unpleasant outcomes (Laursen and Hafen 2010). Think about the possibilities you might want to explore in conflict resolution. You can make a relationship more supportive, decreasing the frequency of conflicts by asking, "Is this worth it?" and you can learn to participate in conflict responsibly. All these skills can be learned if you want to learn them.

Which of the following descriptions best describes your background systems? (1) **avoidant,** in which members avoided most conflict; (2) **collaborative,** in which members used cooperation and collaboration; or (3) **aggressive/coercive,** in which members engaged in overt yelling, calling of names, blaming, scapegoating, and similar aggressive moves. While there is an artificial nature to these distinctions (e.g., some people will avoid, then be aggressive, then avoid again), over time distinctive "rules" for handling conflict emerge. Here are some of them:

Avoidant Systems

- Conflict doesn't exist, and if it does, don't recognize it.
- If there is a conflict, figure out what to do about it on your own.
- Don't tell anyone else if there is a struggle.
- Walk away if something starts to feel uncomfortable or threatening.
- Don't ever raise your voice.
- Snide comments are ignored, even though resentment builds.
- Sulking and the silent treatment are necessary strategies.
- If someone has a concern, don't respond to it.
- Don't express strong feelings.

Collaborative Systems

- Have meetings or mealtime talks to discuss issues.
- Use good listening skills when someone has a concern.
- Deal with people directly.
- Say openly what you are feeling.
- Help is offered in resolving children's conflicts.
- Regular interaction is important.
- Dirty tricks such as sulking are not allowed.
- Parents encourage and model respective communication.
- Strong feelings are seen as normal and are allowed.

Aggressive/Coercive Systems

- Survival of the strongest describes the general climate.
- Be brutally honest regardless of the impact.
- Show your emotions strongly even if that hurts someone.
- Establish your position early.
- Have an audience present when you engage someone.
- Don't back down—hold your ground no matter what.
- If someone attacks you have to fight back.
- People who don't engage are weak.

Notice how different the three lists are from one another. If you grew up in an avoidant family and your roommate grew up in an aggressive family, it would not be too surprising if a conflict between the two of you is difficult to resolve—each of you would break the rules of interaction the other expected you to follow. So our personal history in our families of origin will have a big impact on what we choose to do when conflict starts to rumble below the surface in our relationships.

Application 2.2 Call It the Way You See It

Write for 5 to 10 minutes on the way your family, past or present, handled conflict. See if you fit, roughly, into one of the three background systems described in the text. Put your own label on the system you describe. For instance, you might call your system "hit and run," "wheedle and plead," "get your licks in first," "whatever," "let's get this done so we can do something fun," "leave me out of this," "friendly food fight," or "let me know when it's over." Discuss your reflections with one classmate.

One family exemplifies the way conflict approaches may change over time. Karen and Len are parents of Rachel, who suffered a serious head injury while riding a horse when she was 14. Until that time, the parents seldom raised their voices and life at home was fairly peaceful. Since Rachel's accident, Mom feels stress because of numerous medical appointments and very little time to get her work completed at the family business and at home. Len has decided that Rachel should help out more; he has begun yelling at Rachel to "pitch in and do something to help your mother," while Karen yells back, "You expect too much. She's only 14 and she's doing the best she can." Rachel alternates between placating her father by working hard, then disappearing to avoid the yelling. The family could now be described as aggressive, but this approach has developed recently because of stressors.

Your personal history also includes all interactions with others up to the present. What you experienced as a preschooler, in school, with friends on the playground, and in adult exchanges influences your expectations. Some of us have experiences of working through difficulties with others thus, we willingly engage in what might prove to be a difficult talk. Others of us expect (and thus receive) constant tension, turbulence, and strife. These people are more likely than others to react to daily challenges with self-criticism and criticism of others, blame, negativity, defensiveness, irritability, or selfishness (Heitler 1990). These approaches invite a reciprocal response. Think about your current beliefs and expectations about human interaction. Are you primarily hopeful and optimistic, or cynical and pessimistic? Do you ruminate and take conflict personally? Many people who brood over imagined conflicts think they will be more aversive than the experience actually turns out to be (Wallenfeltz and Hample 2010). Reflecting on constructive options is not the same thing as brooding, which usually turns out badly.

If you grew up in a family in which verbal, physical, or sexual abuse was part of the environment, you definitely will have very strong reactions to conflict. You may be very watchful, careful to smooth over any signs of discomfort. You may have learned to take the abuse to protect others in the family. You may feel guilt at the inevitable failure of that

strategy. Maybe you waited until you were old enough and then left, to go to work, get married, or go to college, the armed forces, or a friend's apartment. Perhaps you learned to escape the immediate violence, either physically or by numbing out, not caring, thinking of something else, or forgetting the conflict. Tragically, teens who witness intimate partner violence and experience harsh parenting are more likely to instigate partner violence while dating (Jouriles et al. 2012). Children who witness intimate partner violence (IPV), not surprisingly, are likely to develop symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. Additionally, those child witnesses initiate aggression, including violence, more often later in their lives than children who did not have to suffer such witness-violence (Panahon 2015).

Alyssa, who grew up with ongoing verbal and physical violence, learned to take her horse out for all-day rambles. She would come back after dinner and busy herself with grooming her horse and cleaning the stalls. Then she would grab a snack when no one was looking and take it to her room. Josh, now 25, started to use drugs at 11, which enabled him to tune out mentally while the yelling and hitting was going on. Some kids hung out at friends' houses until they absolutely had to go home. Children of violent homes have developed many strategies for dealing with their dangerous backgrounds. Some victims of violence learn to use violence in a "first strike capability" mode. They intend never again to be taken by surprise.

Application 2.3 My History with Violence

If you have experienced violence directly or indirectly in your life, these experiences will inevitably affect how you respond to conflict. Answer these questions in your own journal, notebook, or with a small group. What influence, if any, does violence have on your conflict responses? What experiences have you had with violence, whether verbal, physical, or sexual? If you have not experienced violence directly, what violent experiences of others have affected you?

If you have experienced or instigated violence, you are a perfect student for this class. Counseling will undoubtedly help you interpret what you have experienced. There you will learn to identify your trauma-related emotions and over time, make positive choices about how to manage internalized responses to trauma. In a recent women's group, participants wrote and spoke about how they benefitted from not only counseling but additional approaches to cooling the fires of trauma, such as yoga, tai chi, meditation, art therapy, and expressive writing. Nationwide, male and female veterans are learning to use these approaches to help them deal with war-related violence, as well as family and partner violence, which tragically rises after veterans are immersed in the unbearable violence of war (www.redwillowlearning.org 2016). Once you are able to work with your internal traumatic responses, you will be able to continue to learn conflict resolution skills by using the skills in this book and class. *Please seek help if you find yourself unable to cope with traumatic responses.* You are most certainly not alone in this struggle.

Your current living situation certainly influences your methods of handling conflict. If you are with people with whom you feel safe and supported, you can experiment with new styles. If not, you will experience less freedom, possibly relying on what you already know how to do. Similarly, some work situations encourage constructive

(or destructive) conflict, whereas others reward people for silence and withdrawal. All of these aspects of personal history feed into our expectations and actions when we are in conflict situations.

Application 2.4 My Influences

List the 10 most important influences on your personal response to conflict, in order of importance. Keep this list for later discussion or writing on "My Personal Style of Conflict."

We encourage you to understand yourself and your history while you are learning to change conflicts and gain confidence in your new repertoire of interpersonal conflict skills.

Your Worldview Affects How You Think and Feel About Conflict

One's **worldview** shapes conflict resolution. A telling example, reported by Goldberg (2009), helps us think about the crucial function of understanding worldviews. A Native American tribe had been embroiled for years with the federal government over the issue of permanent residence on their traditional land. Over time, they spent much of their time arguing about the right to build permanent housing. When the mediator working with the tribe and the government asked tribal leaders *why* they wanted permanent homes, she was surprised to hear that they did *not* want permanent housing. Instead, they wanted the right to migrate to the mountains in the hot season, using temporary housing during the winter. The government only understood "permanent housing" as a persuasive argument, because their worldview assumed that "legal right to reside" meant "permanent housing." The tribe had adapted what they really wanted, a legal right to use their land, to accommodate to a stranger worldview.

Worldview can be defined as "the cognitive, ethical, and perceptual frames of an individual" (Goldberg 2009, 407). One's worldview is made up of the following components:

- A view of what is real and important in the universe
- A view of how people and objects are supposed to relate to each other
- A view of what part of the universe is more valuable than another
- A view about how you know what you know (epistemology) (adapted from Nudler 1993, 4)
- A view about how people should act (ethical worldview) (Blechman, Crocker, Docherty, and Garon 1998)

Worldviews are evidenced by how people tell the story of a conflict. Narratives, or the way people tell their stories, reveal the views of the universe and how people should act. In addition, metaphors used by people tell how they experience conflict and how important beliefs are connected (Goldberg 2009). Two examples will give you some idea about how narratives of conflict work. In a government organization, a Hispanic employee, a

woman close to retirement, was given a poor performance review. She explained that her mother had cancer and that she was her primary caregiver, while at the same time, her son had gotten in trouble with the law and was on probation to his mother's house. At work Consuela took frequent phone calls, often missed work, and asked peers to explain technical procedures relating to budget analysis many different times. Finally, her peers became fed up, went to their manager, Keith, who began a detailed documentation of Consuela's workplace problems so he could create a "paper trail" and fire her. Consuela told her assigned employee assistance counselor that she was concerned about her own cognitive ability, her stress level, and her work–life balance. Keith told the counselor that he thought Consuela was taking advantage of a humane policy in the agency, was relying on her peers to give her information that she should have, and that she showed no motivation for her work.

Clearly, Keith and Consuela, through their stories, experienced a clash of worldviews. Consuela valued family needs and work–life balance. She assumed that co-workers were glad to help out in a stressful time, as they had done in the past. Keith's worldview put performance first. He expected family needs to be taken care of at times other than work, and he expected individuals to know their own jobs without needing to consult with peers about required information. Keith and Consuela's worldview depended partly, but not entirely, on cultural assumptions. Thus, Consuela thought she might be "going crazy," while Keith thought she "lacked a work ethic." In this particular instance, Keith, being the manager, prevailed, ultimately firing Consuela.

Your worldview might lead you to assume that conflict is generally a negative experience.

Negative Views of Conflict

Prior to a training session to be held for a large corporation, a revealing dialogue took place. The agreed-upon topic was "Conflict on the Job: Making It Work Productively." Three days before the training was to take place, a worried manager called. He said the proposed topic "certainly sounded interesting," and he was "sure everyone needed help in the area," but he wondered if the leader would take a more "positive" approach to the subject. He urged a title change to "Better Communication in Business," and explained that his company didn't really have "conflicts," just problems in communicating. He felt conflict was such a negative subject that spending concentrated time on it might make matters worse. A participant in a course called "Managing Conflicts Productively" came to the course because she had never seen a productive conflict—all the conflicts she had witnessed were destructive. Further, her statement suggested that a helpful conflict probably did not exist. Their worldviews assume a negative perspective on conflict.

Several well-known cultural clichés present a fairly clear picture of how many of us were taught to think about conflict. Parents may tell their children, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all;" "Pick on somebody your own size;" "Don't hit girls;" "Don't rock the boat;" "Children should be seen and not heard;" "Act your age!" (which means act my age, not yours); "Be a man, fight back;" and "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!" All of these sayings give a bit of philosophy about conflict, regarding with whom to fight, permissible conflict behavior, when to engage in conflict, and the power of words in conflict behavior. All of the sayings make assumptions that are not helpful to persons who want to learn to carry out productive conflict behavior.

If you were asked to list the words that come to mind when you hear the word "conflict," what would you list? People commonly give the following responses:

destruction	anxiety	threat
anger	tension	heartache
disagreement	alienation	pain
hostility	violence	hopelessness
war	competition	stress

Many people view conflict as an activity that is almost completely negative and has no redeeming qualities. Some take the attitude that "what the world needs now is good communication," that if people could just understand each other, they wouldn't have to experience conflicts. While there is an increasing awareness of the potentially positive features of conflict when done skillfully, many widely accepted assumptions continue to work against a positive view of conflict. Some of the most common **negative views of conflict** are presented here.

1. *Harmony is normal and conflict is abnormal.* Observation of people in relationships shows that conflict is not a temporary aberration. It alternates with harmony in an ebb and flow pattern. But common expressions, such as "I'm glad things are back to normal around here" or "Let's get back on track," express the assumption that conflict is not the norm.
2. *Conflict constitutes a breakdown of communication.* Designating conflict as a breakdown assumes that communication itself does not occur, but communication always occurs in an interpersonal conflict. Often more communication makes the conflict worse. The recipe "add communication into the breakdown" doesn't work out well. "Breakdown," you will notice, assumes that people are like machines, a doubtful worldview.
3. *Communication and disagreements are the same thing.* Often we mistakenly assume that "we aren't having a conflict; we are just disagreeing." Sometimes this is true. As we described in Chapter 1, conflicts are more serious than disagreements. The attempt to label a real conflict "a disagreement" may be an ineffective strategy to minimize the conflict.
4. *Conflict is a result of personal pathology.* Conflict is often described as "sick," and conflict participants may be labeled as "neurotic," "hostile," "whining," "paranoid," "egomaniacs," "antisocial," "dependent" or "codependent," or "enabling." Labels offer no substitute for a careful analysis of the elements of the conflict. Conflict results more often from a lack of appropriate personal power and too little self-esteem than from someone with a sick personality. In studying conflict, people's *behaviors* should be described, *not their personalities.* Sometimes people are so stuck in a destructive pattern that they cannot change and they cannot participate in collaboration. But the process of conflict itself should not be viewed as pathological. People engage in conflict for understandable reasons. If someone is "rigid," then he or she may have too much or too little power. If someone is "defensive," then he or she may be under attack or expect to be threatened.

5. *Conflict should never be escalated.* Sometimes the most productive choice is to temporarily make the conflict larger so it can be seen, dealt with, and given importance. Sometimes an escalation is unavoidable and cannot be suppressed without relationship damage (resentment, silent hostility, despair, hopelessness, and private decisions to leave). Conflict skills include learning to make enough noise to be heard and to make conflict big enough to be seen. People of lower power band together to confront higher-power people, sometimes so justice will be served. Sometimes people with higher power take a stand to make a conflict larger because they believe it is the right thing to do.
6. *Conflict interaction should be polite and orderly.* Overly nice communication of any kind ensures a lack of authentic interchange. Productive conflict management often sounds chaotic and confusing. Private arguments, especially, seldom conform to public standards of reasonableness, consistency, or relevance in argumentation. With intensity, communication becomes less strategic and rational and more emotionally expressive and personal. A good conflict is not necessarily a nice conflict, although the more people use productive communication, the more likely that the conflict will both solve problems and help the relationship go forward.
7. *Anger is the only emotion in conflict interaction.* Another misconception is that the primary emotion associated with conflict is anger, or hostility. Instead, many emotions accompany conflict. Many of us are familiar with the heated, angry, gut-wrenching feelings accompanying conflict. Yet people often experience loneliness, sadness, anxiety, disappointment, and resentment, to name only a few other feelings.

In our society, adults are not encouraged to acknowledge fears, loss, feelings of abandonment, and loneliness. As a result, people talk about their conflicts in terms of anger rather than heartbreak or loss. In conflict the emotional connection is altered between people. As the relationship changes to one of distance, the natural give-and-take that used to come easily is lost and they experience bitterness, anger, sadness, or other emotions. The loss of a positive emotional bond remains one of the most painful experiences of humankind.

Application 2.5 Identify Your Emotions When in Conflict

What emotions are most common for you when you experience conflict? Think of four areas of conflict: family, roommate, romantic, and work. In each area, list your most common emotions. If there doesn't seem to be a set of common emotions, think of one conflict as an example in each area. How did/do you feel? Be sure to use words of feeling, not judgment or description. We will further explore how to work with these feelings. For now, simply identify them.

8. *A correct method for resolving differences can be prescribed.* Americans tend to resolve disputes, at least in public, in one of four ways: *fight, vote, litigate, or appeal to various authorities* (Stulberg 1987). These approaches assume that someone will win and someone will lose and that all will accept the process and abide by its outcome. In a local church whose members were trying to employ new forms of decision making, great disagreement arose over the idea of using collaborative, consensus-based forms of decision making. In one conflict over whether homosexual people should be given full rights and privileges in the church, the debate at the large

public meeting centered primarily around whether it was possible to make decisions that were binding without a vote and how to vote without automatically creating "winners and losers." Many appeared more threatened by the change in process than by the possible outcome of the decision. In everyday life, subordinates subvert managers, children disobey parents, and coalitions form after a vote is taken, essentially changing the meaning of the vote. People assent with half a heart, then fight against the agreement with all their strength. Sometimes the best method for resolving disputes is not apparent, which leads to a struggle over how to struggle. Rather than being viewed as a waste of time, conflict should be viewed as multilayered.

Positive Views of Conflict

The above set of common assumptions reflects the predominant mode of thought in the contemporary West, at least in the dominant culture. However, many societies, including our own, express contradictory views of conflict—sometimes it is bad, sometimes it is good. Therefore, we may grow up with a confusing perspective on when conflict is helpful or when it should be avoided. We learn few strategies for changing conflict situations from harmful ones into productive ones. Children may receive confusing messages about their conduct of conflict. Sports are all right, but violence outside a sports framework is not. Conflicts with peers is all right if you have been stepped on and you are a boy, but talking back to parents when they step on you is not all right. Having a conflict over a promotion is acceptable, but openly vying for recognition is not. Competing over a girl (if you're a boy) is admirable, but having a conflict over a boy (if you're a girl) is catty. And so on. Persons in power send two different messages: (1) Fight and stand up for yourself, but (2) only when it is acceptable (Bateson 1972). Thus, people develop mixed feelings about conflict, and many simply learn to avoid it altogether.

Yet, there are some **positive approaches to conflict.** For example, would you list the following words after hearing the word "conflict"?

exciting	intimate
strengthening	courageous
helpful	clarifying
stimulating	opportunity
growth producing	enriching
creative	energizing

One of the assumptions of this book is that conflict can be associated with all of these words. Conflict does receive some positive endorsement in legal challenges and competition in business. In games, children learn that "hitting hard" and "fighting to win" are positive virtues. Strategizing, scheming, and maximizing your gains are also necessary. Conflict can be approached from a potentially positive perspective. Consider the following advantages and functions of conflict:

1. *Conflict is inevitable; therefore, the constructive way to approach conflict is as "a fact of life."* Too often, people blame others for conflict, assuming, as we saw earlier, that harmony is the norm. If you can accept conflict as inevitable, you can calm down and use your problem-solving skills rather than expending effort in blame and avoidance.

2. *Conflict serves the function of "bringing problems to the table."* In intimate relationships, conflict can make clear that there are problems to be solved. Many times in couple relationships, conflict emerges over division of labor and over the distribution of power. When couples report high levels of problem severity, they are more likely to divorce (Amato and Rogers 1999). One rule of thumb we have developed is, *If a conflict occurs three times it isn't about the content.* It may be about power, self-esteem, or relationship issues, such as hurts from the past.

Don and Heather have been married for 2 years. They have a 9-month-old son. Heather works 3 days a week out of their home, running an environmental consulting business. Before their marriage, she worked for various nonprofit environmental groups. She is also an artist who sells her work to environmental organizations. Don is a mechanical engineer with a full-time job at a small firm. They reported a conflict over tasks at home. Here is a summary of their dilemma:

Heather: Don and I have agreed that I will work 3 days a week, and on the other 2 days, take on most, but not all, of the home responsibilities. But since our child is home some of the day, every day, I often am doing many things at once—laundry, playing with or caring for Nathan, answering e-mails about work, and trying to write up reports and initiate contacts with clients. That's all right with me, since I like to have a lot going on, except for one problem. When I want to go out with my women friends some evenings, after being home all day, Don gets upset if I leave household and child-care tasks for him to do. He doesn't understand that I can't just neatly divide my work into 3 days of business and 2 days of home and child care. I can't stand feeling stuck and controlled.

Don: I thought Heather and I had worked out a good plan. I would work full time out of the home, and she would work three-fifths' time at home, leaving her time to do most of the home tasks. I don't think she organizes very well. I resent being left with housework when she goes out in the evenings. It's not what we agreed. We need to change something.

Application 2.6 Don and Heather

What problems, specifically, do Don and Heather face? What are some of the areas that could derail them? In other words, applying the "three times" rule, what is the conflict *not* about? What is the conflict more likely to be about? How could they begin to solve the problem and make their relationship better?

3. *Conflict often helps people join together and clarify their goals.* Many times people keep on doing things "the same old way" until there is a conflict. When conflict arises, they must determine their priorities and how to use their resources. In one organization, a group of nurses were told they must function without a nursing supervisor. They were told by upper management to work out their own schedules and assignments as a team. As they struggled with more work and fewer paid hours available, after a period of several months of blaming and complaining, they met together

as a team and worked out their problems. While the initial reduction in resources was not at all desirable, they now work effectively as a team.

4. *Conflict can clear out resentments and help people understand each other.* In a conflict, one cannot continue to go along as though one's own perspective is the only one. When others speak up and say what they need, want, think, and feel, the circle of understanding is often expanded beyond the individual. Even though it may be difficult, conflict can help people pay attention to other points of view.

To continue the examination of views of conflict, we will present an overview of everyday metaphors people use when describing conflict.

Insights from Metaphors

We try to make sense out of the disturbing, difficult experience of conflict by comparing one's current experience to something else we understand. When people compare one thing to another, we often use **metaphors** to create a kind of compact, vivid shorthand description of a complicated process. Metaphors provide imaginative descriptions of emotional experiences. They distill assumptions about the way we think (Goldberg 2009). Our way of thinking depends on metaphoric language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Conflict elicits such strong feelings that metaphors arise in everyday speech, often taking "its creator as well as its hearers, quite by surprise" (Rushing 1983). Aristotle understood analogy or metaphor to be the source of truths, and a mark of genius. If this is true, you are a genius, because you certainly use metaphors. **Conflict metaphors** reflect and create certain kinds of communication.

In the following section, we present common metaphors for conflict interaction. The way a conflict is expressed metaphorically creates a certain perception of what can happen, what will happen, what should happen, and with what kind of feeling behavior takes place (McCorkle and Mills 1992).

Two examples will get us started. Arnie, a manager, described his office as a windmill, with people going around in circles above the ground, not knowing that the pipe connecting the windmill wheel to the underground well has been severed. You can picture the pointless, aimless effort in the office, the sense of purposelessness, and even the dry, arid quality of the human interactions. Nothing life-giving comes from the work.

One student described her family as a melodrama—an old-time film in which a train rushes across a bridge that is about to collapse. Father, the engineer, drives on at top speed, unaware of the crumbling bridge. No lookouts are posted, and no one else is in the engineer's cab. Disaster looms. Imagine the confidence of the engineer, the panic of the passengers (the family members), and the utter frustration at having no way to communicate with the engineer who is steering them into disaster.

Application 2.7 What Is Conflict Like?

Before you read further about metaphors and conflict, take a moment to think of how you generally describe conflict. Finish this open-ended sentence, "Conflict in my family is like . . . ." Then, "Conflict in my workplace is like . . . ."

Metaphors Reflecting Danger

Many images and expressions of conflict cast such a negative tone that creativity is stifled. **Danger metaphors** imply that the outcome is predetermined with little possibility for productive conflict management. Metaphors expressing that conflict bring a danger warning about the costs and consequences of conflict. In win–lose conflicts, what one person wins, the other person, by necessity, loses. A scarce amount of resources is distributed, usually unevenly, among the participants. One of the main reasons conflict brings up so much emotion is that people assume that they have so much to lose. Sometimes, that is true. Other times, as you will see, that assumption can be changed. When metaphors emphasize danger (rather than opportunity), the language of **conflict narratives** serves to warn people away from engaging in conflict. Listen for how conflict is described; you will notice evocative metaphors. Some of them follow.

Conflict Is Warlike and Violent

War, with its violence, is the central metaphor for conflict. The following phrases regarding conflict reflect the metaphor of war and violence:

> Your actions are completely indefensible.
>
> He attacked me where I was most vulnerable—through my kids.
>
> That criticism is right on target.
>
> OK, shoot!
>
> I feel beaten down and defeated after our talk.
>
> He is killing me.

When conflict is envisioned as warlike, certain actions seem natural. In a staff meeting, for instance, accusations are "hurled back and forth" as if primitives are bashing each other with stones. If arguments are felt to be "right on target," then the whole melee is structured as a battle. The scene is that of a battlefield; the actors are people of warring groups who are committed to wiping each other out. The acts aim to produce an advantage by killing or reducing the effectiveness of the opponent. The resolution possibilities are reduced to offense and defense, and the purpose is harm, or vengeance. The war metaphor influences the entire perception of the conflict. Both winning and losing sides feel incomplete; victors desire more power, and losers shore up their defenses for the next attack. Perhaps you work in an organization whose workers act as if conflicts were large or small wars, and fights were battles in the ongoing war. If your organization uses a "chain of command," gives people "orders," "attacks competitors," "wages advertising or public relations campaigns," "fires traitors," "employs diversionary tactics," or "launches assaults," then the organization has evolved a military metaphor for conflict management. If so, conflict is likely to be solved the way it would be if one were on a battlefield. One organization described two managers as "ruling over neighboring fiefdoms." One can imagine raids on resources and patrolling boundaries as normal activities with such a metaphor.

"He is Killing Me"

In a large technological research firm, military metaphors abound. The program directors are under a lot of stress with high-stakes external negotiations, which involve millions of dollars. When they have a meeting with someone who shouts or stomps out of the room, they find it very unpleasant. Between rounds of negotiation, they might tell another program director that "he is killing me." Everyone immediately knows what this metaphor means:
(1) This negotiation is very important, (2) I'm concerned that we won't "make a deal" on this contract, and (3) he is acting in ways that make me likely to lose.

Couples talk in warlike terms, too. They may say:

I just retreat. I fall back and regroup. Then I wait for an opening . . .

He runs over me when I cry and get confused.

When I don't want it to come to blows (laughs), I launch a diversionary tactic, like telling him the kids are calling me.

"She's Squeezing the Life out of Me"

A divorcing couple, Kent and Jeannie, were at odds over the division of their property. Most of the big items had been decided, and they were down to the smaller but more symbolic things such as music, art, family pictures, and gifts to one another. In describing their negotiations, Kent said in the mediator's office, "She's choking me," "These are my lifeblood," and "These things are my life." Jeannie saw the items as "just stuff, for heaven's sake." The metaphors the couple used revealed the degree of importance they put on the items.

Chronic use of military or violent metaphors severely limits creative problem solving. Other metaphors would capture different realities instead of focusing only on military images.

Conflict Is Bullying

In an extensive analysis of metaphors that explain workplace bullying, vivid and painful images of being hunted ("Everybody's fair game") and experiencing abuse ("I've been ripped," "broken," "beaten," and "eviscerated") emerged from the question, "What does bullying feel like?" (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts 2006). Respondents spoke of a "dictator" lording it over the slaves. One worker said, "You literally have a Hitler running around down there who's a mile away from the management who can't see it" (the bullying). The same researchers heard bullies described as an evil demon and a Jekyll and Hyde character who was entirely unpredictable. In the extended "bully" metaphor, low-power people described themselves as "a piece of property," "slaves," and "a caged animal." People referred to themselves as prisoners who were "doing time" (Tracy et al. 2006).

Conflict imagined this way, as a drama of bullying, implies an extreme power difference. The "winner takes all" in a bullying scenario.

Conflict Is Explosive

Perhaps you experience "explosive" conflicts, using phrases like the following to describe the process:

He's about to blow up. Any little thing will set him off.

Larry's got a short fuse.

The pressure's building up so fast that something's gotta give soon!

I just needed to let off steam.

She really pushed my button.

Put a lid on it!

Such perceptions represent the action of igniting flammable materials (feelings), triggering issues, and setting off an explosion. Maybe the pressure builds "under the surface," like in a volcano, or "in a pressure cooker," such as an overcrowded office. People often say they "blew their stacks" in response to an event. If people act out explosive conflicts, they often see them as somehow out of their control ("He touched it off, not me"). The "exploder" may feel better after a release of pressure; the people living in the vicinity may feel blown away.

The explosion metaphor emphasizes danger in conflict. Participants can imagine resolving the issue only by "blowing up" or by avoiding "touching it off." Additionally, people with "explosive tempers" are often relieved of their own responsibility to do something about the buildup of tension before they have to blow up. Family members are taught to keep from making Dad or Mom mad, thus learning that conflict can be avoided by not provoking someone, thus keeping the peace. Family systems theorists have labeled this pattern as one of the destructive patterns of codependence—of taking too much responsibility for the actions of others.

Conflict Is a Trial

The legal system provides a regulated, commonly accepted system for managing social conflict. The system has evolved over hundreds of years and serves our culture well in many instances. However, Western society has come to rely too much on the legal system, partly as a result of the breakdown of community and personal modes of managing conflict. Thus, legal terms creep into personal or organizational conflict metaphors, since at least the legal system has firm rules and expectations. Phrases like the following indicate that legal metaphors may be shaping conflict behavior, and conflict parties believe they are in a trial-like situation:

He's got the best case.

The jury's still out on that one.

You're accusing me.

She's the guilty party.

Don't you dare accuse me . . .

You have no evidence for your allegations.

Even in conflicts between romantic partners or friends, one person might take on the role of the prosecuting attorney, one the role of the defender of the accused. Friends might get informally brought in as jury; one might say to friends, "Should I let him off on this one?" Arguments between interdependent people often go back and forth as if there will be a judgment of guilt or innocence, but often the jury stays out, no judge appears, and the case remains unresolved, to simmer through the system until another suit (interpersonally) arises. Courts maintain clearly delineated processes, basing decisions on law and precedent. Interpersonal situations, however, have no system of law and order to back up a decision. Few "trials" settle underlying issues in the conflict in personal relationships. Instead, romantic partners or friends keep "going back to court" (keep arguing). The legal metaphor doesn't fit most interpersonal situations, but the participants act as if it does, then remain bitterly disappointed that their case "doesn't carry the day."

Conflict Is a Wild Act of Nature

Conflict might be expressed as a negative natural disaster, or at least an uncontrollable act of nature, such as a tornado, a hurricane, an avalanche, being swept away by a flood, a tsunami, an earthquake, or a fire raging out of control (McCorkle and Mills 1992). One telling phrase is that conflict feels like being "a rowboat caught in a hurricane." McCorkle and Mills note that those who feel powerless may "(a) take little or no responsibility for their own actions that sustain the conflict, (b) feel that the other participant has all the choices, or (c) believe that no one involved has any choices" (64). The best course of action, then, would be to avoid conflict, since no positive outcome can be expected.

Conflict Is Animal Behavior

Human animals often characterize conflict as something done by other members of the animal realm—not themselves. People may be called "stubborn as a mule" or described as "butting heads," or in a very common phrase, conflict is called "a zoo" (McCorkle and Mills 1992). You may hear phrases like "tearing his throat out," "slinking around," "stalking," or entering into a "feeding frenzy." One worker was labeled as a bully's "chew toy." Another felt like a "caged animal" (Tracy et al. 2006).

Conflict Is a Mess

Another intriguing image is that of conflict as a mess or as garbage. You'll hear "Let's not open up that can of worms," "They got all that garbage out in the open," "Things are falling apart around here," or "Everything's disintegrating." People will ask to "tie up some loose ends." Another clear expression of the "mess" metaphor emerges when people say, "This is a sticky situation," or "Something stinks around here."

Messes are difficult to manage because they spill over into other areas and can't be contained easily without making a bigger mess. A messy conflict usually means one that is full of personal, emotional attachments. This metaphor indicates that feelings are judged to be messy or not amenable to rational treatment. If the opposite of a messy conflict is a clean or straightforward one, involving only facts and rationality rather than messy feelings, then only part of the conflict can be resolved. The feelings will go underground and "create a stink." Later, we will discuss how feelings can be discussed in a straightforward way.

Conflict Is a Communication Breakdown

A "breakdown in communication" is one of the most popular designations of conflict. Referring to the process as a breakdown implies a telephone line that is down, a computer that won't communicate, a cell phone that drops calls, a car that won't run, or even differences in language that make it impossible to communicate. The implication that a breakdown can be "fixed," however, often turns out to be inaccurate. Many times people communicate clearly in conflict interactions—only to find out that they are in an intractable conflict. Clarity of communication sometimes improves the process of conflict management greatly, but it is a mistake to assume that clarity removes conflict.

Conflict Is a Game

The game, especially a ball game, image is popular. While it is true that games end in victory or defeat, making the overall metaphor a win–lose scenario, the process of "playing the game" can be viewed as offering an opportunity. People "bat around ideas," "toss the ball into his court," "strike out," go "back and forth," and "make an end run."

The game image assumes rules defining the game and limiting interaction among the players. Rules define fouls, out-of-bounds behavior, winning, losing, and when the game is over. An even more intricate game is chess, which requires the players to keep in mind at all times the predicted moves of the opponent. Chess is a game that can only be won by a highly developed prediction of the strategy of the other player. If one doesn't take account of the opponent, one loses immediately. In chess, everyone plays by the same rules.

Gender issues present different levels of danger or opportunity, depending on how strongly parties identify with their gender roles. Many men are raised to feel comfortable with the game image, accepting wins and losses as "all part of the game." Many women are less comfortable with the metaphor, insisting on talking about what is going on, which some men see as not playing by the rules. In an extended study of women engineers, Fletcher (1999) was told again and again that solving high-visibility problems was the way to get ahead. People solving problems of this type were referred to as "hitting a home run," as opposed to being "singles hitters," who were seen as slow, steady contributors, but not the kind of team players that win the promotion game. "Real work" was defined as the kind of problem solving that involved team playing. Men consistently were ranked higher in this skill than were women (Fletcher 1999, 91). Game metaphors reflect opportunities for men and danger for women. Regardless of gender, game metaphors work poorly in intimate conflicts, because most games provide a winner and a loser. In intimate conflicts, if anyone wins, the relationship loses.

Conflict Is a Heroic Adventure

The hero image is a popular conflict image. The superheroes of Western movies, science fiction, myths, and life help scared people, who find a leader who is "bigger and better" than them. They pledge loyalty to that leader, who is bound to protect them. The hero or heroine is one who has found or done something beyond the normal range of experience. "A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself" (Campbell 1988, 123). The question is whether the hero or heroine is really a match for the task at hand, can really overcome the dangers, and has the requisite courage, knowledge, and capacity to serve.

This desire to follow a heroic leader emerges in all cultures. In social or political movements, leaders organize the energies of many people who overcome many obstacles to reach a common goal. Many contemporary films focus on the actions of a hero or heroine who

saves large numbers of people (Rushing and Frentz 1995). The limit to this heroic metaphor in conflict resolution is that one can become used to passively watching events happen on TV or film. The spectator feels helpless or unimportant. If the right leader does not emerge, a wonderful opportunity for change may be lost. Sometimes in organizations, the manager or CEO functions as a hero for a while, sheltering and protecting the people who report to her or him. But if the manager falls in disfavor, a period of distress emerges while new leadership forms. People may get stuck in certain roles in the heroic drama, such as damsel in distress, knight in shining armor, lieutenant or helper to the "great one," or victim. In conflicts, opportunity is heightened when we are able to play various roles as needed.

Many of the heroic roles specify men as actors. Roles such as king, dragon slayer, the lone Western gunslinger, the sports hero, or the action hero of adventure movies are more often filled by men than women (Gerzon 1992). However, Rushing and Frentz (1995) indicate that films, especially Westerns and science fiction, are providing more and more heroic roles for women.

Conflict Is a Balancing Act

Conflict is referred to as a delicate balancing act, like that of a tightrope walker, or that of a rock climber, who must find just the right handholds or fall to sure death. Often negotiations in the formative stages are referred to as "in a very delicate" stage, in which one "false move" will scuttle negotiations. Satir (1972) refers to a family as a mobile, which can be unbalanced by one member's having too much weight or getting stirred up, thus making the whole mobile swing and sway. Working toward balance can present the opportunity to get to the other side, or to rest from working at a problem. Couples who "balance" their conflicts with cooperation and collaboration, for instance, don't exhaust themselves avoiding or fighting.

Conflict Is a Bargaining Table

A collaborative approach to conflict is exemplified by the common metaphor of "the table." Diplomacy, labor negotiations, and parliamentary procedure all use this image. The conflict structure and procedure depend on the table as a central feature. Families are urged to sit down to dinner together, labor and management officials "come to the table," and diplomats struggle over the shape of actual tables at conferences. These real or imagined tables communicate information about who the conflict participants will be, how they will act, and what their placement will be in relationship to each other. Opportunities arise when people "come to the table" or "lay their cards on the table."

King Arthur, in historical legend, created a round table to symbolize equal discussion, with each knight having one vote. The idea of "right makes might" substituted, for a time, for "might makes right." When the federation disintegrated, the round table, smashed to pieces by dissident knights, became a symbol of the disintegration. Other examples of "table" imagery in conflict management include the following:

In parliamentary procedure, "tabling a motion" stops movement toward a decision.

"Bringing a motion off the table" indicates a readiness to decide.

"Under the table" refers to hidden or secretive agreements.

"Turning the tables" comes from a medieval custom of turning from one dinner partner to another to begin conversation. It was done in response to the king's or queen's gesture. If the "tables are turned," a person feels a sudden lack of contact or support, or loss of an ally.

The table metaphor helps us think about power, especially uneven power. Conflict resolution remains difficult if people are "negotiating at an uneven table" (Kritek 1994). People may be metaphorically seated at an uneven table if they do not have the skills to negotiate, come from the nondominant culture, hold unequal positions in an organization, or do not have the freedom to come and go from "the table."

Conflict Is a Tide

Tides ebb and flow within predictable parameters based on the phases of the moon, the climatic conditions, the shape of the shoreline, and the currents of the ocean. The tides are predictable only through observation and careful record keeping. If the relationship is equal and trusting, like tides, the conflict will develop its own rhythm that will not wash away the foundation of the relationship. Conflict will ebb, as well as rise. For example, many families experience more conflict than usual when a college student comes home for the summer to work. After being on their own for several years, many students experience too many restrictions at home, and parents experience what appears to be too little family involvement and accountability on the part of the student. Many times, several "high tide" conflict experiences prompt a family to reset the expectations and boundaries. Then for the rest of the summer, conflict episodes recede to "low tide." Thinking ahead about this possibility helps many family members navigate well through a potentially stormy time.

Conflict Is a Dance

People speak of "learning to dance to the same music." In a dance, participants have to learn how close and how far to move, how to regulate distance, when to slow down and when to speed up, how to maintain contact with partners so they know where they will be, and how to end the dance (Lindbergh 1955). Different flourishes and steps can add to the grace and beauty of the dance. Dancing can be energetic, stimulating, and exhilarating. Sometimes one's partner steps on one's toes, can't dance very well, is awkward, or doesn't know the steps yet. But the whole idea of dancing with partners is to create something beautiful, graceful, and inspiring that depends on each person's skill, training, and individual expression. Dance can give collaborative images of conflict on which to build. Conflict envisioned as dance is reflected in the following statements:

> "I feel hurried. I need more time." (The person is not saying, "I need a different partner.")
>
> "Quit dancing around, and come over here and talk with me, please." (One person may be saying, "I don't know these steps, and I can't reach you. I think you are avoiding contact. Please let me in.")
>
> "They're just do-si-do-ing [a square-dancing term] around." (The people look as though they are doing something together but really have their backs to each other and their arms folded—a fairly noninteractive way to dance!)

Conflict often feels threatening and aversive. In important relationships, use the skill of maintaining contact, whether close or far, when interacting with your conflict partners. You can find the interaction, which can help you use strategies of opportunity rather than danger.

Conflict Is a Garden

Conflict can be like a carefully cultivated garden or farm. In creative conflict, as in good gardening, seeds are planted for future growth, pests are managed, weeds are pulled, and

the garden is watered when needed. Sun and light are needed for the plants to grow, and the most fruitful outcomes occur when the conditions are carefully tended. If constructive conflict can be seen as a garden, many positive outcomes can be experienced. In good gardening, poisons are not put on the ground—thus, rage and attacks, which poison an ongoing relationship, become as unthinkable as putting dry-cleaning fluid on rosebushes. In good gardens, individual plants are given room to grow. Some plants are thinned to make room for mature plants. In human relationships, people learn to leave space for others, to give them room to grow, and to plant compatible varieties together. As a child you may have learned that no amount of watching beans or carrots in a garden would make them grow any faster. Human relationships, especially when conflict has recently been part of the environment, need time to grow slowly, to recover from stress, and to put down roots. We can "harvest" the fruits of careful labor (Kritek 1994, 275).

Conflict Resolution as Quilt Making

One metaphor coming from a historically women's craft is making a quilt (Kritek 1994) or "piecing together a solution." We may speak of putting together a "patchwork of ideas." When making a quilt, people have to decide on the basic color scheme (tone or emotional climate), the design, and what kind of fabric to use. Recently, quilt making has been studied as an artform pioneered by women. Not only did women gather together to make a quilt out of scraps and remnants, they also engaged in informal conciliation around the quilting activity. Such activities still flourish. Community groups have made quilts for victims of violence, for children who are sick, for relief activities, and have raised funds for their programs. At a quilting workshop or festival, individual projects (like individual interests) benefit from the suggestions and appreciation of others. In conflicts, appreciation of the others' efforts helps keep parties engaged in constructive conflict.

Conflict as Musical Improvisation

Conflict can reflect artistry, as in jazz or drumming. In certain kinds of music, individual musicians follow the lead of one soloist, picking up on the theme or the rhythm and extending the music. The solo passes around in the ensemble. Improvisation depends on core skills. One does not simply create something out of nothing. One needs experience and knowledge (Weick 1998). Improvisation involves joining the spirit of the present music, and creative that draws from past music while understanding the music being created in the moment. In drumming circles, the rhythms grow out of the shared experience of the rhythm. Interpersonal conflict can be like this. Someone gets a good idea, expresses it, and the others, rather than insisting on a different melody or rhythm, "add in" to what has begun. Dissonance and harmony make interesting music. In improvisation, participants develop a rhythm in conflict interaction that holds dissonance and resonance together. Discordance is balanced with buffers of harmony and cooperation (Putnam 2010). As in constructive conflict, in improvisation we don't know how the music will end. We do know that expert musicians (and conflict managers) make the best music.

When Metaphors Differ

Problems occur when people envision conflict in different ways. One person may think of conflict as war, with all the attendant warlike images, while the other assumes that conflict is more like a chess game—strategic, careful, thoughtful, and planned. Case 2.1 presents an example of problems arising from different images of conflict.

Case 2.1 Is It a Mess or an Explosion?

Lynn and Bart are married to each other. Lynn sees conflict as a mess, something sticky and uncomfortable, even slightly shady or dirty. People in her family believe that husbands and wives who love each other don't have conflict very often. Conflict is distasteful to her. She is likely to say, "I don't want to talk about it now. Let's just leave the whole mess until this weekend. I can't handle it tonight." Bart sees and feels conflict as an explosion—his stomach tightens, his pulse races, and his heart begins to pound. He likes to reduce the pressure of all this emotion. He's a feelings-oriented person, whereas Lynn is more likely to use a reasoning process if she has to deal with an issue. Bart is likely to say, "I am not going to sit on this until Saturday morning. You can't expect me to hold all this in. It's not fair, you always . . . ."

In addition to their specific conflict, Bart and Lynn are *fighting over how to fight;* indeed, they are fighting over what conflict is and how they experience it. Each assumes that the other thinks about the conflict the way he or she does. They could not be farther from the truth, as they probably will find out.

You can find your own metaphors using the following structured technique to generate creative ideas for managing your conflicts.

Application 2.8 Playing with Your Conflict Metaphor

1. Class members generate *a metaphor* for an important conflict, using one of the previous suggestions. Each person writes out his or her own metaphoric image. ("We are a . . . .")
2. One person *shares the image* with the group of conflicting parties or the discussion group. The group then asks clarifying questions of the person sharing the metaphor, using the images developed in the original metaphor.
3. The group then *brainstorms,* still using the imaginary mode, about ways to resolve the conflict. (In brainstorming, you reserve "editing" until later.)
4. The facilitator or leader then asks the group to *translate* these imaginary resolutions into practical steps for conflict management.
5. The primary party, or the group, then *chooses the options* that are most likely to lead to collaborative conflict management.
6. After all the conflict parties have repeated this procedure, a *contract* is made for selected change.

Application 2.9 presents an example of using metaphors to generate communication options.

Application 2.9 The Dangerous Minefield

Margaret, a college student, writes:

My father and I are in a minefield. The sky is blue, the sun is shining, green grass and sudden death lie underneath the surface. Each of us is responsible for some of the mines underfoot, and we have to avoid our own mines as well as those planted by the other person. There are scattered trees and bushes around the field, which is quite large. They provide limited cover. We are each trying to get in close enough to the other to get a good look without being seen.

My father throws rocks at me to try to flush me out into the open. I back around a bush and meet him. Boom! There's a big explosion—we both flee, wounded, only to begin the standoff over again.

Here are some metaphoric solutions for "The Dangerous Minefield" translated into practical steps for conflict management:

Metaphoric Solutions	Communication Possibilities
1. Dig up my mines, or tell him where they are	Disclose myself
2. Get a metal detector, locate his mines, and	Psych him out and
a. dig them up;	a. confront him;
b. throw heavy objects from a distance to set them off;	b. backstab him;
c. avoid them	c. avoid him or "be nice"
3. Wear explosion-proof armor	Decrease my dependence
4. Throw rocks at him	Attack or goad him
5. Abandon the field; leave	Don't communicate at all
6. Hold on to him during explosion so we can't run from each other	Increase closeness and interdependence, but at great risk
7. Cut down the foliage to get a better view of each other	Describe our behaviors and feelings
8. Use binoculars to see each other	Get information on him from other sources; focus carefully
9. Whistle as I go around the field	Let him know "where I'm coming from"
10. Stand in the open so he can see me	Give him a chance to get information about me; write him a letter

Options 1 and 7 through 10 seem to be moves that would help productively manage the conflict. Many more exist, but these are a good start.

Listen and Learn from Metaphors

Other images of conflict can be detected in ordinary conversation. Listen to the way you and others talk—eavesdrop at work, scrutinize news reports, and pay attention to images in films. See if you can determine the metaphor that shapes a particular view about conflict in a family, an agency, a social group, the general public, or even the nation. What might it mean, for instance, if conflict is seen as an irritant, as in "She bugs me," or "Get off my back," or "He's just trying to get a rise out of you"? Do you think conflict takes on a life of its own, as when it "snowballs out of control" or is "a runaway train"? Many people experience conflict as an endless circle of repetition, going nowhere, as exemplified by phrases such as "We're just going round and round," "We're on a merry-go-round," or "Here we go again!" The tedium of conflict is reflected in "same song, second verse." People refer to conflicts as "a drain," "a lot of grief," "a heavy burden," or "poison." Attending to these vivid images can stimulate your creativity and help you to sort out which images of conflict are dangerous and limiting and which are helpful and present new opportunities.

Application 2.10 Reframing Your Conflict

Think of a conflict you have observed or experienced—possibly one you thought about earlier in the chapter. First, determine whether any conflict metaphor applies to this conflict. You can think of a metaphor of your own, or use one we have presented. If you stay in the current framework, what options are available to you for resolving the conflict? List at least three. Now choose a different, more positive metaphor for "framing" the same conflict. List at least three options that might be available to you if you envision the conflict in this way. Discuss your results.

Narratives Frame Conflict

In the previous section, you learned to identify and derive conflict strategies by working with metaphors for conflict. By doing so, you gained one more approach for resolving conflicts. Narratives, or the internal and external stories we tell ourselves and others, also frame conflict resolution approaches (Bochner 2012; Holman-Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013). When one experiences a painful or unresolved conflict, the stories we tell to make sense of what is happening often contain clues as to how you experience resources as scarce, goals as incompatible, or how you perceive the expression of the conflict. The story in Application 2.11 gives one person's perception of a conflict.

Application 2.11 Hiking Group Breakup

Four friends who live in the mountains decided to start a hiking group. They enjoy new hiking adventures, so after several years of hiking together on an ad hoc basis they expanded their foursome, inviting about 20 others. The arrangement was to be that the original hikers—Shelly, Jack, Eleanor, and Casey—would organize hikes around their town, announce them on social media, and lead the hikes. This worked well for a while, with a varying number of hikers exploring new trails, lakes, streams, and wilderness areas. After a while, the organizing became more complicated. Members of the loosely

(continued)

Application 2.11 Hiking Group Breakup

organized group brought their friends. Sometimes small groups would wander off on their own adventures, with the organizers not knowing where they wandered and whether they needed help. Sometimes the hiking days ended up in frustration for the original four. At one point, Casey proposed to the other organizers that they distribute a new set of guidelines. He suggested that the four of them alternate leadership, and that anyone wanting to join a hike must let the organizer know by Thursday before the Saturday hike who was coming. He suggested that no alternate hikes be undertaken during the day, and that one of the organizers act as a "shepherd" at the back, making sure everyone was accounted for, and that one of the organizers set the pace in the front, accommodating for slower hikers, with rest stops. No one would go ahead of the group. This new set of guidelines worked for a while. Problems arose when one of the members would say, "Tasha, Keith, Sherry, and I are going on the Sawmill Gulch trail. Don't worry, we'll be fine." Since all in the group were peers, the original four did not feel comfortable saying, "No, you agreed to stay with the group. Please don't go off on your own." The hikes were supposed to be fun. During the second summer of the new guidelines, Shelly said that she would continue to hike with the group when she could, but no longer wanted to organize or lead. At the end of the summer, Shelly invited a few friends to join in a new, loosely organized hiking group. She dropped out of the original hiking group. Sometimes when the original friends ran into each other, they avoided eye contact and conversation. About a year later, the former friends agreed, at Casey's suggestion, to get together to talk about what had happened and to see if they could salvage any part of their friendship with Shelley and with each other. They no longer spent time together, and the three original hikers led hikes only occasionally. In that conversation, several narratives emerged:

Shelly: "I enjoyed our original hikes. I loved following along when one of you planned an adventure that was new to me. I liked our talks while we were walking. Our camaraderie pushed me to go farther that I would have gone without you guys. But I began to dread the hikes instead of look forward to them. I hated being both a leader and a shepherd, because I was always looking out for the group, and not just enjoying hiking. I didn't want to chat with new people during all the hikes. I missed you guys, the friends who made all this fun. And I really didn't want to tell people they had to stay in line. So I dropped out. I thought it was my own business to start a new, smaller group."

Casey: "I felt betrayed when you, Shelly, dropped out of leadership. We had done something special, organizing so many people to hike in this beautiful country. I missed our talks when we were hiking, and getting together over a beer to look at maps and plan the next adventure. When the group grew, I was happy to take a leadership role, especially since I trained as an EMT and care about safety in the woods. Since we graduated and started our jobs and graduate school, this was the primary way we stayed connected. Then when you started a new group, Shelly, and didn't tell the rest of us, I felt doubly betrayed and angry. I decided you just didn't want to be friends, so I moved on.

Shelly's narrative framed her experience as one in which she did not want to enforce rules, lead a large group, and chat with near-strangers. She emphasized personal preference and freedom to meet her own needs. Casey's narrative emphasized group solidarity, pride in their accomplishment, loyalty, and safety along the trail.

Jack and Eleanor wanted to attempt to mend the conflict and resume their friendships. In small groups, look again at the definition of conflict in Chapter 1, and brainstorm approaches Jack and Eleanor might suggest, assuming all four want to find a way to be friends. Using the two narratives presented, what suggestions might lead the group toward reconnecting?

Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- What are the *backstories* for all four people? Telling more of the story might help the four friends to see whether their goals are indeed incompatible, or whether overlap might emerge. Shelly might continue her story this way: "I looked forward to our hikes because I liked the hard exercise, while at the same time I could catch up with my best friends. When the group grew, often I was hiking with strangers. Also, our pace slowed as we were trying to accommodate everyone." Casey's backstory might continue: "I am looking forward to getting into resource management, especially guiding. I like to help people enjoy the wild country around us. Doing this with my best friends helped me learn how to accommodate the needs of a group. I counted on our planning sessions to catch up with each other." Might these *goals be more compatible* than they seem?
- Eleanor's backstory might continue: "Shelly and I are still close, and I'm grateful for that. But with my new job, I don't have every Saturday free during the summer. I miss our adventures. I don't really have time for a lot of planning and organizing now." What *scarce resources* could be explored?

Notice that in this example, Eleanor and Keith take the role of informal conflict resolution parties. We will further discuss these informal roles in Chapter 9 when we present intervention strategies. For now, be aware that friends often take the role of informal conciliators in groups of peers.

How Do You Perceive Specific Conflict?

Your history and worldview influence how you respond to conflict. The metaphors we use for conflict illuminate our personal ways of viewing conflict in general. Narratives frame the conflict strategies that might effectively be used. We turn now to the process of analyzing and viewing any specific conflict. While each conflict episode is unique, common elements underlie all conflicts.

Any conflict can be viewed through (1) *communication behaviors* and (2) the *perceptions of those behaviors.* Each person views (1) oneself, (2) the other person, and (3) the relationship in a specific way. Many conflicts occur because of different perceptions. These perceptual pieces form the fundamental views of all conflicts. Combined, the perception pieces form a mosaic interpretation of a conflict. A helpful mosaic takes shape from the perceptions of all the conflict parties. Every conflict takes form from the combination of:

- The *communicative acts* (behaviors) of each person
- The *meanings* (attributions) attached to those acts by each person:

  Each person's view of self
  Each person's view of the other

- The *meanings* (attributions) the conflict parties ascribe to their relationship:

  Past events
  Current events
  Future projections

Note that each person has a lens or filter that gives that person a particular perspective, just as people use different types of glasses to see. We all think our view of a conflict is real. So do all the other parties. Perceptions are, in fact, "real," and must be treated as important data. What you see is all there is . . . until enough conversation occurs to change one's views of the self, the other, and the relationship. It's never effective to say, "That is only your perception." If someone makes that comment to you, you might respond, "Yes, it is. I'll listen to your perception if you will hear mine." When you hear another person's perception, and you can scarcely believe they are talking about the same event, "Say, I am getting how you see this issue/conflict/event. I see it differently, at this point." First affirm what the other person perceives, then speak about your provisional perception ("at this point"). This indicates that you might be open to change (and hope the other will be, as well).

In Nepal and Tibet, this idea of lens is captured when people speak of two *sides* of seeing something. A person in conflict might say, "Well from my side, I guess I am getting tired of waiting for him, but I don't know what is going on from his side." The idea of another side begins a helpful process of understanding the other. One side usually does not understand the other side—your lens and the other's lens distort the events in different ways.

Don't Believe What You See—At First

We will continue to use the metaphor of a lens or filter to describe perception. Have you noticed how easy it is to focus on what your "opponent" does in a conflict? She leaves you out of a meeting, cuts you off in the middle of an explanation, or takes a position and sticks with it even though you have perfectly reasonable grounds for what you think. How easy it is to tell your friend, "Her actions say it all." An administrative assistant in an organization said of her manager, "She just has it in for me. She picks on me. I can't do anything right." Her perception clearly indicated to her that the manager's lens, or filter, was to blame for her unhappiness. On the other hand, the manager pinpointed several tasks that the assistant continually did poorly. For the manager, the fault, seen through her lens of *performance*, was poor performance. Up until that point, no one was providing an alternative view. Our perceptions depend entirely on our interpretations, the meaning we attribute to what someone says or does.

The impact of someone's actions depends on how the behaviors are interpreted by the other people involved. For example, Amber and Aaron are attorneys married to each other. At home, Amber interrupts Aaron a lot; both push for airtime. For many couples, interruptions mean disrespect. In this case, Aaron likes Amber's interruptions, appreciating her passion because he likes full involvement in the conversation. An outsider, such as a researcher, might have interpreted the interruptions negatively. The "relationship view" for Aaron and Amber says, "interruptions indicate interest."

Another example will be familiar to parents. When Sydney accidentally steps on Luke, he shouts to her parents, "She did that on purpose" and begins crying. His perception of her intent drives his reaction. However, *intent does not equal impact.*

intent ≠ impact

Your intent in a conflict almost never equals the impact on the other person. Judy, a manager in a city office, sees herself as friendly and open. She asks employees how they are doing, inquiring about their family members—she has a positive intent. Yet, the impact is that employees feel forced to talk about personal things. The dispute escalates into a petition from the employees to have her removed as manager. When she is told about the petition, she is shocked, and says, "But I'm only intending to show interest and support for them." *Intent is not equal to impact.* You may have experienced how futile your words are when you say, "But I had no intention of hurting you." Meaning develops through repeated interactions; all communication behavior is interpreted. Communication does not "speak for itself." When your conflict partner expresses the impact of your behavior on her emotions, perceptions of you, and her willingness to collaborate, believe her. She is the expert on the impact of your behavior, not you.

Perceptions of and attributions about behaviors are at the heart of the conflict process. Research on attribution theory shows conclusively that we make different attributions about ourselves than about others. Attribution research shows the following:

- We try to make sense out of behavior by looking for causes.
- We attribute causes of *our* behavior to external factors (e.g., "I was under extreme time pressure.")
- We attribute causes of *others'* behavior to internal dispositions (e.g., "She always wants her own way.")

Clearly, we use a different lens for viewing ourselves than we do for viewing others. When we are exposed to conflict, we tend to attribute any negative effects to the other rather than to ourselves. This tendency explains the familiar refrain of "It's his fault!" As the stress of conflict increases, blame of others also increases. We begin with an attribution of blame, and then choose our next conflict move based on our perception that the other is at fault. Confounding the problem, we attribute our successes to our own efforts and our failures to external factors. The other party does the same thing. No wonder conflict is so difficult.

Identify Your Filters

One's views of self, other, and relationships are always, to some degree, biased. (You can log in to *Project Implicit*, a series of assessments sponsored by Harvard University, to determine bias for race, gender, sexual orientation, politics, and other areas of bias.) We all filter our experience through implicit assumptions; no *true* perspective can exist because of personal differences. If you have ever known both individuals of a broken-up romance, you see the complications very clearly. While they once had only good things to say about the other ("She is just so perfect"), they now see only the unattractive features of the ex-partner. When you talk with both of them after the breakup, their implicit assumptions are so strong it doesn't even sound as though they were in the same relationship! Indeed, they were not, because each saw the relationship through his or her biases. Hurt, anger, disappointment, different attributions of communication, and internal sense-making all contribute to a drastically different view of why the breakup happened and who the other person is. One partner may conclude: "Only an incredibly insensitive person could have treated me that way. How could I have been so stupid?" The other partner might say, "She didn't even let me explain. She completely misinterpreted what happened. She always thinks she is right.

She didn't listen, so she broke up with me." As you probably know well, after a breakup, partners seldom repair the lenses through which they saw the other; they often carry around a single-vision, distorted view for the rest of their lives.

The following conversation between two people occurred with two listeners present, as they began coaching to get help for their conflicts at work. Notice the different internal filters they automatically use that give them their opposing perspectives. The two of them work together and had just hosted a special event. They coordinated a series of public meetings for people outside their organization.

Program coordinator:	The executive director does not listen to me, does not include me in decisions, reluctantly agrees to include me, then goes her merry way without consulting me. This happened five times this week during the visit of some important people. She is too controlling. I don't see that I have a future here. *(She cannot see that I have value. I am discouraged.)*
Executive director:	The program coordinator is too passive and does not remember when I talk to him. Further, he is power hungry and wants to run things himself. I specifically remember inviting him to participate on most of these occasions. What is his problem? *(I don't trust him to make good decisions; he needs special handling.)*

The two of them then began a round of mutual blaming. With facilitation, they began to work their way through this dispute. Both remain involved in the organization, with the program coordinator taking more responsibility and the executive director sharing more information.

Outsiders to a dispute, whether they are researchers, intervention agents, or friends, also bring their own **attributions** to the table—adding still other perspectives to the conflict process. While the parties in the previous example see the crucial issues as inclusion, power, control, and assertiveness, an outsider might focus on other issues. For example, during the exchange between the program coordinator and executive director, one of the facilitators was thinking, *Hmm, the coordinator seems very angry. Does he have a problem with strong-willed women? Has the executive director already decided she wants him gone? Is this facilitation just for show?*

Notice how different the starting attributions are for all the people present early in any conflict. Conflict resolution depends on taking in new information, and remaining open to influence.

Consider the importance of perception for married couples, who are happier if they believe they are similar to each other. Whether or not they are similar appears irrelevant—their assumptions determine their happiness (Acitelli, Douvan, and Veroff 1993). When you come to see your work relationship or personal relationship as having no hope, that belief alone predicts dissolution. As a relationship declines, the individuals make fewer joint and more individual attributions. The dissolution of a marriage speeds up if the two players see it as emanating from individual factors (Siegert and Stamp 1994, 358), such as personality descriptions or traits ("selfish," "aggressive," or "untrustworthy"). If during the first big fight the individuals develop a shared view of what happened, their relationship is more likely to survive.

One study on environmental organizations and the timber industry found that each side responds to, anticipates, and often copies the moves they think the other will make

(Lange 1993). This same dynamic is present in personal and workplace conflicts as well. If you are not in communication with the other party, much like the environmentalists and timber industry representatives in Lange's study, then you mull over the conflict in your own mind. Without interaction with the other, the only "information" you have is what is going on in your own mind—your assumptions don't have a chance to be updated. The result? "Prolonged thinking about disputes in the absence of communication focuses individuals on their own perspective and enhances biases toward seeing disputes as serious and holding partners responsible for conflicts" (Cloven and Roloff 1991, 153). When we listen only to our own stories, then our view becomes even more biased. Cloven and Roloff found that in only 1% of the time, individuals reported that they had thought about the conflict from the partner's view (136).

As you can see, the distorted view can become even more warped and hardened in time. Here is an example of such thinking:

Joan

- Why is Jack late?
- He must be tied up.
- He was late last week, too.
- Hmmm, he is moving into the "irresponsible zone."
- I wonder if he wants to tell me something about our relationship.
- It has now been 25 minutes—he is so inconsiderate.
- I knew he would be like this—Sandy warned me about him.
- Jack is a real jerk.

Jack

- Hi Joan. Sorry I'm late. I was counting on Kevin to bring my car back on time and he was late. Driving over I realized my cell phone was out of power. I am very sorry—you must have thought I was not coming.

Joan may or may not accept Jack's explanation; the fact that Jack enters Joan's perspective makes a positive repair much more likely.

Application 2.12 "That's Not What I Meant!"

Think back to a difficult issue that was made more tangled by perceptions that colored the experience. Remember a time when you were certain that the other person's motivation was harmful to you. How did you react as a result of this assumption? What was the outcome? Was the other ever able to say, "That's not what I meant at all. I was trying to tell you . . ."? What happened to the relationship as a result of these different perceptions? How might the results have differed if either had checked out their perceptions, listened, and learned? Write dialogues that illustrate checking out perceptions, or role-play a situation in which this might occur.

Gender Biases

Membership in the "gender club" exerts a powerful, pervasive influence on your developing conflict repertoire. Your own gender and the gender of those with whom you engage in conflict affect (1) your behavior and (2) your views.

One of the primary ways to view the role of gender in conflict interaction comes from the *communication differences tradition,* made popular by scholarly work in communication and linguistics. This tradition has taken a "separate but equal" way of viewing communication differences. Rather than presenting women as deficient in "general" (male) communication skills or males as lacking important relational skills that women are assumed to possess, both gender-based preferences are studied openly. (See Ivy and Backlund 2003; Pearson, West, and Turner 1995; Tannen 1994; and Wood 1997 for comprehensive reviews of gender differences and similarities.)

Gender encompasses both biological and social differences between men and women. Biologically, males and females are distinguished based on their sexual organs. Parents of a newborn will look for sexual organs that usually define "gender." When a new parent says "It's a girl," they are referring to biological markers. Gender also entails socially defined gender identity—when you see yourself and others as male or female. These roles are socially constructed, such as when someone says, "Oh, he is just a typical boy." Usually when people are talking about conflict, they see biological sex and gender identity as the same. For example, if you say, "The glass ceiling has finally been broken and a woman ran for president," you are treating biological sex and gender identity as the same. When a male or female undergoes a sex-change operation, becoming the opposite gender, this profound change alters others' expectations of their communication behavior. Such a change in expectations is not always warranted, because individual differences remain more important than biological gender in determining what an individual will do. Gender, both how we see ourselves and how we see others, has an impact on conflict behavior because it is so fundamental. We are socialized into our gender clubs.

In some circumstances female/male differences do appear in existing typical conflict interactions. In same-sex platonic friendships, men use more competitive strategies with each other than women do (Urban 2005). In another study, people who came from families of origin categorized as "balanced" or "extreme," referring to their cohesion and flexibility, were given a confrontation task in the laboratory. Men, but not women, from extremely close and extremely flexible (rather than more balanced) families experienced more anger and negative nonverbal responses (Larkin, Frazer, and Wheat 2011). This may be because conflict is experienced as a threat to identity. It is possible that women from such families are more used to navigating various relational waters through conversation (talking it through) than men, so felt less distress. In laboratory exercises, men will often exhibit dominating and competitive behavior and women exhibit avoidant and compromising behavior (Papa and Natalle 1989). In real-life observations of young girls and boys (at age 11), adolescent girls use verbal means of aggression, whereas boys use more physical aggression. Interestingly, both sexes used direct verbal aggression equally (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Lagerspetz 1994). Current bullying research, discussed in Chapter 4, will take you deeper into these questions of power and gender. Tannen summarizes her research on gender differences in conflict by concluding that women are more likely to avoid conflict. Men are more likely than women to take control of the conversation to lead it in

the direction they want. However, they expect their (female) conversational partners to mount some resistance to this effort, as men would be likely to do. Women often remain in the "listening" role rather than "lecturing," which puts them at a disadvantage in having their voices heard (Tannen 1994, 11). In organizations, women are more likely to leave than men are when there is ongoing, pervasive conflict. Higher-status individuals interrupt more than lower-status people; however, women (in one study, women doctors) provided more supportive, clarifying, and mending interruptions than male doctors did (Mentz and Al-Roubaie 2008).

Before we decide that "men are like this and women are like that," we need to examine the similarities among men's and women's conflict behaviors. In a comprehensive examination of sex differences, researchers concluded that "no meaningful gender differences in positive affect behavior, influence strategies, autocratic behavior, democratic behavior communication, facilitation and leader emergence" were found. They report, "in both survey and observational studies, we discovered more similarities than differences between men's and women's conflict behaviors" (Canary, Cupach, and Messman 1995, 131). However, the question of gender differences remains highly complex and is undergoing change. In an approach called **social learning theory,** individuals are assumed to learn to be male or female based on communication and observation. They learn gender roles in same-sex groups. Wood (1997) explains that through imitation, young children imitate almost anything they see and hear. However, only gender-consistent communication is rewarded by important others around the child. Children slowly learn how to be a girl and how to be a boy. Persons who discover that they feel identified more strongly with the opposite biological sex may undergo gender confirmation surgery and medical intervention.

Culture plays an important role in gender development. Different valuing of autonomy and dependence is reflected in culturally defined gender roles (Young-Eisendrath 1997). In Western culture, girls and women are seen as valuing **connection with others,** the communication of care and responsiveness, and the preservation of the relationship (Gilligan 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey 1991). Boys and men are seen as valuing **autonomy and independence** more highly, learning to communicate in ways that preserve their independence from others (Kohlberg 1976). This assumption from decades ago also is undergoing rapid change as each gender tries to widen its comfort with communication behaviors once experienced as *other.* One of the main hopes we hold as we explore conflict, gender, power, and culture is to give each of you the opportunity to choose from a wide range of communication behaviors, whether you identify as female or male. The more choices you have, the more likely you are to be able to resolve disputes intelligently and constructively.

Gender Influences Self-Esteem

Research clearly identifies a major slump in self-esteem for girls in early adolescence (Sadker and Sadker 1994). They may not experience a noticeable climb in their self-esteem until midlife, when family roles are less stringent and their career development is more in place. Boys typically feel more self-esteem earlier in their lives but suffer from a sense of failure and disappointment in midlife when they do not reach their (unrealistically) high personal goals (Barnett, Marshall, and Pleck 1992, 79). One of the tenets of this book is that all conflicts are about two issues: *power and self-esteem.* Both genders are limited by self-esteem issues, perhaps at different times in their lives. One finding seems clear on a worldwide basis,

however: Men have more power culturally, even in highly educated countries such as the Scandinavian countries (Young-Eisendrath 2000). Therefore, women and men often sit at an uneven table. Later, we will discuss in detail ways to balance power effectively for long-term conflict resolution, both in the workplace and in intimate relationships.

Gender differences depend partly on maturity and experience. One study shows experienced managers manifesting no gender differences in style, but "among participants without managerial experience, women rated themselves as more integrating, obliging, and compromising than did men" (Korabik, Baril, and Watson 1993, 405). Likewise, in a negotiation context, "Women are not necessarily more fair-minded or compassionate" than men (Watson 1994, 124). It may well be that most of the effects ascribed to gender are due to other relationship factors such as power, gender of the opponent, prior moves of the other, and so on.

In addition to potentially directing behaviors, gender often affects how one interprets conflict behaviors. As we have seen, males and females tend to differ in seeing self and other as connected. Even when actual behaviors may seem identical, for instance negotiating competitively, men and women often conceptualize the relationship differently. Women tend to see the **self-in-relationship,** with everyone affecting everyone else. One's self is formed and enacted in various relationships. Men are more likely to see the self as independent, not as connected to specific relationships. For effective conflict management, we must have both separate voices and a view that we are connected. When we see the self-in-relationship as a theoretical starting point, it allows us to concentrate on the following dimensions of conflict:

- Interdependence rather than power over others
- Mutual empathy as the basis for understanding and communicating
- Relational self-confidence instead of separate self-esteem (autonomy)
- Constructive conflict instead of domination
- Staying engaged with others while in conflict
- Valuing separate knowing and connected knowing
- Utilizing both report talk and rapport talk
- Continuing dialogue when there is disagreement

Models of constructive conflict are built on the ideas of partnership and self-in-relationship (Bang, Fuglesang, Ovesen, and Eilertsen 2010; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule 1986; Brown and Gilligan 1992; Goodrich 1991; Gottman 1999; Tannen 1990; Wilmot 1995). Current research shows that the human brain is designed to act in relationship with others; to act in an overly independent way goes against the "hard-wiring" of the brain. Self-in-relationship ideas underlie the development of constructive conflict practices discussed in subsequent chapters.

Gender assumptions offer at least two influences on our understanding of conflict. First, many of the studies trying to pinpoint conflict behaviors are based on differences *as perceived by the respondents* of surveys. For example, most of the studies that find male–female differences in conflict choices ask college students to answer "in general" rather than for a particular conflict. College students who have a stereotyped belief that there are gender differences may report "behavior" differences when they may not be present. They

may also answer according to how they would like to see themselves, or how most women and men their age see themselves. Their biases for seeing self and others influence the studies looking for behavior differences in women and men.

Gender biases also affect our understanding of conflict because our biases may affect our behaviors. When feeling powerless, males tend to "state their position and offer logical reasons to support it." Women's approaches depend on the gender of their opponents (Watson 1994). As another researcher put it, "Men may use a more independent criterion for managing conflict and women a more interdependent one" (Miller 1991, 28). Women will choose responses based on interpersonal obligations, and men based on the offended person's rights. As a result of their focus on relationships, females in conflict seem to exhibit fewer self-presentational actions (Haferkamp 1991–92). In preschool children ages 3 to 5, for example, Sheldon (1992) notes that young girls' expressions of self-interest are often meshed with "an expression of communal interests." Research also indicates that women in lesbian relationships may benefit from both being female in that they have "more optimism about conflict resolution" (Metz, Rosser, and Strapko 1994, 305). The biases we use, based on gender, affect how we enact conflict behaviors.

Cultural Perspectives

Who knows but one culture, knows no culture.
—Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns*

Application 2.13 Your Cultural History

The United States becomes more culturally diverse every decade. Think about your own cultural history and roots, whether you and your family have been in the United States for generations or whether you are recent immigrants. To gain a sense of how pervasive cultural differences are, think about the neighborhood in which you spent part of your childhood, your fourth-grade classroom, your experience making a geographical move, or your experience getting to know friends or new family members from a different cultural background from your own. Share the results of your reflections with someone from a different culture or geographical background in your class.

Each of us experiences cultural diversity at some level. About 150 different languages are spoken in the United States. The United States becomes more influenced by Hispanic cultures each year. U.S. culture is becoming less of a Western European offshoot in many ways, making the recognition of **cultural differences** essential. We must "de-Westernize" communication research and practice in all areas of communication study, including interpersonal conflict. In the Western world we must go far beyond simply adapting to other cultures, including cultures inside the United States. We must develop a way of understanding that helps us know that if one is a member of the dominant culture, one cannot know the experiences of people in nondominant cultures without authentic dialogue and de-Westernized research.

> What comprises a conflict in one culture is a daily difference of opinion in another. A serious insult in one setting—crossing one's legs or showing the sole of one's foot, for example—is a matter of comfort in another. An arrogant challenge in one culture—putting one's hands on one's hips—is a sign of openness in another. A normal pathway for de-escalating a conflict in one society—fleeing the scene of an accident—constitutes a serious offense in another. Human boundaries are cultural creations—social boundaries, legal boundaries, and emotional boundaries are all drawn according to each culture's values, myths, and preferences. (Augsberger 1992, 23)

Conflict behavior is not easily predicted by country of origin. In general two kinds of cultures exist: **individualistic** and **collectivistic.** (See Gudykunst and Yun Kim [2002] for an overview of intercultural communication.) Communicating across cultures is a kind of intergroup communication. One of the problems we encounter is that communicating with "strangers" (their term for persons from other cultural groups than one's own) becomes more and more the norm as our worldwide communication becomes more rapid and frequent. Those of us in the largely Western, individualistic cultures must come to an understanding about the values and expectations of those in collectivistic cultures. For instance, prevention of serious conflict is much more likely to occur in Japan, China, and Thailand (collectivistic cultures) than in individualistic cultures (McCann and Honeycutt 2006; Moran, Allen, Wichman, Ando, and Sasano). But each culture uses a very wide variety of ways to manage conflict. These ways are taught from childhood to persons in the culture, so that they become the expectations for how conflict is conducted (Tinsley 2001). Yet, these cultures—for instance, Nigeria (a non-Asian collectivist culture) and Canada (an individualistic society)—do not teach their members to take neatly predictable, opposite approaches (Gire and Carment 1993).

Westerners now understand that in many Asian cultures, self-expression is frowned upon if it does not further the needs of the group. In the West, in general, autonomy and self-expression are regarded more highly. Therefore, for Westerners to assume that individual expression is of higher value than harmony in the larger group is to remain in a Western, **ethnocentric** mode. Culturally, it may be true for Westerners that harmony is achieved by explicit expression of individual emotion. Avoidance, which is prized in some other cultures, may escalate conflict in the United States.

The United States can be described generally as an individualistic culture. A person is supposed to say what he or she means and resolve disagreements through the use of power (as in competition) or by working things out together (collaboration) (Wilson 1992). In this type of culture, things are discussed and spelled out, rather than supported by culturally defined, subtle nuances of interaction. This approach to resolving differences and communicating relies on assertiveness, relatively equal power, and freedom from fear of reprisal. Since these attributes are seldom present, however, U.S. culture rewards actions that are, for some people in the culture, stressful or even impossible. For example, Barnlund (1989) notes, "One of the most frequent shocks experienced by Japanese in coming to America is the resilience of friendships in the face of such strong clashes of opinion: Friends are able to confront each other, to vigorously argue contradictory views and to continue to be close friends in spite of their differences" (157). In situations in which people enjoy approximately equal power and understand the rules of interaction easily and well, the ideal of clarity and expressiveness works well. But when there is not a common base of assumptions, one's assertiveness can backfire. Japanese prefer direct means of working out conflicts when the task dimension is seen as high, and the relationship conflict is seen

as low, while North Americans prefer more active ways of working out conflicts when the relationship conflict is seen as high (Murayama et al. 2015).

In less-individualistic, more-collective cultures, discrepancies abound between what is meant and what is actually said. Disagreements are resolved through avoidance or accommodation, resulting in considerable face-saving (discussed at length in Chapter 3). Nuances of communication take on major importance, along with expected ways of behaving and working out problems. People do not confront others assertively and directly; to do so is considered rude and ignorant. In collectivistic cultures, members rely heavily on inferred meaning, whereas in individualistic cultures, members strive for an understanding of the literal meaning (Borisoff and Victor 1989, 141). Communication researchers have provided a clear summary of some of the differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Table 2.1 portrays the differences in communicative strategies—direct and open compared to ambiguous and indirect. No wonder cross-cultural communication is getting more and more attention; we certainly need all the help we can get!

Similarly, Triandis (1980) notes some of the salient differences between the two orientations. In individualistic cultures

> many individuals are high in internal control, emphasize private goals, pay attention to what the person does rather than who the person is . . . people think that decisions made by individuals are better than decisions made by groups . . . where going one's way and not paying attention to the view of others is acceptable, where personal enjoyment is emphasized, where friendship is a matter of personal choice. (65)

Table 2.1 Characteristics of Conflict in Two Types of Cultures

Key Questions	Individualistic Cultures	Collectivistic Cultures
Why?	Analytic, linear logic Instrumental-oriented Dichotomy between conflict and conflict parties Individual-oriented Low-collective normative expectations Violations of individual expectations create conflict potentials	Synthetic, spiral logic Expressive-oriented Integration of conflict and conflict parties Group-oriented High-collective normative expectations Violations of collective expectations create conflict potentials
What?	Revealment	Concealment
How?	Direct, confrontational attitude Action- and solution-oriented Explicit communication codes Line-logic styles Rational, factual rhetoric Open, direct strategies	Indirect, nonconfrontational attitude Face- and relationship-oriented Implicit communication codes Point-logic styles Intuitive, affective rhetoric Ambiguous, indirect strategies

Source: W. Gudykunst and S. Ting-Toomey, *Culture and Interpersonal Communication* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1988), 158.

However, in collectivistic countries

> there is an assumption that maintaining a strong group is the best guarantee of individual freedom, there is a strong emphasis on doing what the in-group specifies . . . shame and loss of face are mechanisms of social control, there is sometimes the tyranny of the group, interpersonal relations are an end in themselves, there are narrow in-groups, there is a concept of limited good, there are more people under external control or motivation, people tend to think that planning is a waste of time, goals tend to be group rather than individual goals, who does something is more important than what she/he does. (66)

One variation of a collectivistic culture is the *honor culture,* such as in Turkey, in which conflict participants care greatly about other people's perceptions of them. Insults create great stress and instability (Günsoy et al. 2015). Certain subcultures in the United States also share characteristics of the honor culture. What kind of conflict culture characterizes your experience? Have you experienced a clash of cultures?

We live in a cobweb of relationships. When you die you are finally free of this cobweb of relationships—which you leave to your children to carry on.
—Hiroko Takada, from Japan

In addition to bridging the gaps between international cultures, we need much more exploration of cultural diversity within the United States. For example, many cultural groups share some of the features of mainstream U.S. culture yet are distinct in ways that make conflict management and mediation of their disputes challenging to someone from the dominant culture. Detailed outlines of cultural considerations for working with African American, Hispanic, and Native American cultures, for instance, are available. More research on conflict with Muslim American cultures remains to be accomplished. Whatever set of assumptions you choose to use, each framework places boundaries on constructive conflict management. Sometimes effective management requires people to be clear, direct, and assertive. Yet, at other times, deferring until the time is right, focusing primarily on the relationship components, and thinking of indirect ways to manage the dispute are the best approaches. To solve the most difficult problems, we cannot rely solely on the teachings of one culture. One major problem encountered in individualistic cultures is that we receive little training in the search for commonly acceptable solutions. If three people want different things, often the problem is resolved by competing to see who is the strongest ("We'll play it my way or not at all!"), or a person has to have enough power to persuade others to go along with a search for a collaborative solution. Therefore, many potentially collaborative ideas generated by low-power people are dismissed as unimportant.

In the United States, students are often taught that directness, ease in public, clarity of expression, assertiveness, and the ability to argue well are prerequisites to participation in conflict management. Indeed, in many contexts these skills are essential. However, for people who hold low-power positions in society, this is a very difficult set of skills to learn. To correct this imbalance, we need to focus also on *indirect* communication skills for people in high-power positions. Both high- and low-power people contribute to the tangles that occur in interpersonal conflict, and both must participate in better conflict management. Finally, cultural considerations include nonverbal communication; concepts of time (such as lateness or promptness); place of meetings or talks; whether content, relationship, identity, and process issues can be separated or not; and face-saving (Borisoff and Victor 1989). As you begin to

pay attention to the structure of conflict interactions, include these cultural and power issues in your analysis. Conflicts usually are not simple. If someone opens a conflict interaction by saying, "It's simple. We just have to do what makes sense . . . ," you can be sure that, if the conflict is ongoing or has raised a lot of emotion, the solution is not simple at all. Even within a given culture, differences abound. In China, for example, people in the younger generation prefer more direct talk than do older Chinese (Zhang, Harwood, and Hummert 2005).

Southern and northern U.S. regions may experience conflict differently. Northerners seem to use "small doses of anger, rudeness and confrontational behavior" to send a message to others to change their behavior. Southerners appear less likely to send "warning signals" when conflict escalates. A culture of politeness may cover escalating anger, but then anger erupts quickly. Researchers have called this the "culture of honor"—anger is suppressed and then escalates quickly (Cohen, Vandello, Puente, and Rantilla 1999).

As you would expect, your *cultural assumptions* influence how you interpret others. If you come from an individualistic culture, you may see a friend from Asia who rarely speaks in public, agrees with everything everyone says, and doesn't argue as having "no backbone." Or, conversely, if you come from a culture that prizes indirectness, to hear someone argue with a parent is offensive. Such a person seems rude and insensitive to you. In collective cultures "loss of face" has more serious relationship consequence (Kam and Bond 2008). Cultural assumptions, many of which are not explicitly realized, influence our perceptions and attributions of others' behavior.

If we want to make more accurate attributions and meaning of others' behavior, we need to translate, interpret, and become fluent in several "conflict dialects." Ask questions about conflict norms when you are not familiar with a particular culture. Most people like to answer a question such as, "Would you tell me how it works for your group? I need to learn what expectations and values to expect. For instance, if you very much disagree with someone who is older and has more power, what can you do?" Every person who intends to manage conflict well must become curious about other cultures than one's own.

While this book cannot cover all facets of cross-cultural communication, some working acquaintance with your own implicit assumptions absorbed through your cultural background will allow you to imagine more conflict management options. Without such awareness, one remains ethnocentric and trapped in the assumptions of one's own culture and biased against people from other groups with different assumptions about behavior.

Summary

Conflict is an important area of study because we all face it as we move through our interpersonal, family, and work lives. Your personal history, such as your family of origin and other influences, makes a difference in how you respond to conflict. Perceptions about conflict, whether it is an activity to be avoided or sought out and whether it is a negative or positive activity, develop over one's lifetime. The way one tells stories or narrates conflicts gives much important information about the conflict itself. In this process, refined images or metaphors develop in one's imagination and language that give shape and meaning to conflict episodes. Metaphors generally present conflict as either dangerous or a

situation presenting opportunity. The way a conflict is narrated frames the conflict strategies that can be used. Stories matter.

Perceptions and attributions influence conflict resolution. Remember to inquire about one's own perceptions, remaining open to new information. You may need to change your mind, your story, your approach, and your emotional response based on new information. Gender often plays a key role in the behaviors one chooses in conflict, and also influences how one sees others. Finally, one's culture (individualistic or collectivistic) affects one's behaviors and one's perceptions of others in a conflict.

Key Terms

attachment styles 38
personal and workplace history 39
avoidant system 40
collaborative system 40
aggressive/coercive 40
worldview 43
negative views of conflict 45
positive approaches to conflict 47
metaphors 49
conflict metaphors 49
danger metaphors 50
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intent ≠ impact 63
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social learning theory 68
connection with others 68
autonomy and independence 68
self-in-relationship 69
gender assumptions 69
gender biases 70
cultural differences 70
individualistic cultures 71
collectivistic cultures 71
ethnocentric 71

Review Questions

1. What is your own personal history with conflicts?
2. Is your family avoidant, collaborative, or aggressive?
3. Has your family approach to conflict changed?
4. Describe attachments styles and how they affect conflict later in life.
5. What are some negative views of conflict?
6. Describe some positive views of conflict.
7. What is the difference between intention and impact?
8. Describe how narratives of conflict communicate about the conflict.
9. What do conflict metaphors tell us?
10. What are some examples of danger metaphors?
11. What are some examples of opportunity metaphors?
12. Can you come up with a new metaphor expressing opportunity?
13. Chart the elements of the lens model of conflict.
14. What are some persistent gender effects?
15. What does it mean to say there are gender and cultural filters?
16. How does your culture affect how you view and do conflict?

Chapter 3

Interests and Goals

"Winning or Losing?"

An American father and his 12-year-old son were enjoying a beautiful Saturday in Hyde Park, London, playing catch with a Frisbee. Few in England had seen a Frisbee at that time, and a small group of strollers gathered to watch this strange sport. Finally, one homburg- clad Britisher came over to the father: "Sorry to bother you. Been watching you for a quarter of an hour. Who's winning?" (Fisher and Ury 1981, 154).

Our interests and goals are sometimes hard to identify (Bevan 2010). Both parties to the conflict and outsiders to the conflict often can't identify goals and interests accurately. This chapter describes the types of interests and goals we struggle over with others. We treat "interests" and "goals" as different terms for the same things—what we want from engaging in conflict.

All conflicts hinge upon the reality that people perceive *incompatible goals* held by at least two people who seem to be *interfering* with what the other person wants. Whether a sister and her older brother are struggling over limited parental attention, two managers are competing for a coveted promotion in the organization, two friends want to go to different concerts, but with each other, or a seller and buyer are arguing over the price of a car, the perception of incompatible goals fuels the conflict. In every conflict the interdependence of the parties rests on both common and disparate goals, but the parties often perceive only the disparate goals. When we realize that "what you want is not what I want," we are in a conflict. As the conflict intensifies, the parties focus more and more on the differences. Conflict is more than a disagreement; when people believe that another interferes with their interests and goals they sense conflict (Kerwin, Doherty, and Harman 2011).

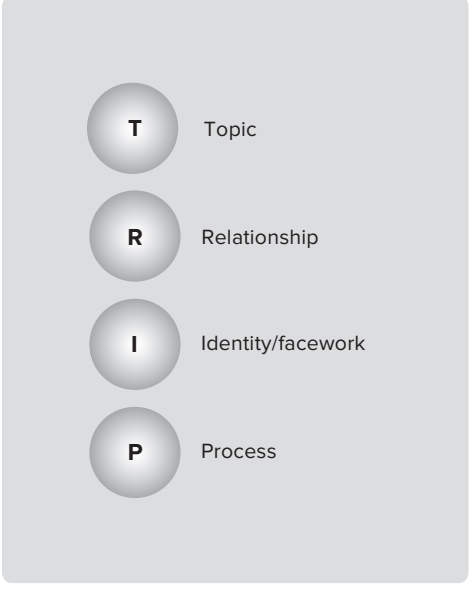
Goals differ depending on the relationship. In a friendship, for example, your main goal might be affinity—wanting the other to like you. On the job, you may primarily want to gain information from colleagues or to persuade them about something, or to experience stimulation and satisfaction from your work. With a sibling, you may want to maintain close contact while he or she stays more casual about connection. Goals range from obtaining money, goods, services, love, or status to getting information. In a conversation, your primary goal might be to express your emotions. The majority of conflicts in stepfamilies involved resources (e.g., possessions, space, time, attention, privacy, money), divided loyalty, perceptions that the parents were showing favor to their "own" children, and conflicts with members of the extended family (Coleman, Fine, Ganong, Downs, and Pauk 2001). Yet the stepfamily members also want to maintain connection. In emotionally charged conflict situations, you may be confused about what goals you want to achieve. If you are angry

at your roommate, you might not know whether (1) you want to punish her for being sloppy; (2) you want her to like you, but you still want to influence her cleanliness standards; or (3) you want her to get angry and move out, so you can get a new roommate. Most conflict participants initially lack goal clarity; they only discover their goals through experiencing conflict with the other participants. As we will see later, the goals often shift during the course of the conflict. What you want to achieve in the conflict also affects the tactics you choose during the conflict. For example, if you are "defending yourself," you are likely to use self-oriented tactics—being competitive and looking out only for yourself. On the other hand, if you want to improve a relationship, you are more likely to use conflict moves that are integrative—taking account of the others' needs as well as your own. One fact emerges from studying goals in personal and organizational settings—effectively functioning teams have a clear understanding of their objectives. The more clearly individuals or groups understand the nature of the problem and what they want to occur, the more effective they will be in solving problems (Lau and Cobb 2010). When goals can be clearly thought through ahead of time, you will be more likely to both negotiate for your goals and acknowledge emerging goals in the conflict process (Tasa, White, and Leonardelli 2013).

Types of Goals: TRIP

People in conflict pursue four general **types of goals:** (1) *topic* or *content,* (2) *relational,* (3) *identity* (or *facework*), and (4) *process* (see Figure 3.1). The acronym TRIP stands for these major types of goals, which overlap and shift during disputes. These types of goals will be examined one at a time.[1]

Figure 3.1 The Four Types of Goals Pursued During Conflict



[1] In earlier editions of this book, we used "content" following the influence of Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967). The TRIP acronym is much easier for students to recall; thus, we have changed the label "content" to "topic." Throughout this book, "content" and "topic" are used interchangeably.

Topic Goals: *What* Do We Want?

The key question when looking at a conflict is "*What* does each person want?" **Topic,** or content, **goals** emerge as different ideas about what to do, what decisions to make, where to go, how to allocate resources, or other externally objectifiable issues. Topic goals can be listed, argued, supported by evidence, and broken down into pros and cons (Huang 2010). For example, Amanda might tell her supervisor, "I have been here six months, and I am hoping for a raise, assuming that you are satisfied with my work." Other examples of topic goals are

securing a student loan	a clean apartment
more free time	meaningful work
a new pair of skis	fashionable clothing
space to work	a different job
a vacation overseas	reliable transportation
to sell a house for $200,000	transferring to a different college

In different contexts, the topics change. For example, in the workplace typical topics emerge that cause disputes:

promotion	efficiency	getting to work on time
title		job assignments
accuracy	salary	new computer
office location		

In friendships, people might struggle over

loaning money	what holiday plans to make
sharing a ride	how welcome friends are in a shared apartment
where to recreate	whether to share possessions
what music to listen to	
which movies to see	

In intimate relationships, people struggle over

How much time to spend together	Differences in biorhythms
The place of other people in their lives	How to spend money
When and how to have sex	

Application 3.1 My Topic or Content Goals

Select three different relationship contexts such as school, work, friendship, and intimate relationship.

1. For each relationship, list the "topics" that typically arise for you and your friends in disputes.
2. Compare the list of topics across the three relationships.

Most of us discuss topics that are distinct in each relationship type as well as some that cross all three categories. You might, for example, value cleanliness as an important topic regardless of the situation, or this goal might be restricted to only your living environment.

Topic goals can be easily seen and talked about; they are external to us—we can point to them and say, "I want that." While they might be categorized as "objective," feelings still infuse these topics. Topic or content struggles are of two types: (1) people want different things (I want to get the most for my car, and you want to pay the least for it); or (2) people want the same thing (same job, same romantic partner, same room in the house). In either case, what happens is a struggle over the goals. The perception that there is not enough to go around—a perception of a scarce resource—intensifies the conflict. More examples of struggles over content goals are:

- Three midlevel managers must come to agreement about which benefits to offer employees. Jill favors educational benefits, in addition to a basic benefits package; Chuck favors increased insurance options; and Jim wants to increase flextime options. All three managers want to keep employees longer but disagree on how to do that.
- A divorcing couple tries to construct a visitation schedule that allows each parent access to their young children but that also fits with each parent's work schedule. The specific visitation schedule is the topic goal. Mom may state, "I want the kids on Sundays," or "I want to see them one night a week when they are at your house." Dad might say, "I want them on alternate weekends."
- A project manager in Singapore who produces computer chips for a Taiwan company is under pressure from his boss to increase income. The project manager in Taiwan, who purchases from him, is under pressure to cut costs.
- A romantic couple talks about the pros and cons of either being together for the summer and both working in a restaurant, or one going to Glacier Park to be on a trail crew and the other to work as a biologist in the River of No Return Wilderness Area. They want to spend the summer together, but both also want to advance their respective careers.
- Mary is going to put her house up for sale because she will be moving to a different region. She asks $295,000 for the house, knowing that this price will pay for both her relocation and 3 months of living while she finds a new job. Her content goal means she can meet other important goals.

Usually, when you ask people what they want in a conflict, you will hear a topic goal from at least one of the parties—"I just want a different office." For most people, topic goals are the easiest to identify and tell others about. The topic, while important and the beginning point to understanding all disputes, is just one part of the conflict mosaic. Some writers refer to topic goals as "substantive" or "realistic" goals, but relationship, identity, and process goals are also real and substantive. When one person says, "That's not what we were talking about," she means, "Let's get back to the subject," meaning the topic that person most wants to discuss.

If you study negotiation in business school or law school, for example, you will focus almost entirely on topic goals. Mediators in legal disputes, for instance, usually shuttle back and forth between the parties carrying "offers" of money until they reach a settlement (Lewicki and Hiam 2006). In later chapters, ways to enrich topic negotiations by including other kinds of goals will be presented.

Other topics are important in addition to money. If you have a disagreement with your class instructor over your grade, you are engaging in a topic dispute. You thought you deserve a B, but the professor graded your essay as a C. Your enactment of the topic conflict, whether escalating or seeking joint agreement, will have a crucial impact (Parayitam, Olsen, and Bao 2010). While topics are important, other crucial goals that arise in conflicts deserve equal study.

Relational Goals: *Who Are We* to Each Other?

The key question when assessing the **relational goals** of a conflict is "*Who are we* in relationship to each other?" Relationship goals define how each party wants to be treated by the other and the amount of interdependence they desire (how they define themselves as a unit). Additionally, the amount of influence each will have with the other is worked out through relational interaction.

Differing relational goals lead people into conflict just as differing topics do. People often experience deep disagreement about the question of who they are to each other. The following statements, expressed during actual conflicts, express relational concerns:

How You Want to Be Treated by the Other

What I need here is some respect.

So, what happened to our collegial relationship?

What I want is for you to support me when we are in public. I won't put up with that kind of abuse.

Well, you don't have to be nasty about it.

I want to be included on projects that affect me.

I expect professional conduct from everyone on this team.

You told Sandra the report would be in by the due date. Then you called in sick and had me handle it. This hurts my trust that you will do what you say.

I was hired at the same time Jim was, and now he's receiving extra training and I am not. I want access to training as well so I can do a better job.

Mom, this really upsets me because I know you get along better with Samantha.

I want you to take me seriously, and not brush off what I say.

What Kind of Unit Are We?

I thought we were best friends.

Are you committed to this team or not?

We both have our separate lives to live now, so let's get on with it. What I do is none of your business.

I just don't know who we are to each other anymore.

A professional would attend all the team meetings, even when the scheduling is inconvenient.

Now that we are divorced, we are only parents to the kids and that will continue indefinitely.

Relational goals will emerge in any ongoing dispute and must be recognized and managed. When mediators, for instance, ignore relationship concerns, they will experience more difficulty in helping divorcing partners reach agreement (Donohue, Drake, and Roberto 1994, 261). Relational goals seem hard to talk about openly. Who talks first, who talks the most, nonverbal cues such as eye contact, and many other factors give us clues about relationship goals. For example, if an employee asks for a raise and is told no, especially with little comment, the supervisor might be warning, on the relational level, "Don't push too far. I have the right to tell you what we can afford and what we cannot afford." If the employee says, "Why not? This is the best year we've ever had!" the relational message might be, from the employee's perspective, "I have a right to challenge what you say."

Leading marriage researchers report, based on longitudinal research about marital conflict, that only 31% of couples' problem are resolved over time. Those couples who do manage to resolve their relationship conflicts become expert at creating conversation around these unsolved issues. Those two-thirds who do not resolve their relationship issues may stay tangled in gridlock and continue to hurt each other over their perpetual issues (Gottman 2014).

Nonverbal communication and the way a request is structured often indicate relationship dynamics. Think of the different relationship implications of "shut the door" (speaker has the right to order the other to do something), "Would you mind closing the door?" (speaker wants the door closed but wants to maintain a pleasant relationship), and "I wish I could leave the door open, but it's so noisy" (speaker respects the other person) (Fisher-Yoshida 2014). In the later example, the other person might respond with a loud slam, a comment that "I'd rather leave it open because Mira is stopping by," or "I'm too hot as it is." All these interactions indicate complicated relationship dynamics. When relationship implications indicate conflict, they become as much part of the conflict as the topics at hand.

Communication regarding relational goals can remain tacit and unspoken. Productive conflict interaction sometimes requires that a third party or a participant clarify the tacit relationship definitions. The following are some examples of common relational goals:

- A second wife decides not to go to a big family gathering of her husband's relatives. She resents the expectation that she is expected to attend his family's Labor Day event. She prefers to visit with her family at that time of year. If the husband and wife have a conflict over this issue, the content goals may be fairly clear: The husband wants the wife to go to the gathering, whereas the wife wants to visit her family and not attend the big gathering. The wife's relational goals might be varied:

  She may want equity in the time she spends with her family.

  She could be trying to establish her independence from the new family group. She might want to protect herself from comparison to the first wife.

- The husband's relational goals might be to

  Please his family

  Introduce his second wife to the family in a relaxed setting

  Spend more time with his wife

The wife and husband argue about how much influence they will allow the other to have, about what kind of a unit they are, and other relational issues. If the couple argues

about content goals only, they will get stuck on issues about plane fares and what they can afford, or the weather in Georgia around Labor Day, or the cost of a rental car. In ongoing relationships such as this one, the relationship goals should take precedence. Most people argue content when they ought to be talking about relational goals—and wonder why they can't reach agreement on the topic.

- In a staff meeting, Joan insists that "before we decide on the reorganization, I need to know how committed you all are to staying with the organization." She needs some clarity on how people define their relationship to the larger group before plunging ahead with an extensive reorganization plan. Yet staff members may perceive this question as threatening—they may not know or be ready to disclose their level of commitment.
- Two teenage girls currently are "on the outs" with each other. Jennifer talks about how JoAnn is "high and mighty," then JoAnn complains to another friend that Jennifer has "an abnormal need to be in on everything." The conflict erupted the day after JoAnn canceled her plan to go shopping with Jennifer and went with another friend instead. The content, whether to go shopping together, was not the issue; the relational strain was.

Relational goals *are at the heart of all conflict interactions* yet are difficult to specify from the outside (and sometimes from the inside as well). That is because each person translates the same event into his or her own relational meaning. When Steve insists that the best plan for the Fourth of July is to invite friends over for a picnic on the deck, and Jack insists that it would be a lot more fun to go to the park, get food from the vendors, and watch the fireworks, they may remain in gridlock until Jack reminds Steve that he always does the cooking, while Jack plays Frisbee with the guests. If Jack states plainly that he doesn't want to do the cooking, they may shift the conflict back to a productive conversation over the plan (back to content/topic). If Steve continues by saying that it makes no sense to invite friends to a huge community event, Jack will eventually need to say, "You know, I don't want my cooking to become expected. I'd like to mix and mingle, too." Then they have the option to come up with a new plan, because the relationship issue was brought clearly into the conflict.

A conflict is interpreted differently by each participant. Just as we have no success in translating Ukrainian unless we speak the language, conflict parties must learn the relational language of their conflict partners. For example, a father and daughter fight many

The daughter scatters books, shoes, and lunch box in the living room while she gets a snack. Father comes home an hour later, sees the mess, and explodes. Daughter says, "I forgot," and father says, "You always forget."

Content messages: "I forgot." "You always forget."

Daughter's translation: It's not important. I wish he'd pay attention to something that is more important to me, like how I hate school.

Father's translation: She doesn't listen to me. She is getting too independent to care what I think.

evenings when she comes home from school and he arrives home from work. Mother gets pulled into playing peacemaker, trying to urge them to get along better. The following example demonstrates how an event can trigger such a conflict.

The father wants more responsiveness from his daughter, a key relational issue as noted by Canevello and Crocker (2010). The difficulty with relational issues is that we never ultimately know the other person's translations. Just as the daughter and father have different translations for these events, usually the conflict parties cannot accurately guess what the other's translations will be. When they can estimate the other's relational needs, they tend to dismiss them as not important. The friend who remarks "you shouldn't be bothered by not being invited to the wedding" is telling you your relational needs are not important. One technique in conflict management, therefore, is to ask conflict parties to *share their relational translations* of the content issues. That might sound like, "What does this issue mean to you?

Other examples of incorrect or incomplete translations of each other's messages are illustrated by the following:

- A partner obsessively tracks messages on Facebook posted by a partner. If one partner mistrusts the other, conflict may arise over "what you said," instead of "what that post means to me" (Westaby and Redding 2014).
- Co-workers bicker each day about whose turn it is to lock up the business, which requires staying longer at the end of the day. None of the procedures developed seem to work—people have doctor appointments, or have to pick up a child, or have a racquetball court reserved, so they have to leave early. This conflict is becoming a big issue. So far, the only way people resolve the issue is by coming up with creative excuses for leaving work. Resentments grow daily, factions are created, and pretty soon, the boss will have to step in and make a new rule, which will displease everyone. No new procedure (content solution) will work until leftover resentments are explained and attended to (relational issues). Then new topic goals can be developed that have a chance of finally working.
- A couple argues over who should fill the car with gas each week—each feels she or he is doing more work than the other and wants credit for what is already being done. But the man argues that he shouldn't have to do all the work on the car, and the woman argues that he doesn't notice now much work she does for him, such as taking clothes to the cleaners. (Yes, this is a conventional, old-fashioned couple.) Not only are they arguing about content, they are mistranslating the crucial relational goals (which remain unstated).

Relational goals also form in reaction to the other party's apparent goals. What I want from you is the result of what I think you think about me. Once a conflict is triggered, each party reacts to what he or she thinks the other is doing or wanting. When Sandy says, "I won't take that kind of treatment from Jason," she is reacting to her guess about how Jason will act in the future, too. Once the conflict spiral begins, each person responds to an image of the other that may not be accurate. When Jason replies, "You are just trying to control me," he states his relational reaction to Sandy. In this manner, relational goals escalate into polarized states.

Application 3.2 Relational Goals

Take two important but different relationships to you, for example, a parent, intimate, lifelong friend, work associate, or other relationship. Think of a time you were upset at how he or she treated you. Then, list the "relational issues" that arose. For example, look at the samples of relational issues and amount of interdependence examples we gave above and see if you can identify your key relational issues, as well as probably relationship issues of the other. Learning to take the perspective of the other is a key skill in conflict resolution.

Let's summarize some principles about relational interests and goals.

- Every statement carries a relational message.
- We each translate or interpret relational messages differently.
- Relational interests carry more urgency than topic interests, if left unaddressed.
- One's relational interests are triggered in reaction to our interpretation of the other's behavior.

Good, clear relationships make the topic issues much easier to resolve, bring synergy to a conversation, and enhance your positive identity.

One more example of a relational statement will clarify this issue. Ali, who works for Sam in a high-tech organization, after a meeting with Sam, says to a colleague, "Wow, one day I get the 'good Sam' and the next I get the 'bad Sam.' When I meet with him, I just sit still and try to figure out if he will be respectful to me or blow up. He has me so unnerved that I may transfer to another department." Such statements reflect the importance of relational goals and how they affect performance (Lau and Cobb 2010). "We don't see the other person as the villain because they disagree with us; we see them as the villain because of how they treat us" (Harper 2004, 67).

Identity, or Face-Saving, Goals: *Who Am I* in This Interaction?

People in conflict try to maintain their sense of self. When one feels misunderstood, and then blamed, conflict turns into a high-intensity struggle over a scarce resource—in this case, a positive sense of self and the knowledge that one is viewed positively by others. Identity conflicts are often hard to identify and the conflict progresses, since they are usually represented as disputes over tangible resources (Ellis 2006; Rothman 1997). The key question in assessing **identity,** or **face-saving, goals** is "Who am I in this particular interaction?" or "How may my self-identity be protected or repaired in this particular conflict?"

In addition to content and relational goals, identity goals include specific desires to maintain not only one's self-esteem but also one's sense of self-identity. Identity needs have been extensively discussed as facework or saving face (Folger, Poole, and Stutman 2008; Goffman 1967). Often people will say, with frustration, "What are we fighting about?" or "I don't know what is going on!" Many times, a puzzling or maddening interaction makes sense if you see one or more of the parties trying to present a positive face (Moeller, Crocker, and Bushman 2009). You know you are confronting an identity struggle when you hear the following kinds of statements:

- "I am not that guy. I am not the kind of person who would ever do such a thing."
- "You say I ignored you and would not speak to you. I find it very hard to believe that could be true. I never remember ignoring you."
- "I am upset that you think I would have disclosed your plan to resign. I keep confidences."
- "What can I do to get you to believe that I am telling the truth?"

When identity or face-saving becomes an issue, people are less flexible and engage in destructive moves (Ellis 2006; Folger et al. 2008). As Brown (1977) said years ago, "In some instances, protecting against loss of face becomes so central an issue that it swamps the importance of the tangible issues at stake and generates intense conflicts that can impede progress toward agreement and increase substantially the costs of conflict resolution" (175). Many conflicts hinge on the parties' keen interest in face issues such as respect, esteem, validation, honor, and dignity (Totman 2014).

When people can clarify their identity, more cooperative problem solving comes about (Bechtoldt, DeDreu, Nijstad, and Zapf 2010). The athlete who says, "I don't use drugs because I'm not that kind of person" is clarifying her identity. If one person says, "I did not intend to dismiss your idea; it's that I disagree with you," and the other replies, "I believe you," the two people may be able to move to content issues because they are not struggling over personality or bad character. Simply listing the answers to "who am I?" will be a good start for identifying your identity. These identity statements often arise when people are talking about themselves, and are constructed by us in our communication exchanges.

competent	likeable	responsible	trustworthy
best friend	logical	enthusiastic	well-organized
reliable family member	friendly	expert	leader

Another way to find your identity concerns is the exercise in Application 3.3.

The importance of identity, or saving face, can be seen when large corporations or individuals are sued in court. In some circumstances, they can enter an "Alford Plea," which means, "I don't admit guilt, but based on the evidence presented I think I would be convicted." Thus, we read news reports of organizations saying, "We didn't do it, and we paid the plaintiff $15,000,000." On one hand this seems absurd, but on the other the practice illustrates the importance of saving face. The issue is no longer "did I break the law," but "how can I protect how I see myself and others see me?" The most extreme example of this is people on death row. Often, as they are being escorted to execution they will say, "I am innocent," or "I am a good person." We need to have a positive self-identity, even if it doesn't correspond to what we have done.

In each conflict interaction, individuals either save face or lose or damage face. Self-esteem can be seen as a scarce resource. This is another way of saying that people's sense of self is often tenuous, not fixed. Few people are so full of self-esteem that they do not care about looking good in conflicts, or being seen as intelligent, honorable, correct, or justified. Likewise, when your opponent begins to perceive that you are damaging his or her sense of self, the stakes get higher. Facework occurs for each party throughout

Application 3.3 My Criticism Log

Keep track of all the negative thoughts you have about people in your world over a few days and jot them down in your notebook or diary. You don't need to track the type of relationship, who the other is, or anything else—just list the negative thoughts you have or comments you make. Some examples are "He is so stupid," "I can't believe how incompetent she is," "He is so mean to everyone," and "She is just power hungry."

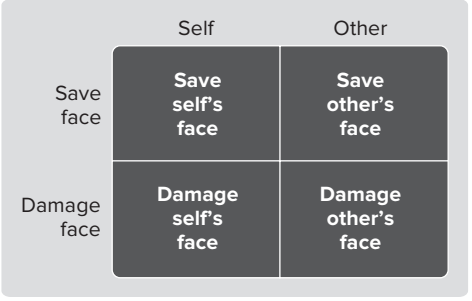
1. List all these criticisms of others, then in groups of three or four, read them aloud to others (don't worry about how you sound; just say them even though they may usually be socially unacceptable).
2. Members of your group help you identify your two or three main "themes" for your criticisms of others. Most of us have two or three main identity dimensions that arise in criticisms of others. Put these "themes" in nonjudgmental or positive terms.

   For example, medical doctors often say things about their colleagues such as "He isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer," "She didn't do very well in medical school," "I just don't know how he became a doctor given he can't process all the details," and "He isn't very bright." The theme of "intelligence" is clear.
3. Discuss with the group your main identity "themes" and how they predict with whom you will have conflict or struggles. As you might guess, when others don't protect or value our identity, a conflict will erupt with them.

the conflict (see Figure 3.2). In face-saving conversations, people often give accounts of what has happened, or what the interaction meant, as a way to "repair" one's identity after a personal attack (Buttny 2000). "Changing one's mind about human nature is hard work, and changing one's mind for the worse about oneself is even harder" (Kahneman 2011, 172).

Because people often act out of self-interest, what normally happens as a dispute progresses is people protect their own face, or identity, while damaging the other's face, or identity. Productive conflict management demands that we attend to neglected important areas. One study analyzed communication in three cases of hostage negotiations.

Figure 3.2 Dimensions of Saving and Damaging Face



The cases involved three different people: (1) an armed, suicidal man barricaded inside a TV station; (2) a man suffering extreme emotional instability who was barricaded in a house; and (3) an armed man holding his children hostage. What emerged in the taped FBI transcripts was the necessity to let the men save face while working to get the hostages released. The outside negotiators had to restore the armed man's face, by saying such things as "I think you are an extremely strong person for how you have handled this so far," "You've got a whole lot of people who care about you," and "The people you are trying to help, they need you" (Rogan and Hammer 1994). Sometimes face is saved ahead of time, and other times it is restored after there has been some loss, like in the hostage situation.

Figure 3.2 also shows how someone can damage one's own face. Though it seems unlikely, people often say negative things about themselves. When you say, "I'm just a terrible parent," or "I'm a lousy student," or "What does someone my age think he/she is doing going back to school?" those statements are damaging to one's own face, or identity. Such statements may also be made in the hope that the listener will say something kind. In the hostage situations, the armed men were, in effect, saying, "I'm just crazy," and the job of the outside negotiators was to get the men to start to see their own behavior as not quite so damaging to their view of themselves. Once face is restored, one is free to give up extreme defensive tactics, such as holding hostages.

People try to avoid loss of face by defending their self-images against humiliation, embarrassment, exclusion, demeaning communication, or general treatment as unimportant or low-power individuals. When people attack others' face, they may belittle, scorn, ridicule, taunt, mock, or overtly reject them (Totman 2014). Attempts to solve a problem or stop a conflict by causing another person to lose a sense of dignity and worth never work in the long run. One researcher calls it the "identity trap"—when our identity issues disable us from seeing constructive paths of problem solving (Donohue, in press).

Remember the four horsemen discussed in Chapter 1, and how many destructive conflict cycles result from this kind of destructive communication. Overuse of power may temporarily solve a problem. When losers are created, however, the losing group or individual waits for a time and place to "make it right," either by getting back at the winners, by subverting the ongoing process, or by leaving the relationship, work setting, or group. Demeaning communication creates ongoing pain and dissatisfaction, and the conflict remains unresolved at a deep level.

Face-saving and giving others face are extremely important in all cultures but often take precedence over topic issues in Asian cultures. It is now well known in the business community that entirely different kinds of negotiations are required in Asian cultures. Attempting to support the others' face and avoiding at all costs the loss of face of the other require great attention. These are part of the requirements of polite interaction among many Pacific Rim cultures. One would never pin an opponent down or attempt to prove him or her wrong.

People, especially when they feel low power, may assume that escalation is the best route in conflict. Take the case of employees who are convinced the management in their company is incompetent. They want to publish their complaints in the local paper. While at first, this might seem effective, if they do that, the managers will lose face and undoubtedly respond in a negative way. Almost always, when you ask people the best way to handle complaints about them, they prefer it to be in private and not publicly aired—saving face for all.

You can tell that attempts to save face are being employed when you or others engage in the following kinds of communication (adapted from Folger et al. 2008):

1. *Claim unjust intimidation.* Topic goals take second place to this specific kind of relational goal—to stand up to another's attempt to take over. People accuse others of taking advantage, declare their resistance to unjust treatment, and often seek support from outside parties when they are being treated unjustly.
2. *Refuse to step back from a position.* A person who no longer feels comfortable with an earlier position may choose to stay with it, even in light of new information, because looking foolish or inconsistent results in losing face. Thus, topic and larger relational goals are set aside to avoid looking weak, ill informed, or incompetent. In a community in a Western mountain state, water rights became a major conflict for a group of summer-home owners in the mountains. A city tried to claim water rights to a small creek that flowed through the homeowners' property. One man resisted the efforts of a majority to build a legal defense fund because he had said at a meeting, "I'm not going to pay some lawyer to fritter away my money on something we can't stop anyway!" As several summers wore on, this embattled individual refused to step back from his position of "no money to lawyers" and "we can't make any difference anyway." He wrote letters to others in the homeowners' group, bitterly protesting the intimidation by the majority group in assessing a fee for each homeowner to build the legal fund. Clearly, as new information came in strongly supporting the efforts to fight the city's water claim, as when the district court judge supported the summer-home group, the man who was fighting to avoid losing face found himself in a dilemma—to fight further might be to lose face even more. Eventually, he pretended he had supported the legal efforts all along but just thought the fees were too high. This was a face-regaining effort, and the homeowners' group wisely dropped the issue so the man could be part of the community again. For him, the content and relational goals had become temporarily unimportant.
3. *Suppress conflict issues.* People also try to save face by refusing to admit that a conflict exists, since to acknowledge the conflict might mean that events are out of control, which might make people feel uncomfortable and incompetent. In the water rights conflict discussed previously, several longtime friends of the dissident homeowner said things like, "Well, Kent is just cantankerous. He'll get over it," or "Well, these things bring up strong feelings." The association had few effective means of conflict resolution. Many felt that to acknowledge conflict at all would mean that their group was in danger of losing a sense of camaraderie and community spirit. One board member tried to schedule a meeting that the dissident individual could not attend because of his travel schedule—an attempt to suppress or avoid the issue of face, or identity, needs.

In productive, ongoing relationships, several kinds of communication will help restore lost face or prevent further loss of face. You can increase flexibility and problem solving if you:

1. *Help others increase their sense of self-esteem.* Treat others with goodwill, giving them the benefit of the doubt even when they have been belligerent or unproductive. You might say things like, "Everyone gets upset sometimes. We can get past this,"

or "You must not have had all the information I had. You couldn't have known about the Grandview project yet, as I did." Even saying something like, "I know you were doing what you thought was best" gives the other person the benefit of the doubt and is usually true. People do tend to do what they think is best at the time.

2. *Avoid giving directives.* Parents can tell their teenage children, "I want you to honor the house rules we've discussed. I want to be able to trust you and not worry about monitoring you—you're almost grown and can make decisions for yourself." This approach is much better than "If you don't follow the rules we've set up you can find somewhere else to live!" As will be discussed later, it's better to avoid direct threats and to use persuasion and face-saving communication instead. No one wants to be pushed around. Even if you have "right on your side," it may not always be wise to be "right," as this creates winners and losers.
3. *Listen carefully to others and take their concerns into account.* Even when you don't have to listen because you have the power to make a decision independently, listening and taking care of others' concerns as best you can helps them feel included, approved of, and respected.
4. *Ask questions so the other person can examine his or her goals.* By asking questions instead of attacking, you give the other person a chance to change in the interaction instead of entrenching or digging in (note the warlike metaphor).

In conclusion, helping others protect their self-identity as a good, worthy, and competent human being goes far toward helping resolve conflict by allowing people to focus on goals other than self-protection.

Process Goals: *What Communication Process* Will Be Used?

The key question when assessing **process goals** is, "What communication process would work best?" Many times people disagree about how to formally or informally conduct a conflict. A group might argue over the merits of consensus versus voting. Intimates often disagree about whether strong emotions hurt the process of conflict or not, or whether the partners should stay up and talk when one is sleepy or wait until morning. Work groups go back and forth about whether to send out opinion questionnaires, talk informally in a series of meetings, delegate certain decisions, or put off deciding certain issues. All these relate to the process of conflict interaction and will impact content, identity, and relational goals.

Some examples of process goals are

giving each one equal talk time	talking informally before deciding	not allowing the children to speak
consensus	having high power person decide	voting
decisions made by subgroup	secret ballot	

Different processes of communication may change the relationships involved. For instance, minorities may be given more power with a free flow of communication, whereas higher-power people might maintain their power with a more tightly organized form of interaction, such as one that relies heavily on written communication.

Process goals arise in all kinds of contexts. For example, deciding on which judge hears your case is a crucial question in the law (Bush 1984). In the workplace, people want processes that enhance equality and open participation. People struggle in organizations and small groups over the pros and cons of consensus, informal discussion, information gathering, delegated decisions, written summaries, voting, and parliamentary procedure.

Process goals also vary in different cultures, with some being quite authority oriented and others relying on equal participation. In Native American tribal politics, a long process of consensus building is often required before a decision is considered valid by the tribe. The tribal members delegate less to their elected officials than do Western European cultures (Broome and Cromer 1991).

In addition to changing the levels of influence, different processes encourage or discourage creative solutions. Quick, well-defined processes help you move forward but may decrease creative, innovative solutions. Longer processes can build in time for reflection and evaluation and improve the chances for creativity. Thus, different processes affect the conflict outcome as well. For instance, one couple struggled over when to buy a house. The wife wanted to buy a house in the next few months, whereas the husband wanted to save more money before they looked seriously. The husband suggested that they first discuss with each other their financial goals and then talk about the house. This discussion resulted in the wife's decision that she, too, wanted to wait at least a year so that they could better their financial situation. By changing from content issues, such as the interest rate, the availability of houses in the desired neighborhood, or the likely tax consequences, to a different process, such as talking about other goals, the couple changed the relational conflict ("I've got to get her/him to listen to me") to a mutually acceptable process about time.

Large public meetings are arenas for process conflict. People who know they are in the minority or low power often argue for parliamentary procedure, which provides more options for hearing from the minority than does, for instance, informal large-group discussion followed by voting.

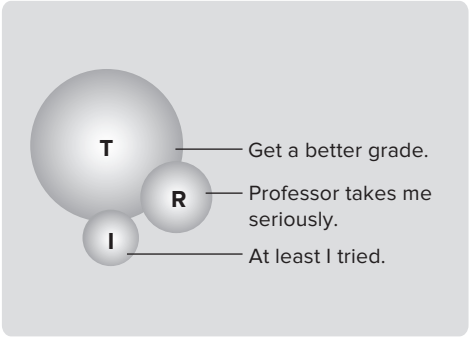
Whatever the context, process conflicts often change when individuals feel heard. People drop their obstruction to a certain process if they are assured of being heard and counted (face/identity issues) and when they see their content and relational goals are being protected. As in struggles over differing content, relational, and identity goals, process conflicts blend into the other conflicting goals.

The Overlapping Nature of TRIP Goals

Now that each type of goal has been explained and illustrated, we can deepen our analysis of goals in conflict. A number of features about conflict goals need to be highlighted.

Feature 1: Not all types of goals emerge in all disputes. Disputes may emerge without process issues. In the workplace, for example, there may be a heated disagreement between two supervisors, yet neither wants to change any processes such as how frequently they meet, or who is included. Similarly, many conflicts have no content issues. Two friends may be locked in a struggle over how responsive they are to one another; a relational issue that doesn't involve content. It is often puzzling to parents how their children can fight for hours over "nothing"—no identifiable content issues. But rest assured, if there is a struggle and no content issues are apparent, the struggle is about identity, process, and/or relational issues.

Figure 3.3 Content Goals Paramount



Feature 2: Interests and goals overlap with one another and differ in primacy (Avivi, Laurenceau, and Carver 2009; Wilson, Kunkel, Robson, Olufowote, and Soliz 2009). When you begin a dispute over your grade (the topic goal), you also want to be treated well by the professor (the relational goal) and want to think that you tried hard (the identity, or face-saving, goal). Figure 3.3 demonstrates how this might look from your side.

As you can see, you begin a discussion with the professor with the topic issue paramount in your mind; the relational and identity issues are not as important to you. Note therefore that even though they differ in prominence, different goal types emerge.

The professor shown in Figure 3.4, on the other hand, may be most concerned about relational issues ("I don't pull rank"). She also shares a topic issue ("I want students to get better grades") with her identity issue being seen as "treating students fairly."

In a different situation, a process or procedural goal might be utmost in one party's mind. You are a member of a departmental student group and would like to run for president. You were out of town last weekend, and this Tuesday in class someone said, "Hey, what do you think about Stan being president of the student club? We had an election last night." For you, the procedural issue of not being notified of a meeting when others knew you wanted to run for president is the paramount issue, as shown in Figure 3.5. Note that in this case, the procedural issue looms largest, followed by identity and relational issues of equal weight.

Figure 3.4 Relational and Identity Goals Paramount

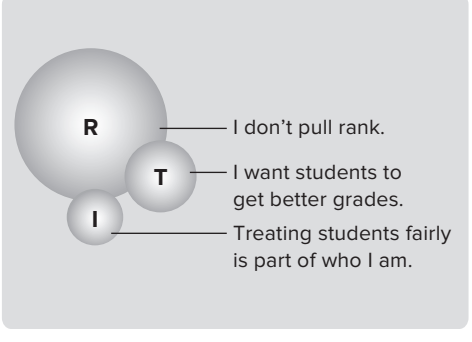
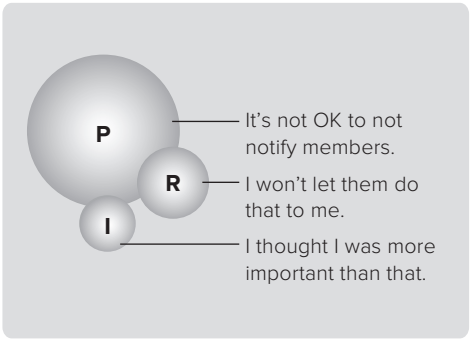


Figure 3.5 Process Goals Paramount

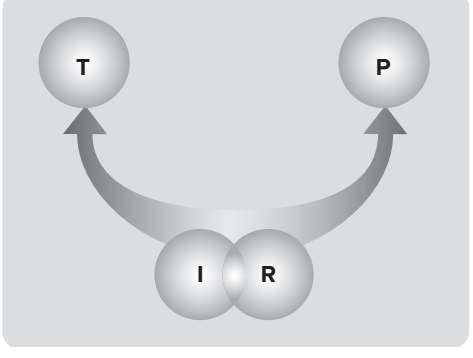


Feature 3: Identity and relational issues are the "drivers" of disputes; they underlie topic and process issues. As you listen to people describe conflicts, you begin to notice a pattern—identity and relational issues carry the most energy. In most business disputes, for example, regardless of the topic issue, someone will be concerned about trust, treatment, or communication—relational issues. Further, the face-saving and identity issues discussed earlier anchor all disputes. Because we are human beings, our inherent view of our self drives disputes. Think back to when you were a kid and not chosen to play or were excluded from some high school activity. A typical response might have been, "I didn't want to be part of the stupid team anyway (relational) and besides, I'm a good reader and will just go home and finish the great book I'm reading (identity)."

In addition, relational and identity concerns will almost always overlap—*who you are* with others is related to *how* the relationship is conducted. Figure 3.6 illustrates which goals are almost always present and, in fact, drive almost all disputes.

Many people see identity and relational goals as "intangible" because they are difficult to specify, yet even though they may be difficult to put in specific terms, they nevertheless are the key drivers in all conflicts. In our work as mediators in hundreds of disputes we have never seen a dispute without relational and identity issues!

Figure 3.6 Relational and Identity Goals Propelling a Dispute



Powerful relational and identity issues underlie all conflicts, although they often are acted out indirectly. For example, it may not be common in your family to say, "I feel excluded," but rather, family members may watch others at the family picnic, see who is left alone, and seek them out for a talk. In an organization, it may not be within the cultural norms to say, "I don't feel very valued here," but the president may give you access to the boardroom for meetings as a way to indicate your organizational importance. Similarly, watch little kids at play. One of the kids may be left out, and another may turn to that child and say, "Want to play dolls with me?" Such a move is both a relational and identity tactic. Another example of meeting issues indirectly was when Bill, one of the co-authors of this book, was 12 and not getting any time with his dad, who was busy running a small business. Bill was hyperactive and on the verge of delinquency. An observant neighbor noticed him, and offered him a summer job driving his tractor. Many relational and identity needs were filled for Bill sitting in the Wyoming weather on the John Deere tractor. If Francis had approached Bill's dad and said, "I think your kid needs some attention, but I know you are working 14 hours a day, so how about I give him a job on my ranch this summer?" Bill's dad would have been insulted. But the indirect offer to help, by giving Bill a job, avoided a conflict with the father and allowed Francis to give neighborly assistance. The neighbor saved face with Bill's father while helping the boy.

By being alert to the "relational translations" someone else might make, you can serve both relational and face-saving needs indirectly through content. Indirect, topic-only solutions do not work in intense conflict situations, however. The more severe and strained the conflict, the less satisfying the content approaches will be. This leads to the fourth feature of conflict goals.

Feature 4: In a serious dispute, topic-only solutions are rarely satisfying to conflict parties. If you know someone who has ever won a lawsuit, ask him or her, "How do you feel about the other party and the process you went through?" You probably will hear anger, frustration, and exasperation, with the "winner" usually launching into a tirade about both the other party and the other party's attorney. That is because (unless it is a very unusual case) only topic issues have been addressed, and the relational and identity needs feel respected, to be listened to, and to be told that you are a reasonable person have not been addressed. During the dispute there is often so much threat to each person's identity that content solutions alone are not satisfying. In this type of situation, if an outsider says, "You got $150,000; what more do you want?" the plaintiff will usually answer, "An apology." The desired apology, addressing relational and identity goals, trumps the content goal of money.

Feature 5: Conflict parties often specialize in one kind of goal. Conflict parties in ongoing struggles often highlight one type of goal and limit themselves to it, as in the following dialogues:

In the Organization

New hire, just out of university: (thinks) I will stay at this desk until my manager leaves, no matter what, so she will know I am dedicated and serious (relationship and identity goals.)

Manager: (thinking about Amanda, the new hire.) She isn't efficient, her desk is piled up, and I don't know what she does all day. I hired her to come up with marketing ideas for the twenty-somethings, and she is not initiating anything. I may have made a bad choice in hiring her. (topic and process concerns.)

In the Family

Grandfather: My daughter is just not a good mother to her kids—she needs to learn how to be a better mother. The kids should be cleaner, and they are always late to school. Those kids deserve a hands-on mom. (topic specialization)

His daughter: [the mother of two small boys] I am just not willing to have the kids spend time at their grandparents' house until Dad learns how to treat people better. He only criticizes the kids and me and never says anything positive. (relational and identity specialization)

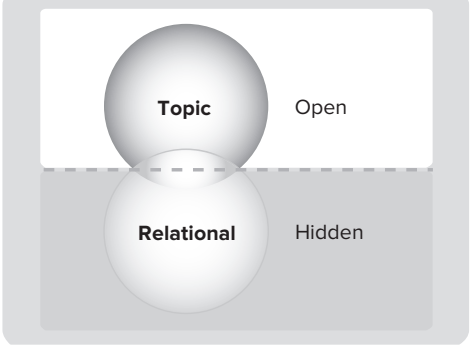
In these conflicts, the participants separate and specialize—one party on topic goals and the other on relational goals. This split tends to keep the conflict going—as the topic specialist continues to expect better "performance" from the other, the relational specialist becomes more and more critical of the treatment he or she receives.

Specialization in either topic or relational goals often reflects the parties' relative power. All too often, high-power parties are the ones who focus exclusively on the topic. Failure to acknowledge relational goals may be due to a lack of skill or can show hostility, or lack of caring. Focusing only on topic devalues the other person and his or her concerns. The most powerful group member usually wins by structuring the conflict and ignoring troubling relational issues from lower-power people. Topic discussion is simpler and requires less investment in the other person. Similarly, lower-power members may wish to bring in goals other than topic goals as a power-balancing mechanism. If a lower-power person can get the higher-power person to pay attention to relational, process, and identity goals, the lower-power person is "empowered" and becomes a legitimate party in the conflict.

Feature 6: Goals may emerge in a different form. Sensitivity to the different types of goals allows you to recognize when one type of goal is being acted out in terms of another. Any one of the four can come to the surface in a different form and with different intensity (Kerwin et al. 2011). Topic goals emerge as relational, identity, or procedural goals. Relational goals can emerge as topic, identity, or procedural goals, and so on—12 possible substitutions exist. One of the most common is illustrated in Figure 3.7: a relational goal carried by topic.

Many times conflict parties are simply unable to identify their relational goals. Instead, they act them out at the topic level. For example, you may feel devalued by your boss, so you wage an ongoing, persuasive campaign to change the performance evaluation system used by the organization. Or you think your brother does not respect you, so you argue

Figure 3.7 Relational Goals Emerging in Topic Form



"Stay for Dinner"

Connie, Sharon, and Janene, seniors at a university, share an old house near campus. They have known each other for years; they grew up in the same town. Their roommate relationship has, thus far, been fairly smooth, although recently an issue has emerged. Janene eats two meals a day on campus at the food service. Connie and Sharon like to cook, so they prepare their meals at home. They have invited Janene to share their evening meal several times, and Janene has occasionally accepted. It's Thursday night, Janene is rushing to get to the food service before it closes, and the following dialogue takes place:

Connie: Hey, Janene, you might as well stay and eat with us. It's late—you'll never make it.

Janene: No big deal. If I miss it, I'll get a hamburger or something. [She rushes out the door.]

Connie: [to Sharon] That's the last time I'm going to ask her to eat with us. She thinks she is too good to be bothered with staying around here with us.

A few weeks later, Connie and Sharon find someone who is willing to room with them, share cooking, and pay a higher rate. So they approach Janene and say, "We are struggling with finances, and we have someone who will eat here, share expenses, and save us all money on food. Would you rather pay a higher rate or move out?"

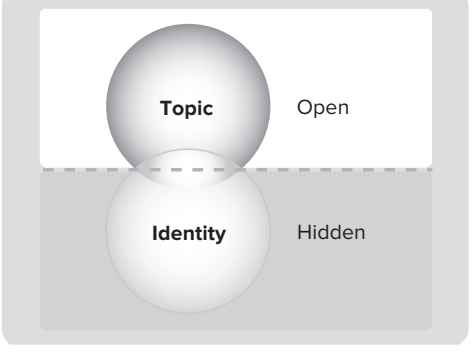
that he doesn't have the training to handle your aging mom's finances. You may insist that a work team view YouTube videos on trust and vulnerability, because you mistrust one member of the team. In "Stay for Dinner," notice the shift in goals. Conversation about Janene's reasons for eating on campus might have de-escalated this conflict. Janene's parents bought a food plan for her to help her out with expenses, and Janene did not want to take advantage of her roommates' cooking.

As you can see, this dispute began with two people feeling excluded and quickly degenerated into a topic-only conflict. Because relational issues were ignored, a longtime friendship was lost.

Identity conflicts, as well, often erupt on the topic level, as shown in Figure 3.8.

"I'm right/Are not/Am too" is an example of an identity-driven dispute that gets played out on the topic level. Each person starts by wanting to feel right (identity, or face-saving). Watch what quickly happens.

Figure 3.8 Identity Goals Emerging in Topic Form



"I'm Right/Are Not/Am Too!"

Duane and Kathy are going to a movie. Duane is driving, and they both notice a red car passing them.

Duane: That's a Subaru, like the kind I was telling you about.

Kathy: No, I think it was a Toyota. But it's pretty.

Duane: No, it was a Subaru!

They argue back and forth about the rightness of their claims. Neither is a car expert, but both are adamant, using sarcasm and biting humor.

Kathy: Well, you may be right, but I still think it was a Toyota.

Duane: Look, I know I'm right!

Kathy: You never think I know anything!

Duane: You don't know anything about cars. Blow it off. It's not important.

Kathy sits silently for 10 minutes.

The couple will continue to argue about identifying cars, but both have stated relationship concerns. Kathy feels she is not given credit as a knowledgeable person. Duane states that he needs to be right on things he knows more about. The couple appears to be negotiating about who has preeminence in certain areas of expertise. They haven't worked out how to "call off the conflict" or how to ask for more respect from each other. They are likely to find other topics to fight over until the relationship is addressed directly. The following box presents two openings that might start them off more productively.

Duane: It bugs me when you challenge me about something I know a lot about. I start thinking you don't think I'm very smart.

or

Kathy: Duane, I'm not that interested in Toyotas, or Subarus either. But I've been thinking that you get the last word on most topics we discuss. It makes me want never to give in—even if I know I'm wrong.

Goals Change in Interaction

TRIP goals are like a lava lamp, glowing, changing, altering, and always moving.
—Leanne Eleff, 2001

Goals don't stay static but undergo transformation before, during, and after disputes. They will emerge as one type and, during the course of the dispute, change into another type. Even after the struggle is over, goals will shift and change. Relationships are made and transformed in communication with each other (Fisher-Yoshida 2014).

Eleanor is a senior in a conflict resolution class. She believes the grade on her last essay was too low.

The Bad Grade	
Eleanor to her friend:	That instructor has it in for me. He continues to ignore me in class and on the last assignment, he didn't understand my point, so he gave me a C. I'm going to challenge my grade. Eleanor, thinking to herself as she waits to see the instructor: Ok, when I go in there, I'm going to get him to understand how hard I worked on the analysis paper, and that he missed my main point, which is that my conflict styles change in context. I'll ask him to raise my grade.
Eleanor in the office:	Mr. Jones, I would like it if you would consider changing my grade on the first essay question. I don't think you understood what I was trying to write.
Mr. Jones:	Have a seat. Why don't you tell me what you were saying about your changing conflict styles (she does this).
Mr. Jones:	I get what you were saying. However, I asked you to fill out the style instrument, give three examples of your conflict styles, and decide which one you would call your "default" approach. You did not do that last piece of the assignment. I'm OK with your rewriting the paper, and then I'll give you the average of the two grades.
Eleanor:	That's fair. (He's being reasonable and I see that I ignored part of the assignment.)

Note how her goals changed. She began thinking the instructor was not paying attention to her in class and did not understand her style paper (relational and identity goals) and a content goal (raise my grade). Because the instructor treated her with respect by asking a question and listening to her, her relationship and content goals changed. She no longer felt disrespected, so her content goal (change my grade) dropped out of her primary consideration. Such change and flow are typical in conflict situations.

One way to look at this flow of goals is to specify how goals change across time from (1) prospective (before interacting with the person), to (2) transactive goals (during the interaction itself), to (3) retrospective (after the conflict). It is important to be able to track the changes in both your and the other person's goals—they continue to evolve over time.

Prospective Goals

The word *goals* most commonly connotes intentions people hold before they engage in conflict. For instance, Sally might say to Dorothy, "What do you hope to accomplish at the board meeting? The last one was awful—so much confusion and disorganization." Dorothy might reply, "I want to sort out who's in charge of the budget decisions and how we're supposed to come up with $5,000 more next year than we took in this year. I don't want to take responsibility for more fund-raising." Dorothy has stated her **prospective goals**—those she can identify before the board meeting begins. Simply stated, she hopes that the board

will decide who makes budget decisions and delegate fund-raising to some responsible party other than her, the board chair. The other board members will come to the meeting with their own prospective goals. An effectively managed meeting will take account of all the prospective goals members bring, whether they are readily stated or not.

Taking the time to clarify what you want from a particular interaction lays the groundwork for more effective conflict. The expectation of collaboration establishes a positive tone for the discussion. Keep in mind that your prospective goals work better as a beginning plan, not a hardened set of "must have" goals.

When you clarify your prospective goals, you

- Gain clarity about what you want from a meeting.
- Prepare yourself for a discussion.
- Show respect for your own and others' time and presence.

During the discussion, your goals continue to shift and change during the transaction itself. You contribute to constructive conflict management when you acknowledge the change, saying something like, "When I came to this meeting I was certain that I wanted nothing to do with fund-raising. I wanted to guide the organization's overall mission, but not be tasked with fund-raising. As we talk, I see that I know some of the donors well, and it makes sense for me to make contact with them. Let's get specific about who will contact which donors."

Transactive Goals

In many conflicts goals are partly unknown, only to become clear as the conflict unfolds. For example, during a struggle with your housemate over financial misunderstandings, you discover that what you really want is to move—which you did not know you felt until the argument began. You have just stumbled onto a **transactive goal**—one discovered during the conflict itself.

Respectful conversation, or genuine dialogue, creates the space for change to emerge as conversation continues. Each step along the way influences what will happen next, as interdependent relationships develop. When each conversation partner pays attention to self, others, and the relationship, surprising outcomes can emerge from conflict (Fisher-Yoshida 2014).

You may have been absolutely certain that you wanted an assistant to carry out the new project your boss assigned to you, but during a staff meeting you may change your demand for an assistant. You now say that you can do the work without an assistant for at least 6 months. What happened? Did you back down? Did the boss win? Did you have "no guts"? More likely, you became aware of the interdependent nature of your work team and decided to change your demand, given the needs of the entire group. You may have been given recognition for the difficulty of your job. Maybe your boss said in front of the group, "I'd like to give you an assistant, but I don't have the money in the budget and don't know where I can get it" (a face-saving message). Your conflict goals changed because of the communication event.

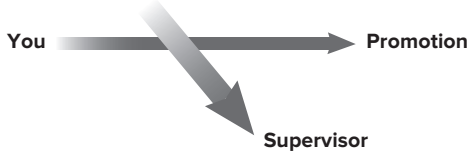
A school board member was trying to decide how to handle her strong opposition to the closed, or "executive," sessions of the board that her colleagues on the board supported. She discussed the incipient conflict with friends ahead of time, rehearsing what she was going to do (prospective goal). When the next board meeting arrived, she did not give her prearranged speech. She compromised and agreed with her colleagues that some closed meetings, in limited circumstances, were acceptable. This change is an example of transactive goal development.

If you are a person who says, "I don't know what I want until we get a chance to discuss it," you understand transactive goals. The following box exemplifies the way new goals develop as a conflict progresses. Note that the two friends see themselves as interdependent and that they value their relationship as well as solving the immediate topic issue (finding the lost silver pendant).

Verbal Communication		Goal Analysis
First phone call:		
Amy:	You know that silver pendant I loaned you? I guess you didn't return it with the rest of the jewelry, because I can't find it.	Amy's #1 prospective goal is to *get the pendant back from Janice.*
Janice:	I don't have it. I remember that I didn't borrow it because I knew it was valuable to you. You must have misplaced it somewhere. But I'll look.	Janice's #1 prospective goal is to *convince Amy that she is not responsible for the disappearance of the necklace,* a goal that is incompatible with Amy's prospective goal.
Second phone call:		
Amy:	I still can't find it—I'm getting panicky. I'll stay on the phone while you go look. Please check everywhere it might be.	Amy maintains prospective goal #1 by escalating her previous goal statement. Amy and Janice still have incompatible goals.
Janice:	You're upset about the necklace, and I don't know what I can do since I honestly don't think I have it. But what really concerns me is that you are upset with me. You mean a lot to me, and this hurts.	Transactive goal #2: *Affirm the relationship in spite of the loss of the necklace.*
Amy:	I know. I really don't want to put it all on you. I'm glad you understand, though. You know, John gave me that necklace.	Amy reaffirms transactive goal #2, making it mutual. She agrees to discuss, affirming the relationship as a new, additional goal.
Janice:	Well, what can we do to get this solved? I feel awful.	Janice restates transactive goal #2 and offers transactive goal #3: *Find the necklace together without damaging the relationship.*
Amy:	I'll hang up and we'll both go look everywhere and then report back.	Amy advances transactive goal #4: *Share the responsibility with a new plan of action.*
Janice:	OK. And then we'll come up with something if we don't find it right away. Cross your fingers.	Janice accepts transactive goal #4 and advances transactive goal #5: *We will keep working until we solve this problem.*

We shift to negative goals when we can't "get what we want." Frustration can lead to comments that belittle, injure, or try to damage the other. This shift from the original topic or content goal to a negative relationship or identity goal characterizes the destructive conflict. In diagram form, the goal change occurs as follows:

1. You want a promotion:
2. ——————————→ Promotion
3. When you ask her for a promotion, your supervisor says, "No way. You aren't going to get a promotion as long as I'm the boss here. Your work has been substandard, not worthy of promotion." Your boss interferes with your original goal, and you begin to focus most of your attention on her interference and your attempts to gain power.



4. You then begin to lose sight of your original goal and spend energy trying to get even with the boss. You talk to people at home and at work about her, tell others how biased she is, spread rumors at work, and do other things to undercut her authority.

This example describes a typical pattern of goal shifting in a conflict. What began as a topic goal, getting a promotion, turns into a relational contest between the two of you—you shift from a positive topic goal to a negative relational goal.

Such shifts occur often. Two business partners, for example, who begin by wanting to help each other earn sizable amounts of money, experience a misunderstanding over a contract and then spend the next 2 years trying to one-up each other during board meetings and to get others in the organization to side with them. The partnership begins to flounder as each member thinks the other is more trouble than he is worth.

One other type of goal shifting occurs in conflicts. Often, a person who is frustrated over the content of a conflict (the vote doesn't go your way) will shift from content to process. Concerns about fairness, equal treatment, and other process issues often surface when one has not been successful at attaining a desired content goal. The teenager who launches an appeal to use the family car and is turned down may resort to arguing that "you listened to Steve, but you didn't let me tell you why I needed the car. You treated me unfairly." She is switching from the unsuccessful content attempt to a discussion of process and relationship. Similar process concerns arise in many conflicts after the participants realize their content goals have been thwarted.

A change in any type of conflict goal spills over to the other types of conflict goals. Often, as in previous examples, identity issues become intertwined with relational goals. When you feel powerless in relationship to another person, your sense of effectiveness or worthiness is challenged. Thus, identity goals rise in importance.

Conflict parties also *sacrifice topic goals to achieve relationship goals.* When the spouse never argues, avoids expressing any disagreement, and always says, "Whatever you want," he or she is sacrificing content goals in order to maintain the relationship, or is indirectly communicating lack of interest (a relationship issue). Acquiescing to others and never telling them what you feel are types of topic goal sacrifice. In contrast, people will sacrifice relational goals to win on the topic. If you are intently set on your content goal (making money, going where you want for the weekend and expecting your partner to agree, or always winning), you may be sacrificing the relationship in order to win the content. If you never consider the wishes of the other and always try to win, you are probably destroying valuable relationships in order to accomplish your goals.

In conclusion, conflict goals change over time—they are in flux. As one goal is frustrated, others assume more importance. Goals change during the transactions we have with others.

Retrospective Goals

Retrospective goals emerge after the conflict is over. People spend a large part of their time and energy justifying decisions they have made in the past. They need to explain to themselves and others why they made the choices they did. This process often happens with intimates who, for example, have an intense conflict over discipline of the children. After the first triggering comment, they may say, "Let's decide what's best for the children, not just what fits our own upbringing" (prospective goal). During subsequent conflicts over specific instances of discipline, they discuss everything from how the individual children react, to whether Mom and Dad should support each other's choices, even if they don't agree. If they decide that discipline is to be handled differently from the way it was in past episodes, Mom might say retrospectively, "I mainly wanted to see whether you would begin to share the discipline with me." Dad might say, "All along I was really trying to get you to see that you need to loosen up with the kids." Assuming that the couple comes up with a wise agreement they can follow in future episodes, the retrospective sense-making helps them define who they are and make meaningful statements about the place of the conflict in their lives. Monday morning quarterbacking is important in ongoing relationships as well as in sports.

Since we do not know the implications of a conflict until we look back on it, retrospective goals give us clarity. Retrospective sense-making reverses the usual way of looking at goals (Weick 1979). Weick explains organizational behavior as *goal interpreted.* People act in an orderly fashion, coordinating their behavior with each other, but with little notion of how this is accomplished until after the fact. Then they engage in retrospective meetings, conversations, paper writing, and speeches to explain why they did what they did. Talking about what happened after an important conflict is as important as talking about what will happen before a conflict episode. In these retrospective accounts, your prospective goals for the next episode are formulated. Thus, we learn from experience.

Retrospective sense-making also serves the function of face-saving. Visitors to the United States often comment on our lack of face-saving social rituals as compared to Japan, China, and other countries. Even if you have been involved in a competitive conflict and have won, rubbing it in or gloating over the loser will only serve to alienate and enrage the person, perhaps driving him or her to devious actions in retaliation. If you give respect

to the person, even if you did not agree with the position, the person's "face" will be saved, and you will lay the groundwork for collaboration in the future. Following are some face-saving comments:

> Employer to job applicant: We looked very highly on you and your application. Our offer to Ms. Shepherd was based on her experience in our particular kind of operation. Even though you and I have been at odds for some time over organization of the new program, I want you to know that your new ideas are always sound and well organized. I just have different priorities.
>
> Mother to teenage daughter: I know you didn't want to cause us worry. You couldn't have known how upset we'd be that you were four hours late. But since you did not follow our agreement, we are grounding you for a week, as we said we would if the rule was not followed.

Goal Clarity

As noted, how conflict parties formulate, alter, and explain their goals in a conflict determines to a large degree the success of the conflict experience. This section gives suggestions for better articulating and working with goals to improve your conflicts.

Clarify Your Goals

Goals that are unclear or hard to specify usually produce more conflict. A careful specification of everyone's goals lets you decide which ones to abandon, which ones to trade, and which ones to maintain. The best goals include all four levels of conflict.

Sometimes, however, a discussion of goals in interpersonal conflict elicits the same avoidance reaction mentioned in earlier chapters: "I don't want to be manipulative. If I figure out what I want ahead of time, I'm being pushy and presumptuous—I'll let the chips fall where they may." However, all effective communication is goal directed. This means that communication is purposive, not that it is manipulative, and that people communicate for reasons and to reach goals. Since no one can avoid being goal directed, especially in conflict communication, productive conflict management depends on parties' taking open responsibility for their goals. In other words, know what your goals are, state them clearly to yourself, and communicate them in a flexible manner to your conflict partners. Advantages of clarifying your goals follow:

1. *Solutions go unrecognized if you do not know what you want.* If parents are not clear about whether they want their 18-year-old to live at home or to board in the dorm at a local college, they will not know how to manage the conflict with the son who wants to live in the dorm but does not have a job. If saving money is the primary goal, the parents might allow the son to live in the dorm and get a job. If the parents have decided that they do not want him to live in the dorm under any circumstances, the son's offer to get a job may trigger a covert conflict that is unclear and unproductive for all parties.
2. *Only clear goals can be shared.* Since people cannot read your mind, you must clearly communicate your goals. An example of this kind of goal sharing occurred in an academic department. The chairperson complained that the faculty was not paying enough attention to university politics. He made several statements over a period of a week or so, urging more attendance at meetings, more discussion of long-term budget and curriculum plans, and voluntary participation in activities around

campus. Since all this happened at the beginning of a semester, when the rest of the faculty were feeling busy, hassled by bureaucratic demands, and underappreciated, the response from the faculty was negative. A genuine conflict began to brew. Finally, the chairperson said, "Since keeping us involved in the university is my job, I feel really down when nobody supports what I'm doing. I need some feedback on what you think so I'm not just floundering around." Because he changed his goal statement from "Why don't you people work more?" to "I need support for what I'm doing," the conflict was reduced and productively managed.

3. *Clear goals can be altered more easily than vague goals.* One agency was embroiled in conflict over whether to fund and provide staff support for a new program to aid recently unemployed families. The three staff members who had been charged with setting up the new program did not know whether the agency director wanted to support that particular new program or whether he wanted to demonstrate to the funding sources that the agency was committed to being responsive to families in general. When the director clarified that the specific program should serve an underserved population, the staff members altered their previous goals so that the new program would assist with community problems of child abuse that were receiving little funding at that time. The change in staff goals was possible because the larger goals were clarified for the staff members, along with their important role in reaching the goals.
4. *Clear goals are reached more often than unclear goals.* Having a map helps travelers reach a destination. Raush et al. (1974) found that 66% of the conflicts in which the issue was clearly stated were successfully resolved, whereas only 18% of the conflicts in which the issue remained vague and nonspecific were resolved. For example, a couple is considering where to move after college. If they choose the first option, "We will stay in the same city no matter what," they will have made a significantly different choice than if they choose the second option, "We will both get the best jobs we can." Those with shared individual and relational destinations are more likely to arrive at some desired point together. Clarifying goals has one risky outcome: It may make seriously incompatible goals apparent; however, they will become apparent sooner or later. Additionally, when goals are "stated explicitly and directly there is control of escalation" (99). When one's goals are unclear, they often promote overreaction from the other person, who misjudges the nature of the conflict. We are remarkably poor at second-guessing the goals of our conflict partners.

Often people create difficulty by assuming that their goals cannot be attained—that the other party will stand in their way. How many times have you planned and schemed for days, only to find that others were perfectly willing to give you what you wanted? A friend was miserable because her children would not give her any free time on the weekends. She began to believe they did not respect her needs. Finally one night she said in tears, "If I don't have some time alone, I'll go crazy." The teenagers were glad to make plans to give her time with no responsibilities. She simply never had asked. Even if the goal is a difficult one, allotting time to accomplish a clear goal allows for its attainment (Neale and Bazerman 1985).

In conclusion, clarifying goals is a key step in conflict management. People assess the conflicts in which they participate by making decisions about which goals are worth pursuing. In common language, they get a "grip" on the situation before deciding how to proceed.

Estimate the Other's Goals

Once a destructive conflict begins spiraling, *all our behavior is* **reactive.** We make choices based on what we think the other is thinking and intending. While not as elaborate as chess moves, all conflicts share a structure similar to chess—knowing the other has "moves," you try to counter his or her moves. Our **estimate of the other's goals**—about "what the other wants"—propels our own choices.

When you talk to two parties to a dispute individually, you will be struck by their misjudgments of the other's goals. Here are some samples from real disputes:

Party #2's Estimate of #1's Goals	Party #1's Goals
He wants to control me.	I need some predictability.
She is trying to fire me.	I want to restructure the unit.
He wants favored treatment.	I want to be recognized.
He doesn't value our input.	This crisis demands action.
She is getting ready to break up with me.	I need just a little more space.

One of the patterns in disputes is that as you get more convinced you *know* what the other wants, you are less accurate. Figure 3.9 demonstrates this relationship. In a congregation that was attempting to heal from long-standing conflicts, primarily stemming from in-group and out-group affiliations, one task force member stated that her primary goal in a reconciliation group was to establish a safe and trusting group climate. Soon, however, she blamed two members for not speaking to her, saying this was why her goal was a trusting environment. The two blamed members did not believe her goals; after her harsh comments, they assumed she wanted to shift responsibility for the demoralized environment. Yet, she was telling the truth about what she wanted, while using a tactic, blame, that worked against her goal. She would have been better off to reflect on her goals, making sure her comments preserved the relationships and the identity needs of others.

Becoming convinced we know absolutely what the other wants sets the stage for misinterpretation. As Sillars (2002) notes in his research on married couples in conflict, "I have been struck by how confident people seem to be when making very tenuous inferences

Figure 3.9 Confidence and Accuracy about the Other's Goals

about others" (8). One dramatic example comes from church members who were sexually abused by clergy. They had this to say about their goals:

> Most survivors do not want to receive money from the church as compensation for what was done to us. Most of us merely want to ensure that our perpetrators are removed from being able to abuse others in their position as trusted priests. We'd like some apology for what we've endured. Sometimes we want an apology or acknowledgement given to our parents. (Survivors 2004)

The legal system is not set up to support all these goals. In American culture we often substitute money for other goals. We do not have a well-functioning system that compensates people for nonmonetary goals.

In most personal conflicts in which you have known the other for a long time, your inferences about the other are "well informed but also quite biased" (Sillars 2002, 2). We all assume we "know" someone well, but the research is quite clear that we don't! For one thing, when individuals are asked to report their thoughts during a video recall, only 5 to 7% of the time are they thinking about their partner's perspective (Sillars 2002). Further, while one person focuses on the topic (content), the other focuses on the relationship—they tend to see only their part of the TRIP issues and not the other person's.

Given that there is misunderstanding about the other, this by itself feeds negative conflict spirals and the descent into destructive conflict. In addition, however, *both parties feel misunderstood by the other.* They somehow know the other is misunderstanding their goals, and, in fact, feeling misunderstood then moves the conflict to a more destructive level. As you feel misunderstood, you will choose destructive conflict moves to get back at the other.

No wonder we get into such difficulties in conflict. We misunderstand the other, react to what we think he or she is intending, feel very confident in our assessments, and then justify our damaging moves.

No magic process untangles these intertwining misperceptions. Communication itself is fraught with difficulties, but one effective action is to ask the other what he or she needs. Sometimes all you have to do is ask, listen, and act. One couple argued repetitively about finances—whether they had enough money to go out to eat, or spend money on a trip. Sarah, who was in charge of paying the bills from a joint account, once yelled in frustration, "What do you want? I pay the bills on time, I balance our account online every week or so, and I never spend money we haven't agreed on!" When the conflict dust settled, Greg said, "I want to keep a $500 buffer in our joint account." Sarah replied, "I did not know you wanted that." Greg replied, "I thought you did not care what I wanted." All his dampening behavior changed when they agreed on a lesser amount as the buffer. They started having fun again.

Collaborative Goals

The best goals are clear, as explained previously, and help conflict participants collaborate on resolving the conflict while protecting their ability to work, live, or interact with each other in important ways. The following statements characterize **collaborative goals** and may be used as a checklist for "good goals":

1. *Short-, medium-, and long-range issues are addressed.* Many times people engage too forcefully with others at the beginning of a conflict because they are afraid their ideas will not be heard. Collaborative goals build in ways for people to be involved

in the process as it unfolds. To form collaborative goals, plan for evaluations along the way. Give as much attention to a few weeks or months from now as to "right now." Looking at longer-range goals helps de-escalate the importance of initial, prospective goals. One city council, meeting in a retreat, specified which goals, over a time line, were important to them. They set up a plan to specify who would do what by when and with what evaluation process. A year later, only those goals that had been broken down into a specific time line were achieved. Goals that are set up on a time line are less overwhelming than global goals such as "Let's change the way we get along as a family" or "I want more say about the financial structure of our family."

2. *Goals are behaviorally specific.* Behaviorally specific goals can be checked. "I'll try to do better" might become a doable goal with specification; at present, it is a positive statement but not a collaborative goal. Terms used in intimate relations are often more vague than statements in business relationships. A corporate vice president could not get away with telling the president, "I will try the best I can to remember to turn the monthly reports in on time," but intimates make such vague promises frequently. Specificity helps the parties know when a goal has been accomplished. The following examples illustrate how to make vague statements more specific:

   - Instead of saying, "Please respect my things more," say, "I want you to ask me before you borrow any of my clothes. I'm usually glad to oblige, but I want you to ask me, all right?"
   - Instead of saying, "Let's get this show on the road" (and then showing nonverbal impatience during a meeting), say, "I need to leave this meeting at 5:00 sharp."
   - Instead of saying, "This time, young lady, you're going to listen to what I say!" a parent might say, "Last time we talked about your messy room I wasn't pleased with where we got. This time, I want you to listen to me, and I will listen to you, and then I want us to decide on what is reasonable. OK?"

3. *Statements orient toward the present and future.* The language of change uses what can be done now instead of what should have been done in the past. Hopeful statements instead of blaming statements set the expectation that agreements can indeed come about. A department head might say, "I want our program group to increase services to clients without increasing hours worked by our counselors," instead of, "We have got to be more efficient than we were last year."
4. *Goals recognize interdependence.* In all conflicts, tension arises between serving self- interest and serving the interests of the other party. Research consistently indicates, that when conflict parties operate with both concern for self and concern for others, the agreements that emerge serve the parties best (Holloway and Brager 1985; Tutzauer and Roloff 1988). This does not mean that you give in to the other; you can remain firm in achieving solutions that work for you while simultaneously seeking to please the other (Tutzauer and Roloff 1988). We will discuss how to construct collaborative solutions in Chapter 5.

5. *Collaborative goals recognize an ongoing process.* An overriding goal of constructive conflict is to remain committed to the process of constructive conflict. The particular content can be transcended by adhering to a collaborative process.

Fisher and Ury (1981) remind conflict managers that goal setting begins with the participation of all conflict parties. "Give them a stake in the outcome by making sure they participate in the process" (27). For collaborators, "the process is the product" (29).

The outcome of constructive conflict should be wise agreements on each of the TRIP interests. Wise agreements are fair and durable and take the interests of all parties into account (Fisher and Ury 1981, 4). The struggle for wise agreements is exemplified by a couple with children that goes to court for a divorce. The agreement should be representative of both sides; should be fair to all parties, including the children; should keep the couple out of court in the future; and should set up care for the children if they are too young to care for themselves. The process should be efficient, involve all parties' interests, and improve or at least not damage the relationship between the parties.

When conflict parties work together to clarify goals and specify what the conflict is and is not about, destructive conflicts subside. Participants can come to see themselves as working side by side on a problem, attacking the problem instead of each other. The overarching process goal is "We, working together, can solve this problem that is confronting us." Part of the self-interest of conflict parties is preserving a workable relationship, focusing on the problem instead of each other. Excellent conversation can lead parties to clarity of their individual interests, their overlapping interests, and therefore, the goals that are most likely to help all reach satisfaction.

Summary

As a conflict unfolds, topic, relational, identity, and process goals emerge (TRIP). Topic goals are the "objective," verifiable issues that people talk about. Relationship goals are those pertaining to the parties' influence on each other. Who gets to decide, how they treat one another, and other aspects of their communication are relationship goals. Identity, or face-saving, goals have to do with the needs of people to present themselves positively in interactions and to be treated with approval and respect. Process goals refer to parties' interests in how the interaction is conducted. Although most conflict parties center their discussions on content and process goals, the relationship and identity components fuel the feeling in a given conflict.

Goals change in the course of a conflict. Prospective goals are those identified before interacting with the other parties. Transactive goals emerge during the communication exchanges. Transactive goals often shift; a destructive conflict is characterized by a shift from original goals to a desire to harm the other party. Retrospective goals are identified after the conflict episodes have occurred. Unregulated, unplanned, fast-paced conflicts keep many people from understanding their goals until they later have time to reflect on the transactions.

Clarifying your goals, better estimating the other's goals, and working to build collaborative goals enhances productive conflict management. Working against or without consulting the other party often sets destructive forces in motion that preclude integrative management of the conflict.

Key Terms

types of goals 77
topic goals 78
relational goals 80
identity, or face-saving, goals 84
process goals 89
prospective goals 97
transactive goals 98
retrospective goals 101
reactive behavior 104
estimating the other's goals 104
collaborative goals 105

Review Questions

1. Define the four types of goals (TRIP).
2. How do goals shift over time?
3. How do goals overlap and influence one another?
4. When do conflict parties shift their goals?
5. What does it mean to sacrifice one kind of goal for another?
6. What happens to goals in interactions with others?
7. What happens when we experience change in prospective goals?
8. Give an example of a transactive goal.
9. What are common identity themes?
10. How do retrospective goals change?
11. What does it mean to "specialize" in a type of goal?
12. What are the advantages of goal clarity?
13. Do conflict parties accurately estimate the other's goals?
14. What determines if goals are collaborative?

Chapter 4

Power: The Structure of Conflict

Power is the ability to achieve a purpose . . . whether it is good or bad depends on the purpose.
—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Just as energy is a fundamental concept in physics, **power** is a fundamental concept in conflict theory. In interpersonal conflicts, perceptions of power are at the heart of any analysis (Lasswell 2009; Magee 2009). While people seldom talk directly about power, the currents operate as unseen but felt forces in any conflict (Dunbar 2015). Reflect on times when you have heard someone say, "I'd really rather you did not do that," or when your family was gathering ideas about where to go on vacation. Maybe you can remember how you decided where to sit, when to speak, or whether to speak at all in a tense meeting at work. Joyce (author) tells the story of when, in her childhood, her father had a chance to take a job in Hawaii, leaving their home in Dallas. She and her sister, the older siblings of three, lobbied their 3-year-old brother to "vote" for Hawaii. The two sisters learned about the influence of power when their parents gently informed them that they were not making this decision by voting, and while the parents wanted to know how the children felt, *they* would make the decision. Power determines many of our communication choices.

Analyzing power helps the conflict student learn more about dealing with situations of extreme power imbalances, such as violence and verbal abuse, bullying, and economic disempowerment. You will also become better equipped to confront less dramatic but still influential power differences that may accrue from gender roles, work systems, intimate and family systems, and differences of advantage.

This chapter examines common assumptions people hold about power, introduces theories of power, illustrates orientations to power, analyzes bases of power, and proposes a relational theory of power. You will learn to assess power, and most important, how to rebalance power so constructive conflict can take place. Sometimes all we can do in conflicts is keep the destruction from spiraling out of control, or negotiate an uneasy "balance of terror." Often, thankfully, alternatives to the top-down exercise of power, or avoidance when people are out of power, emerge when people commit to finding them. Constructive use of power solves problems, enhances relationships, and balances power, at least during particular interactions. When that happens, the hard work that goes into learning about conflict management is worth it!

Power Defined

Scholars define power various ways. A focus on *outcome,* on power *in the relationship,* and hybrid approaches which meld both have served the field well (Totman 2014). In previous editions of this text, power was defined as *the ability to influence a relational*

partner in any context because you control, or at least the partner perceives that you control, resources that the partner needs, values, desires, or fears. Interpersonal power also includes the ability to resist the influence attempts of a partner. (Thanks to Maureen Monsour for this classroom-tested definition.) Dunbar (2015), in a thorough review of literature on interpersonal power, suggests a new, simple definition of power, to which we add the idea of resistance:

Power is the ability to produce intended effects, and in particular, the ability to influence the behavior of another person, and to resist the influence attempts of others.

Like any other ability, people with power do not always choose to exercise their ability, and even if they do, how effective they are depends on other people and their responses. Six characteristics of power support the above definition:

- People with power are more likely to get their way than people with less power, even if the power is exercised with subtlety.
- Power is an attribute of the system rather than the property of the individual.
- Power changes in a dynamic way, depending on interaction.
- Power depends both on one's perception of others' power, and the behaviors of each person.
- Power is always unbalanced, although people in relationship may balance power across different spheres and over time.
- Power depends on social relationships, interactions, and outcomes of specific conflicts. (Adapted from Dunbar 2015)

Personal Orientations to Power

In Chapter 2 you learned that your particular views of self, other, and relationship are the key ingredients in a conflict (along with the other's perceptions of these). When a dispute occurs between people, their perspectives on their own and others' power will predispose them to engage in certain communicative moves. People feel passionately about power—who has it, who ought to possess more or less, how people misuse power, and how justified they feel in trying to gain more power for themselves.

We each need enough power to live the life we want. We want to influence events that matter to us. We want to have our voices heard, and make a difference. We want to protect ourselves against perceived harm. We want to hold ourselves in high esteem and we need to highly regard those we care about. We do not want to be victimized, misused, or demeaned. No one can escape feeling the effects of power—whether we have too much or too little.

When people struggle with each other, they almost never agree on anything having to do with power. For example, you might be a student intern in a real estate firm and you feel that brokers have all the power. The brokers, on the other hand, see you having sources of power such as your close connection to others in the office, your ability to help the brokers do their jobs, and your knowledge of the real estate business you gained working last summer. Plus, you are not yet trying to make a living from real estate. If you see yourself as low

power you are likely to keep silent even when you disagree—giving the impression that you agree when you don't. If, on the other hand, you feel that both you and the brokers have sources of power, you will be more likely to engage in discussion to work through issues. If you think of yourself as "just a lowly intern," you may miss many opportunities to be a team member because you have assessed your power in this system incorrectly.

You probably can identify an emotional response when you hear the word *power.* Kipnis (1976) notes, "Like love, we know that power exists, but we cannot agree on a description of it" (8). The following exercise will help you think about how you respond to the *idea* of power.

Application 4.1 Meaning of "Power"

Respond quickly to the word power, as you did with the word conflict in Chapter 2. What comes to mind? The following are common associations: Mark the ones that fit for you, and add connotations of your own:

power play	power source	power corrupts
high powered	power behind the throne	devious
bullheaded	run over	authority
power politics	powerhouse	overpower
low powered	sneaky	strong-arm
bulldozed	powerful	influence

Discuss what you were taught about the use of power. List three explicit or implicit "learnings" about power from your personal history, then discuss these with your small group. Some examples from students include:

"When people gang up on you, there's nothing to do but get away. You can't go up against a group."

"The most important kind of power is your own character."

"Stay connected to people in power; they can help you."

"Using power with those you care about is despicable."

"We don't talk about power. Power isn't nice."

"Your father/mother has the say around here. Don't cross him/her."

"It's safest to get in a coalition with someone older and stronger."

"I learned to gain power by manipulation, deception, sneaking, or lying."

"As a pretty young girl I learned to gain power by flirting and playing with boys and men."

As reflected by this list, people have different views of power, some positive and some negative. Some people see power as good and exciting. Others see power as instinctive—something we all possess innately (Pierro, Cicero, and Raven 2008). Still others see power as the result of political skill; as a charismatic thing that people have within themselves. We respond to conflict differently based, in part, on our different orientations to what power is—positive, negative, or benign.

Power Denial

Some people dislike any discussion of power. They may deny that power and influence are appropriate topics for discussion. One student wrote that in her relationship with her boyfriend, "No one has to have power—we just listen to each other, try to respond with love, and always put the relationship and each other first." She seemed to think that acknowledging any use of power would destroy her idealized relationship with her boyfriend. Some view power as negative and find "explicit references to power . . . in bad taste" (Kipnis 1976, 2). Conducting research on married couples, Cahill (1982) encountered this view when he interviewed them about their relationships. When he asked them about decision making, persuasive techniques, and disagreements, the discussion flowed smoothly. But when he asked about their relative amounts of power, he encountered long silences, halting answers, obvious embarrassment, and reluctance to speak of the topic. Similarly, McClelland (1969) noted that when people were told they had high drives to achieve or affiliate, they derived great satisfaction from the feedback, but people who were told they had a high drive for power experienced guilt.

In its extreme form, reluctance to talk about power emerges as **power denial.** Haley (1959) listed four common attempts people use to deny that they exercise power, as listed in the accompanying box.

Denying Power Use

1. Deny that you communicated something.
2. Deny that something was communicated.
3. Deny that you communicated something to the other person.
4. Deny that the situation even existed, for example, "That did not happen. You remember it completely wrong."

The speaker can deny *he or she is communicating* in a number of ways, such as saying, "I'm not myself when I drink," or "It's just the pressure I'm under that's making me act like such a grouch." You may hear the claim "I can't help it. I told you I was jealous. I'm not responsible for what I said." To say that you are not responsible for your communication lets you exercise control (if others accept your claim) while denying that you are doing so. Denying that a *message was communicated* is another way to ignore the existence of power. The simplest way to deny communication is to say, "I did not say that." Since this kind of denial usually gets you in trouble after a while, another form develops, such as, "I forgot I said that. Did I really say that? I didn't mean to." For example, a supervisor might consistently forget to include the new members of a staff in the e-mail lists. As a result, the newer, less powerful members are often late for meetings or miss them totally, having to reschedule other meetings at the last minute. When confronted by those left out, the supervisor says, "Oh, my administrative aide is responsible for scheduling meetings."

Denying that a message was communicated *to a particular person* is another way of expressing discomfort with the exercise of power. For example, a salesperson rings the doorbell of an apartment complex, and the following dialogue ensues:

Salesperson:	Hello, I'd like to take this opportunity . . .
Apartment dweller:	People are bothering me too much! Oh, I'm not talking about you. It's just that everyone bugs me day in and day out. I get no peace of mind. I wish the world would calm down and leave me alone.
Salesperson:	Maybe I can see you another time. I'm sorry I bothered you . . .

The person who was bothered is exercising considerable control in the communicative transaction and also denying that the remarks are not meant for that particular salesperson. Another common way of denying that your comments were addressed to the other person is to claim that you were "just thinking out loud" and did not mean to imply anything toward the other person. For instance, a boss might say, muttering under his or her breath, "If I could count on people . . ." Then when a subordinate asks what is wrong, the boss might say, "What? Oh, nothing—just a hard day."

The last way to deny communicative power attempts is to *deny that what has been said applies to this situation.* Saying, "I'm used to being treated unfairly by others; I probably always will be," denies the clear implication that you feel the other is treating you in a demeaning manner. One employee left work without notifying her supervisor. She had been working extra hours in order to finish a report due to their funding agency. As she left, she was heard to say, "Let's just see how everyone can get along without my help since they seem to ignore my suggestions." When her supervisor confronted the employee on the overheard statement, she said, "Oh, I was just under stress from working all weekend. I didn't mean anything about the rest of the team. They're doing the best they can." The employee who left denied that she used her power to withhold her expertise under deadline pressure. She also denied the importance of what she said.

All of the preceding examples are ways that people can deny exercising power in a relationship when, in fact, they really are exercising power. Whenever you communicate with another, what you say and do exercises some communicative control—you either go along with someone else's definition of the conflict, struggle over the definition, or supply it yourself. Even if you would rather be seen as a person who does not exert power, you exercise influence on how the conflict interaction is going to be defined.

Many people who hold high-power positions are particularly prone to denying that they have or use power. Directors, presidents, CFOs, doctors, teachers, managers, and some parents have more power than they may recognize. If you are in a high-power position, you may not see yourself as powerful. Others do. Here are some of the communication consequences of being in a high-power position:

- You don't know what people don't want you to know.
- You hear about one-tenth of the "grapevine" information.
- People are more cautious/afraid/nervous/withholding than you think they are.
- The "Open Door Policy" that you talk about is not effective.
- People want to please you.
- Your supervisees cover up what they don't know.
- Your team may express agreement and approval of your ideas, then talk among themselves about problems with your ideas.

People in high-power positions must take specific communication steps to address the natural outcomes of unequal power. These balancing moves will be presented later in the

chapter. For now, remember, if you are in a position of designated leadership or organizational power, the communication around you changes. Lower-power people cannot productively balance the power without the help of the higher-power people.

The fact that power is central to the study of conflict does not mean that people are manipulative and try to gain power illegitimately. Rather, the *productive* exercise of personal power is crucial to your self-concept. Without some exercise of power in your interpersonal relationships, you would soon feel worthless as a person.

Remember that just as *one cannot not communicate* (Watzlawick et al. 1967), you do not have the option of not using power. We only have options about whether to use power destructively or productively for ourselves and our relationships.

A Relational Theory of Power

Are people, in themselves, powerful? If you say, "Lynn is a powerful person," you may, if she is your friend, be referring to such attributes as verbal facility, intelligence, compassion, warmth, and understanding. Or you may refer to a politician as powerful, alluding to her ability to make deals, call in favors, remember names and faces, and understand complex economic issues. In interpersonal relationships, however, a **relational theory of power** explains status more effectively. Excluding situations of unequal physical power and use of violence, power is a property of the social relationship rather than a quality of the individual. Lynn, for instance, has power with her friends because she has qualities they value. When she suggests something to do, like going on an annual women's backpacking trip, her friends try to clear their calendars because they like her, have fun with her, and feel understood by her. Lynn has a way of making a group feel cohesive and at ease. But if an acquaintance hated backpacking, did not like some of the other people going on the trip, and was irritated at Lynn because of a misunderstanding that had not yet been cleared up, Lynn's power with the irritated acquaintance would lessen considerably.

Individuals do not own power. The particular relationship creates the power distribution. Therefore, power is a *product of the communication relationship* (Guinote and Vescio 2010; Raven 2008). Certain qualities matter in this relationship, such as economic resources, love and affection, or networking skills. Rather than residing in people, "power is always interpersonal" (May 1972, 23). In the strictest sense, except when violence and physical coercion are used, power is *given* from one party to another in a conflict. Power can be taken away when the situation changes. Power dynamics are fluid, changing, and dependent on the specific relationship and context (Dunbar 2015; Pratto, Lee, Tan, and Pitpitanand 2010). Each person in a conflict has some degree of power, though one party may have more compared to the other, and the power can shift during a conflict.

Power is based on one's dependence on resources or currencies that another person controls, or seems to "possess." Emerson (1962) specified that a person's power is directly tied to the nature of the relationship. In terms of two people, A and B, person A has power over person B to the extent that B is dependent on A for goal attainment. Likewise, person B has power over person A to the extent that A is dependent on B. The following box expresses this simple formula.

PAB = DBA

(the power of A over B is equal to the dependence that B has on A), and

PBA = DAB

(the power of B over A is equal to the dependence that A has on B).

Your dependence on another person is a function of (1) the importance of the goals the other can influence and (2) the availability of other avenues for you to accomplish what you want. As Emerson (1962) states, "The dependence of Actor B upon Actor A is directly proportional to B's motivational investment in goals mediated by A, and inversely proportional to the availability of those goals to B outside of the A-B relation" (31). In a mutually beneficial relationship, power is not fixed, but shifts as each becomes dependent in a positive way on the resources the other person may offer. This process builds a relationship and takes time to accomplish (Donohue and Kolt 1992).

Both/and power, or power that is shared, remains the model of choice for many women in Western culture. Shared dependency creates a more vital relationship than unequal dependency. Researchers at the Wellesley Centers for Women have spent four decades explicating "relational theory" in an attempt to balance out the more traditional assumptions (which are thankfully changing) of a patriarchal system. In their collective writings, they describe how boys were traditionally socialized to depend on autonomy, or separation from the constraints of other people's views, and from group identity. Boys were more comfortable with the hierarchy of teams, captains, coaches, and winning and losing than were girls. Girls learned to play with less emphasis on hierarchy. Many (not all) girls' games are cooperative in nature, as they play out roles, after discussing together what to do. As Heim and Galant noted (1993), there's no boss in dolls. For boys, conflict meant competition, which often enhanced their relationships. For girls, the win/win strategy (enhancing mutual dependence) is still often preferred.

Maturity and competence depend on growth-in-connection and mutuality. The ability to develop relationally depends on mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and responsibility to both self and others. It is shared positive power. Relational theory underlies effective conflict resolution, of the collaborative kind, which will be presented extensively later. When people work in teams in organizations, the ability to use mutual, or both/and power, is necessary. Yet this kind of mutuality is often not valued as much as the more masculine **either/or power.** Fletcher (1999) describes how both/and work disappears in organizations since it is not categorized as "real work." For instance, preventing problems is not seen as important as solving problems on some work environments. Mothers who coordinate highly complex family activities sometimes are viewed as "not working" because their efforts involve interaction among all the family members instead of major attention being given to their own schedules and needs, with the attendant economic rewards. Fletcher's (1999) research with engineering firms showed that in a culture that prizes individual achievement and winning, voluntarily helping others was seen as naïve and powerless (95).

The following case will illustrate the difference between either/or and both/and power

Application 4.2 The Case of Lynn and Daniel

Lynn and Daniel are a married couple in their 30s. Daniel is employed as a smoke jumper supervisor. This work requires him to be ready literally at a moment's notice to get in a plane and direct safety activities for firefighters from various regions when a fire breaks out. Lynn and Daniel have two small children, ages 2 and 4. They have decided that for now, the family needs are best served by Lynn's being the primary parent, and taking care of the children, especially since Daniel is sometimes gone for weeks during fire season.

Here's where the problem comes in. In Daniel's family the person making the money had the power. He believes that since Lynn is not making much money (she works part time as a piano teacher), she should not make major purchases without his permission. He expects Lynn to pay the necessary bills, but to ask him for money, when she needs it, for household expenses. Lynn is angry and sometimes feels defeated since, in her view, Daniel does not know the needs of the household. She thinks she should be able to make expenditures as she sees fit. When she wants to plan a trip, or buy something out of the ordinary, Daniel says, "Make the money, then. I'm working as hard as I can." Lynn believes that Daniel completely devalues her work at home.

How Might Lynn and Daniel Talk About Their Conflict?

What Lynn Feels and Thinks Lynn feels furious some of the time; she often feels misunderstood and devalued. She sees herself as extremely careful with household expenses. She shops when needed items are on sale, watches for good grocery values, and buys the kids' clothes at consignment shops. She swaps clothes and toys with other mothers of young children. Lynn often feels competent and powerful in her role. She loves her children, is glad to be home with them, and experiences her mothering as a chosen job. Truth be told, she is often glad when Daniel is gone on a fire, because she can make decisions without "going through Daniel." She loves Daniel, but is often angry with him, and feels sad because her affection diminishes when they fight.

In Lynn's family, money was always very tight, and she is proud of her skills at stretching a small budget. Her mother did the same kind of good job that Lynn does, and her father appreciated her efforts. Her father worked as the manager of a small-town store, so he was present in the home and often complimented Lynn's mom on her homemaking skills.

Lynn has a college degree in communication with a minor in child development. She is upset that she and Daniel have not been able to solve their chronic, ongoing conflict about expenses. Lynn now sees Daniel as "just wanting to have all the power." In her view he lords it over her since she doesn't make money. Lynn sees herself as making money by saving the family money.

Then a trigger event arises. Daniel is gone for 6 weeks on a major fire. During that time, Lynn's mother develops breast cancer. Daniel is out of cell phone contact much of the time. Lynn decides to fly herself and the kids to the Midwest to be with her mother for the period when Mom is deciding what kind of treatment to pursue. Lynn puts the tickets on their credit card.

"Nothing is more important than being with my family at this time," Lynn thinks. "Daniel will be upset, but he has to understand my values. I'll let him know how important this is to me and mom. She hasn't seen the kids in over a year and it's the right thing to do."

What Daniel Thinks and Feels Daniel agrees that it is important for Lynn to be home with the young kids. He agrees that she should go to graduate school, if she wants to, when the kids are in school. He loves Lynn and feels fortunate to have found her. He thinks she is an excellent mother. Daniel is very concerned about his job. His major concern is his safety, and the safety of his crew. He has to make very tough judgment calls that affect their safety. He has a degree in forestry and resource management. While he has had a chance to move out of active firefighting, since he trains and supervises during non–fire seasons, he likes the challenge of making good judgment calls. He is popular with his crew. They trust him and like working on his crew, because he is skilled and fair. He is a quick thinker, a no-nonsense leader, who nevertheless feels his responsibilities deeply.

At home, Daniel loves to be a father to his kids. He misses them when he is gone, as he misses Lynn. Daniel worries about money since he is, for now, the sole earner. His ability to earn extra money depends on his hardship pay, which means being gone for more than a few days. His father and mother argued about money. His father made most of the money, while his mother worked part time while raising five children. His father was a school administrator who was an alcoholic, although most of the people in their community did not know it. He was occasionally abusive to the kids, and demeaning to their mother. Daniel made a decision when he first left home never to be abusive, as his father was. He has made his own peace with his father, who admires Daniel's work. He is close to his mother.

Daniel thinks he and Lynn are doing a good job of raising their children and getting along as young parents. However, Daniel becomes angry when Lynn spends more than a budgeted amount of money without checking with him. He does not see their arrangement as one that requires "Lynn has to ask me." Rather, he feels it is a matter of respect. He is not interested in what he considers "frills," and disagrees with Lynn's choices about some of the ways to spend money, especially on trips, vacations, and family visits. He thinks those expenditures can wait until they are both working. He has not seen his parents and younger siblings in 3 years; they communicate infrequently, although he calls his mother often when he comes back from a fire since she worries about him.

When Daniel was able to call Lynn he found out that she was leaving the next day to see her mother. He was furious and told Lynn he wanted her to cancel her plans.

The Communication Possibilities Lynn and Daniel will not be able to see each other for at least 2 weeks. They have never been more at odds with each other in their 8-year marriage.

Here are some **ineffective communication strategies** that Lynn and Daniel can use to resolve their conflict.

Lynn's Ineffective Communication Strategies

- "We may not have the money in the bank, but that's what emergency credit cards are for. We can deal with the expenses later."
- "You cannot tell me when to see my own mother when she is scared and sick."
- "Sure. You couldn't possibly understand a normal relationship with a parent, given how sick your family is."

- "If you try to stop me, I'll go anyway and maybe I won't come home."
- "My Dad sent the money." (This is not true. She thinks she'll deal with the problem later.)
- "You are breaking my heart. I'll never forgive you."
- "I've already told the kids we are going to see Grandma."
- "You can't possibly understand how I feel."

Daniel's Ineffective Communication Strategies

- "You do not have the right to make this decision without me."
- "You care nothing for how hard I am working. It will take a year to pay off this trip."
- "Can't you talk to her on the phone every day?"
- "Leave the kids with your friend. She owes you some babysitting time."
- "You are being unreasonable. Wait until you know what is going to happen, then maybe we can work out a trip."
- "Don't you care what I think? Is this all up to you?"
- "You have no sense of what the limits are to what I make. If you want to go, get a part-time job."

In small groups, (1) identify what's wrong with these approaches; (2) specify ways that might work to open up communication. Role-play some of the best ideas you have learned so far, without "caving in." Lynn and Daniel both have reasons for their opinions and feelings. Identify your biases, and use the best communication skills you can—without abandoning the issues and concerns under this power struggle. The class should give feedback on how realistically the "Lynn team" and "Daniel team" play their roles. During the role-play, class members can come up and give new suggestions about what might work. Remember that Lynn and Daniel are interdependent; they love each other, and a lot is at stake.

Bases of Power

If you have traveled in a foreign country you may have struggled with different currencies. Euros used in Greece are worthless in India, where rupees are used. Likewise, a pocketful of rupees is worthless in France, unless you exchange them. Just as money depends on the context where it is to be spent (the country), your **power currencies** depend on how much your particular resources are *valued by the other persons in a relationship context.* You may have a vast amount of expertise in the rules of basketball, but if your fraternity needs an intramural football coach, your currencies are not as valuable. Power depends on the ability to employ currencies *that other people need.* In the same manner, if other people possess currencies you value, such as the ability to edit your term paper or give you a ride, they potentially maintain some degree of power over you in your relationships with them. Conflict is often confusing because people try to spend a currency that is not valued in a particular relationship. You may have heard a discarded romantic partner proclaim, "But I am a good person!" Goodness must not be the currency the person who broke off the relationship most wants.

Power currencies are classified in many different ways by researchers (Totman 2014). One classic categorization is Raven and French's bases of power as *reward, coercive, legitimate, referent,* and *expert* (Raven 2008; Raven and French 1956). Kipnis (1976) maintained that influential tactics are best classified as threats and promises, persuasion, reinforcement control, and information control. May (1972) notes five types of power: exploitative, manipulative, competitive, nutrient, and integrative. Folger, Poole, and Stutman (1993) supply this list: special skills and abilities, expertise about the task, personal attractiveness and likability, control over rewards and/or punishments, formal position in a group, loyal allies, persuasive skills, and control over critical group possessions.

Other ways of categorizing bases of power are well described by Totman (2014) in his extensive analysis of the way power and leadership work together, especially in religious congregations. *Normative power* depends on membership in certain groups that people value. Formal declarations of allegiance, or normative power, include the U.S. pledge of allegiance (20), dress codes in corporations, policies that certain religious groups adhere to, or want their members to adopt, and student codes of conduct regarding plagiarism and documentation of work.

Settings can influence power in a striking way. This form of power literally sets the stage upon which power is determined within the group (Totman 2014). Think of a judge being dressed in formal black robes, sitting on a higher plane than people in the courtroom. The norms dictate that when the bailiff intones, "all rise," that everyone does (21).

Some forms of power depend on *trust.* A person regarded by others as an *authority* needs to have a high level of knowledge in the area of leadership and specific knowledge required by the position of authority (Totman 2014), as well as be trustworthy of reasonable and fair action. When *mistrust* is high, people may not believe each other, therefore reducing their willingness to depend on the goodwill or the word of the other. Trust is one of the first qualities to suffer when lying is suspected, or when people refuse to give others, such as intimate partners, respect and kind treatment. For couples dealing with betrayal, lack of interest, rude or cruel treatment, or lying, trust is the first quality to suffer and the last to return. When trust remains very low, the relationship usually ends.

Designated power, or position power, can be easily seen. The president of the United States, police officers, managers at work, and professors all have certain designations of power in a particular role. Persons of color undoubtedly view the power of a police officer, when he pulls over their car, differently than white women may. Your classroom instructor can assign your grade, and your supervisor at work can give you a raise for superior work (Maurer and Seibel 2010). Applying the relational theory of power, however, if you are not a citizen of the United States the president may carry less of a powerful image, or if you are a member of an opposing political party you may not regard the current president highly. If an employee knows that she will request a transfer to another school, she may not care much what her current supervisor thinks of her teaching if she has already received a good recommendation from her principal.

Regardless of the various labels, everyone has potential currencies that may be used to balance or gain power in a relationship. Even when you devalue your own currency, a careful analysis can show you areas of wealth. The following box presents a list of general interpersonal power currencies.

The acronym *RICE* will help you recall interpersonal power currencies, the aspects of power most important in interpersonal conflict:

R

Resource control: Often comes with one's formal position in an organization or group. An example is the controlling of rewards or punishments such as salary, number of hours worked, or firing. Parents control resources such as money, freedom, cars, and privacy for teenagers.

I

Interpersonal linkages: Your position in the larger system, such as being central to the communication exchange. If you are a liaison person between two factions, serve as a bridge between two groups that would otherwise not have information about each other, or have a network of friends who like each other, you have linkage currencies.

C

Communication skills: Conversational skills, persuasive ability, listening skills, group leadership skills, the ability to communicate caring and warmth, and the ability to form close bonds with others all contribute to interpersonal power. All people need to be related to others, to matter to others, and to be understood by others. Those who communicate well gain value and thus interpersonal power.

E

Expertise: Special knowledge, skills, and talents that are useful for the task at hand. Being an expert in a content area such as budget analysis, computer skills, fixing houses, or local knowledge of real estate choices give you power when others need your expertise.

Resource Control

Resource control often results from attaining a formal or informal position that brings valued resources to you. The head of a company, regardless of personal qualities, will always have resources that go along with the job. Leadership and position, by their very nature, create dependence. Power goes with leadership and designated positions, such as CEO, supervisor, or parents of young and maturing people. Whatever your position—secretary, boss, chairperson, teacher, manager, or volunteer—you will be in a position to control resources that others desire. Some resources are economic in nature, such as money, gifts, and material possessions. Many people try to be close and supportive to those around them by buying gifts. They trade on economic currencies in order to obtain intimacy currencies from others. Their gifts are not always valued enough to bring them what they want, however. As Blau wrote decades ago, "A person who gives others valuable gifts or renders them important services makes a claim for superior status by obligating them to himself" (1964, 108). People with little money usually have limited access to these forms of power. College graduates who cannot find jobs must remain financially dependent on others, thus limiting independence on both sides. Elderly people whose savings shrink due to inflation and growing health care needs lose power; mothers with children and no means of support lose most of their choices about independence, thus losing most of their potential power. Economic currencies are not the only important type of power currency, but they operate in personal conflicts as well as in larger social conflicts.

In addition to economic resources, many other qualities may tip the balance of power, such as attractiveness, access to recreational facilities, a favorable assessment of skills brought to a situation, and willingness to share materials at work.

Interpersonal Linkages

Another cluster of power currencies comes from one's *interpersonal linkages,* a set of currencies dependent on interpersonal contacts and a network of friends and supporters. People often obtain power based on whom they know and with whom they associate. For instance, if you have a good friend who has a rustic cabin at the ocean you can share with others, then you have attained some power (if your family or friends want to go to the ocean) because of your ability to obtain things through other people.

Interpersonal linkages help one attain power through coalition formation. Whenever you band together with another (such as a good friend) to gain some sense of strength, this coalition can be a form of power. The small boy who says, "You better not hit me, because if you do, my big sister will beat you up" understands the potential value of coalitions. The friend who says, "I've got your back" loans a kind of interpersonal power to someone who feels scared or threatened.

Interpersonal linkages are a source of power when people check out their network for what classes to take, where jobs might be available, where rentals might be found, and other kinds of information. "Who you know" is often a source of power. Letters of recommendation, whether for work or further education, draw on interpersonal linkages for their power. People who use social media skillfully often draw on linkages for interpersonal power

Communication Skills

One's *communication skills* also serve as potential power currencies. If you can lead a group in a decision-making process, speak persuasively, write a news release for your organization, or serve as an informal mediator between angry people, you will gain power because of your communication skills. Almost all companies hiring college graduates these days stress good oral and written communication skills. Likewise, if you can facilitate the social process of a group, serve as the fun-loving joker in the family, or get conversations started at work, others typically will value you. Remember, only when these currencies are valued by others will they increase your power.

Communication skills also include the ability to form bonds with others through love, sex, caring, nurturing, understanding, empathic listening, warmth, attention, and other characteristics of intimate relationships. If a father provides genuine warmth and understanding to his teenage daughter who is going through a tough time at school, his support is a currency for him in their father–daughter relationship. Some people draw others to them because they listen attentively, remember what is important to others, and ask questions that show the importance of the others. One cannot become an effective conflict manager without excellent interpersonal communication skills. While the entire book you are reading refers to communication skills, here are some cornerstone skills to learn as well as possible:

Enlightened Conversation

Conflict resolution depends wholly on a skill we all already possess. You will want to become an expert in conversation, because *it is one of the most important ways of establishing equality* (Young-Bruehl and Bethelard 2000, 209).

Face-to-face conversation remains the starting point to constructive conflict. You may be fairly clear about what you want, what the other person's issues might be, and what the stakes are. The *best first step* is to talk directly with the people involved. Conflicts are worsened by e-mails that are designed to sharpen or avoid conflict, policy changes, announcements at meetings, memos, any other forms of avoidance—it seems hard for people to talk with each other when feelings are strong.

Joyce (one of the authors) consulted for many years with a government agency. Here is a typical phone call. Director calls Joyce. She describes a difficult person and asks for counsel on how to proceed. Joyce listens, then says:

Joyce: I think you should talk to him directly. You could go down the hall and ask for a brief conversation/pick up the phone and call him/ask for time at the conference next week.

Director: I knew you'd tell me to do that. I guess I still find it hard. Do I have to?

When Bill (one of the authors) coached executives, after listening to details about a co-worker who was interfering with them, he would ask, "Have you told him that and had a conversation about it?" The answer was always "no." Len, a vice president, reported, "My boss is totally unpredictable—one day he loves my work and the next day he is scornful and nasty." Bill suggested that Len work out a way to give feedback, such as "I want to do a great job, but it is hard for me to read what is important to you. On Tuesday you said everything was great, then on Wednesday you showed real displeasure. Give me some guidance on what you want." Len, however, says, "I can't do that, he is my boss—I'll just wait it out this year and then move on." Direct conversation seems to be very difficult for many people. Here is a starting list of excellent communication skills:

- *Speak to the other with a positive tone.* For instance, your opening words should communicate respect, should be *clear,* should *show compassion for the perspective of the other,* and should be *direct.* Cheryl felt furious and defensive when her older sister, Diane, called her and her boyfriend a couch potato. She decided to talk with her a second time, after the first interaction went badly. ("Keep your opinions to yourself—what I do is none of your business)."

  A second try might begin like this: "Diane, I get immediately defensive when you make a derogatory judgment about us. When you made that comment, I had already worked my shift. I was relaxing.

  You were my best coach when I was growing up and needed help from my older sister with homework. You may be worried that I'm not putting in enough study time. That's my concern—it's up to me to manage my time. Please don't make a judgment." A positive tone lowers defensiveness.
- *Listen.* Pay close attention, ask open-ended questions, and let the other person know you've heard what he or she has said. Avoid saying, "I understand you, but it's just that. . . ." This ensures that the other will not feel understood. Instead, say, "I think what you are saying is that you are uneasy about my plan." When you use "but" the person hears nothing you've said before that one word.
- *Reflect feelings.* In addition to listening and reflecting content, reflect the feelings of the other person. This is harder than it seems. Often, we miss the feeling tone of the other. Reflecting feelings might sound like this: "You are too pressured to take on a new project now, although you like the sound of it."

- *Clarify what you have heard.* You might say, "Let me be sure I understand what you are saying. . ." or "Are you telling me that you do not want to work with Paul?"
- *Question when needed.* Ask questions for which you do not know the answer. Avoid asking questions as a way to slip into your opinion. A good question would sound like this: "Tell me more about your concern for your son. What are you worried about?"
- *Summarize.* You can help track and orient the conversation by summarizing what you have both/all talked about so far. Avoid adding your own opinion—that comes later. Summarizing might sound like this: "We've identified the problems about scheduling the family reunion. People have a lot of different ideas about where to meet. Some feelings have been hurt already, and many of the family members have strong opinions. We've decided to ask Carolyn to contact everyone giving the best options the three of us have come up with. Is this right?"

Expertise

Expertise currencies are special skills or knowledge someone else values. The worker who is the only one who can operate the boiler at a large lumber mill has power because his expertise is badly needed. The medical doctor who specializes in a particular area has expertise power because her information and skills are needed by others. Almost all professions develop specialized expertise valued by others, which serves as a basis of power for people in the profession. Family members develop expertise in certain areas that others within the family come to depend on, such as cooking, repairing the car, keeping track of birthdays and anniversaries, or babysitting.

We limit our own power when we develop some currencies at the expense of others. For example, women have traditionally been most comfortable providing more warmth and affection than men do. If this particular communication skill is developed at the expense of the ability to clarify a group discussion, a woman unnecessarily limits her power potential. The person who trades on currencies of interpersonal linkages, such as access to the manager, may neglect the development of expertise. The person who gains power by controlling resources, such as money or sex, may neglect the development of communication skills, resulting in a relationship based on coercive instead of shared power; withdrawing warmth in intimate relationships too often substitutes for good communication skills. A worker who focuses on the development of expertise in computer programming and systems analysis may ignore potential power through interpersonal linkages, thus furthering a tendency toward isolation in the organization. The most effective conflict participant develops several forms of power currencies and knows when to activate the different forms of power. A repertoire of currencies is a better base for sharing power than exclusive reliance on one form of power, which can lead to misuse of that power.

Clarifying the currencies available to you and the other parties in a conflict helps in the conflict analysis. People are often unaware of their own sources of productive power, just as they do not understand their own dependence on others. Desperation and low-power tactics often arise from the feeling that one has no choice, that no power is available. Analyze your power currencies when you find yourself saying, "I have no choice." Usually, you are overlooking potential sources of power.

Application 4.3 My Sources of Power

Think of a *particular relationship* where you are in conflict, strain, or the potential for struggle. Then, (1) list your own sources of power, using the RICE acronym. After that, (2) go to a friend or partner and share the RICE examples from the book and ask him or her to list sources of power you have (without showing this person your list). Finally, (3) compare the two lists and see what sources of power you missed.

Often, it's difficult to hold on to the idea of relational power. Under stress, we go back to "she has power because she has a supportive family," or "I have power because I don't care" (when the person really does care). Of course, it is true that certain areas of expertise can bring power. Some people may be valued by others because of excellent cooking skills, or because they have taken an Emergency First Responder course, or because they know their way around a large city. However, if their conflict partners do not value these areas of expertise, the expertise does not bring power. Power in relationships depends on control of resources valued by a partner.

Many conflicts go awry because one person believes their own expertise in, for instance, child rearing, Spanish, or map-reading gives them power in certain situations. One case where the expertise did not activate power was in a group of women friends visiting Costa Rica. One of the leaders spoke Spanish. She developed a good conversational relationship with several local guides who wanted to take the women on a zip-line tour of the tropical canopy. However, when the women saw the height of the platforms, and the length of the zip-lines, they opted out. No matter how hard the leader tried to convince the women that the guides thought the activity was perfectly safe, translating the Spanish with great skill, the group had already made up their minds—reassurance or no reassurance, they were not climbing to those platforms.

Increasing another's dependencies on you can be constructive or destructive. In the following case, mutual dependence is constructive at the beginning, but in the end, a destructive outcome occurred.

In "Power Play," a seemingly unequal power situation was suddenly balanced by the resignation of the assistant—a classic "got you now" move on the part of the low-power person. The case illustrates how power dynamics are shifting and dynamic. Each of the participants in this conflict attempted to exercise power. When the administrative assistant assured the physician that she would take care of the arrangements for the conference and then did not, she destructively increased (temporarily) the doctor's dependence on her. If the physician had rethought the flexible time needs of the office staff and then given desired resources (flexible time off), this change would have been an example of constructively increasing dependencies.

One way to reduce power others have over you is to change your goals. If after a few years in a job a person is not valued by an organization, a change of goals is likely to occur. The disenchanted employee might remark, "It is not important to me what they pay me for this job. I'll just do the minimal amount of work and expend all my creative energy on my hobbies." By altering the importance of the goal, you reduce the power the other has over you. The often-heard remark "There are other fish in the sea," used when a person has been

Application 4.4 Power Play

In a medical clinic in a rural town, a conflict over flextime had been brewing for several months. Many of the staff wanted the option of flexible time. The doctor in charge of the clinic traveled frequently since she often had to give presentations elsewhere. The administrative assistant especially wanted the option of flexible time. She was unhappy with the way the office policies were set up, believing them to be unfairly weighted toward professional staff and against hourly employees. When the assistant had problems with child care or needed to go to an appointment, she was not allowed to leave if the director was gone. The physician in charge also was a working mother, but she was able to work out her own schedule. The administrative assistant used tactics that a person stuck in a low-power position would typically use—calling in sick, forgetting, making mistakes, losing files, promising and then not following through, and complaining to other staff members. The director had begun a process of documenting her poor work. When the doctor went to a professional meeting in another state, she discovered that no hotel reservations had been made, the conference fee had not been paid, and the materials for her presentation to the conference had not arrived. When the doctor arrived back at the office, ready to fire the assistant, she found that the assistant had resigned without notice.

dropped in a love affair, is just another way of saying that you have alternative sources for accomplishing your goals. (Or at least you hope you do, and you want other people to think you do!)

Communication plays a vital role in working out interdependence. People try to persuade others that they are valuable, that they need to be connected, and that the other's needs can be met best in a constructive relationship with the person doing the persuading. Communicating about the value you offer another is one way of increasing your power; the other becomes more dependent on you, and thus you have more power in that relationship. For example, recently Cheryl moved to a new state, and she immediately began going out with Jon, who had lived there for a long time. Jon took Cheryl on trips, introduced her to his wide circle of friends, and introduced her to cross-country skiing, rafting, and rock climbing. When Cheryl became disenchanted with Jon, resulting in one attempt to break up with him, he reminded her of all the plans they had made for the future, and that he was going to include her on a big rafting trip Cheryl wanted to do. Jon was attempting to persuade Cheryl of the importance of what he provided her—he tried to influence her perception of his positive power. Unfortunately for Jon, Cheryl was unhappy enough that she had already investigated other ways to raft and climb, and decided a mediocre relationship was not what she wanted. His influence attempt failed, and they broke up.

Power in Distressed Systems

When power is viewed as either/or (what you win I lose), or only the property of the designated leader, conflict resolution suffers. Take a look again at the list of words associated with power—most show an either/or association. Power in this approach enables one to move others against their will; in a power struggle, a contest of wills is set in motion. Many people think that power is only force—pushing others around against their will. Even in a relationship in which people once practiced shared, or *both/and power* ("we are in this

together"), when the system becomes distressed, they may begin to slide down the slippery slope of coercion and dirty tricks.

Once a relationship, whether at work, in friendships, or in intimate relationships, begins to go downhill, concerns with power heighten. As the relationship deteriorates, the parties shift to a more overt focus on power—a shift reflected in their discourse. In fact, a characteristic of destructive conflict is that parties start thinking and talking about power. Almost no one thinks that he or she has more power than the other, at least when emotions run very high. We think the other has more power, which then justifies dirty tricks and our own attempt to gain more power. We often see ourselves as blameless victims of the other's abuse of power. When partners are caught in this destructive cycle of either/or power, their communicative interactions show a lot of "one up" responses, or attempts to demonstrate conversational power over each other (Sabourin and Stamp 1995). Partners might say, "She is just trying to control me," or "I'm not going to let him push me around." People keep score—watching the points they have vis-à-vis the other party. Struggles over power relate directly to relationship satisfaction. Figure 4.1 demonstrates how concerns rank in a distressed relationship.

The focus for a dispute becomes power—who has the right to move the other. The teenager who says, "You can't boss me around," the spouse who shouts, "Just who do you think you are?" and the co-worker who states, "Well, we'll see who the boss is around here!" are all giving power center stage in the dispute. These struggles often escalate. Dissatisfied couples are more than three times as likely to escalate episodes and focus on power than satisfied couples (Alberts and Driscoll 1992). Using the terms developed in Chapter 3, power becomes the overriding *relationship concern.* We are not suggesting that power shouldn't be an issue. Rather, we suggest that when power itself becomes the main focus of thinking and discussion, parties are likely to be involved in an escalating power struggle, and may well have temporarily lost sight of their original interests.

Notice in Figure 4.2 that disputes also involve "rights" and "interests." Rights, similar to our idea of core concerns, include not being discriminated against, being free from

Figure 4.1 Power Emphasized in a Distressed System

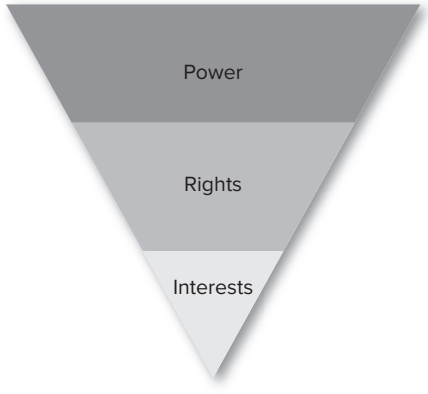


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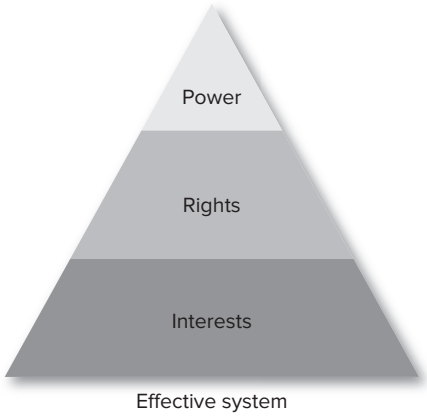
Figure 4.2 Power Deemphasized in an Effective System



Source: From William Ury, Jeanne M. Brett, and Stephen B. Goldberg, *Getting Disputes Resolved: Designing Systems to Cut the Costs of Conflict*. Copyright © 1988 Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, San Francisco, California.

physical harm, and other constitutional and legal guarantees citizens should expect. Sometimes it is more appropriate that disputes get settled on the basis of rights rather than power or interests. For example, if the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954 outlawing segregation in public schools had been settled on the basis of the power structure at the time, it would have resulted in a struggle in the streets, and continued violation of the interests of Black Americans. If, on the other hand, it had been settled only on the basis of interests, Brown might have negotiated her way into school, but the country's social policy would not have changed. Instead, the groundbreaking decision was decided by the Supreme Court on the basis of rights.

When we solve a dispute based on interests, the goals and desires of the parties are the key elements. For instance, if you don't want your teenage son to use the car, you can (1) tell him it is not OK as long as you pay the expenses in the house (power); (2) let him know that you own the car (rights); or (3) let him know that you are dissatisfied with how he drives, and until you are convinced he will be safe, you will not lend the car (interests). Thus, disputes can occur on any one of the three levels. When power becomes the only personal goal, the dispute is harder to resolve. Moving to interests helps manage a conflict constructively.

Figure 4.2 illustrates an effective system. Notice that the emphasis is on interests with rights and power playing smaller but still important roles. As you can see by comparing Figure 4.1 with Figure 4.2, an overemphasis on power is symptomatic of a distressed system.

Assessing Your Relational Power

Since power is a dynamic product of shifting relationships, the amount of power parties have at any one time cannot be measured precisely. One maxim to remember when you are in the middle of a conflict is this: *Each person firmly believes that the other person has more power.* Many of the pathologies or misuses of power arise because the image people

have of their power (and others') is unrealistic. Because each person in the conflict so often believes that he or she is in the low-power position, the conflict escalates. People use devious and manipulative tactics, since they truly think they have no choice. This **perception of power** is almost always inaccurate. In this section, ways of assessing power more accurately are presented. Remember that in emotionally involving conflicts, we usually feel out of power. Therefore, feelings are not the only, or even a very accurate, guide.

What might be a better way to assess the various power issues when your emotions are involved? Thinking about power, with the use of concepts and assessment instruments, can help engage your objectivity instead of subjective feelings only. As you think through what is happening, what has happened in the past, and what you would like to have happen in future interactions, you can gain a healthy distance on a current conflict.

The most common way to measure power is to compare the relative resources of the parties in a conflict. For instance, in organizational work, it is generally agreed that power accrues to "those departments that are most instrumental in bringing in or providing resources which are highly valued by the total organization" (McCall 1979).

People have power in the organization when they

- are in a position to deal with important problems;
- have control over significant resources valued by others;
- are lucky or skilled enough to bring problems and resources together at the same time;
- are centrally connected in the work flow of the organization;
- are not easily replaced; and
- have successfully used their power in the past (McCall 1979).

This method of assessing power places high reliance on the resources controlled by a person or group on whom the organization is dependent. Although it provides a useful starting point, this method has two limitations:

1. It defines resources too narrowly (Berger 1980).
2. It puts too much emphasis on the source of the influence. Overemphasis on the source is characteristic of most studies of power, such as the "bases of power" work of Raven and French (1956). Most assessments of power view the relationship as one-way. Person A is seen as exerting influence on person B. In diagram form, the relationship looks like this:

   A – – – – – – – – – – – → B

   The relational perspective presented thus far characterizes the communication as two-way: Each participant has power *with the other.* The relationship looks like this:

   A ← – – – – – – – – – – → B

Most research presents power as (1) a static individual property, (2) only surveys one respondent in a conflict, and (3) disregards the interactional elements of power.

In a research study wives were asked questions such as "Who decides where the family will take a vacation?" "Who decides what job to take?" "Who has the last say about spending money?" "Who is the real boss in the family?" or "Who would decide how you

would spend $300?"[1] It seemed reasonable that the most powerful member of a family would be the one who made most of the important decisions; unfortunately, there were difficulties with this popular research method of measuring power. First, the researchers did not ask both spouses the questions. They might have received different answers if they had asked each partner separately. Second, the questions asked for "perceived authority"—who the participants thought made most of the decisions rather than who actually *did.* As a result, the participants may well have answered according to who they thought *should* have been making decisions. Given the sex-role stereotypes of that time period, a woman may have not wanted to tell a researcher that she was "the real boss." Whether it was accurate or not, women usually reported that their husbands made most of the decisions.

At one time or another, you have probably judged someone as powerful because he or she controlled the conversation. Many researchers have studied conversational control in couples. Assuming that conversational control and power were the same thing, these researchers studied who talked the most, who interrupted the most, who changed topics the most, and who engaged in more "one up" moves. These two measures of power, decision making and conversational control, do not measure the same concept. If you look at different measures of power, you will probably reach different conclusions about who is most powerful.

As we have noted, the key is how the parties perceive the power each can exercise. Conflict parties need to be asked (1) what are your sources of power, (2) what are the other party's sources of power, and (3) how does the other see you and his or her sources of power? The participants' perceptions are almost always different from an outsider's view.

One happy, long-term couple married for 40 years participated in a decision-making task in which disagreements between the two were reported back to them, and they were asked to reach common agreement. At the end they were asked, "who changed their mind the most" and both of them said "both equally," yet a videotape of the couple clearly showed the husband making four changes and the wife none. As an outsider, you would say that the woman was clearly "more powerful," yet as conflict participants they simply did not perceive power between them in that narrow, outcome-only, way. Seeing themselves as equals may have had something to do with their long-term happy marriage!

Application 4.5

Who Has the Power? An Observation and Assessment

With a group of people serving as the audience, try this experiment in class: watch a movie, role-play, or video presentation of two people in conflict. Or have two class members take on a problem-solving task or role-play an argument. They might argue about where to go for spring break, whether to ask a roommate to leave a living arrangement, or how fairly to assign grades to a group project. The audience makes notes throughout the conversation about who has the most power, and why. Then discuss your observations and your assessment.

You will probably find that almost everyone in the audience has a different way of deciding who really is more powerful. For some it may be nonverbal dominance; for

[1]Some of the classic studies are Safilios-Rothschild 1970; Heer 1963; Kenkel 1957; McDonald 1980; Turk and Bell 1972; Mishler and Waxler 1968; Gray-Little 1982.

others, vocal quality; for still others, amount of time spent in overt argument, or who wins at the end, or who appears to "let the other win." In essence, *no single validating criterion for assessing power has been discovered* by researchers; such a specific technique does not exist. Power is especially difficult to assess when influence is exercised covertly, or in hidden ways. Most of us have trouble deciphering covert power, or choices made based on another person's potential influence. For example, Will is an outdoorsman who would like to take a weeklong fishing trip, but he knows that his wife will not like being left alone for such an extended period of time since she works and would have to assume all the care of the children. Will proposes a 2-day trip and, in the process, talks more and controls the discussion. An observer might guess that Will was in control of both process and outcome, since he and his wife agree that he will go on the 2-day trip. Yet Will's conversation was structured around his estimate of his wife's reaction. Her power was important to his decision, yet an outside observer could not have known that without asking. Implicit influence carries as much weight as explicit behavior.

People who look the most powerful to outsiders often are less powerful than they appear. Without knowing the structure of a relationship, you cannot guess who has the most power, since people balance their power currencies in complex ways. For instance, if one person appears to let the other do the talking for the group, the person who gives tacit permission for the other to talk is actually controlling the situation. Gender issues come into play, since women in our culture cannot usually become the powerful aggressor without facing social disapproval or physical danger. Many women learn to seek safety and power by hiding, becoming invisible, or becoming relationally oriented. Whereas a woman's safety and power needs are often met by becoming smaller and less visible, the traditional masculine style of seeking safety is by becoming the feared individual, by becoming bigger and more visible (Kaschak 1992, 126). A woman's overt use of power often exposes her to denigration and attack, whereas a man's overt use of power may be viewed as evidence that he is a good leader. Overt use of power by men at home is judged less positively than in some work situations.

Power can be exercised in ways that look weak. Sometimes the most powerful behavior is to appear to submit, yet resist, or act in a nonresistant way. An example of this form of power was Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil rights tactics, based on Gandhian principles. Civil rights workers in the 1950s and 1960s received training telling them to sit down when confronted by powerful persons, to protect their bodies if attacked but not to attack in response, and to use nonaggressive verbal responses. As happened in India, weakness in the face of strength made stronger persons question their use of force and coercion. A less productive "weak" way of exercising power is that of the apocryphal army private who, when ordered to do KP duty, does as sloppy a job as possible while asking constantly, "Is this the way? Am I doing it right?" This "reluctant soldier" example can be seen in offices, in families, and on work crews where one person is "trying" (but failing) to get it right. The supervisor, parent, or crew boss then gets disgusted and does the job himself or herself.

Another indirect way to gain power is to refuse to cooperate when other people are depending on you. When this tactic is used in conjunction with unexpressed anger, it is labeled *passive aggressive behavior.* In passive aggression, a person acts aggressively (in one's own self-interest, without much regard for the other) by being passive, or unconcerned, when the other person needs a response. Passive aggression is displayed when people feel they have a low level of power, whether they do or not, since it appears to be a

safer way of expressing anger, resentment, or hostility than stating such feelings directly. Additionally, "nice" people may use passive aggression instead of direct conflict statements because they have been taught that it is not nice to engage in conflict. Here is a list of common passive aggressive behaviors:

- Forgetting appointments, promises, and agreements.
- Slipping and saying unkind things, then apologizing.
- Acting out nonverbally, such as by slamming doors and banging objects, but denying that anything is wrong.
- Getting confused, tearful, sarcastic, or helpless when certain topics come up.
- Getting sick when you've promised to do something.
- Scheduling two things at once.
- Evading situations so that others are inconvenienced.

The following case presents an example of passive aggressive communication.

Application 4.6 Deteriorating Roommate Relationship

Two college roommates have a practice of borrowing each other's possessions. When Jan and Cheryl first moved in together, they decided it would be inconvenient to ask each time they wanted to use an item or borrow an article of clothing. Cheryl has been keeping Jan's things longer than Jan wants her to, however, often causing Jan to have to look for her textbooks, car keys, sweaters, skis, and gloves. Recently, Jan lost several of Cheryl's possessions, including a sweater she took to a party. She feels justified since Cheryl has been misusing the privilege, too. They are avoiding the issue and spending time away from each other. Role-play a direct instead of indirect way for Jan to ask for change. Remember to verbalize content and relationship concerns, specific goals, and face-saving techniques. Show listening and problem solving. Try the role-play two ways: (1) Both people cooperate and (2) Cheryl does not cooperate at first. She instead becomes defensive, attacks, withdraws, or acts in any other way you want to play out a destructive conflict. Show how she and Jan might finally resolve the conflict (realistically!).

A better strategy would be to confront angry feelings directly instead of indirectly. The college professor who double-schedules may feel overloaded and underappreciated but could tell people directly that too many appointments are interfering with the rest of his or her work.

Balancing Power Constructively

Parties assess power differently. In addition, each party retains sources of power even during times of **power imbalance** (Oyamot, Fuglestad, and Snyder 2010). Such power asymmetries produce predictable effects on both the higher- and lower-power parties, and the imbalance produces systemwide effects on the relationship.

Strong emotions accompany different levels of power. Think of times when you have felt yourself to be in a position of low power. People often feel hostility or hatred, saying "I simply cannot stand his attitude. If I never had to deal with him again I'd be glad."

Or you may feel helpless rage or helpless lethargy. When you feel low power in a relationship that matters, you may feel worthless or unable to influence your situation. You may feel sad, defeated, or depressed. When people hold the high-power position in an important relationship they may not feel universally pleased at all. People who have a lot of power often feel burdened with decision-making responsibilities, worry about being blamed, and feel responsible for doing more than is good for them. Many type A, overworking people with designated high power do not report feeling happy. Instead, they feel misunderstood, resentful of how much responsibility they feel, and unhappy with the attitude or performance of others. Neither high nor low positions automatically bring about certain feelings. But you can be sure that an imbalance of power *does* bring about strong feelings. These feelings become part of the conflict.

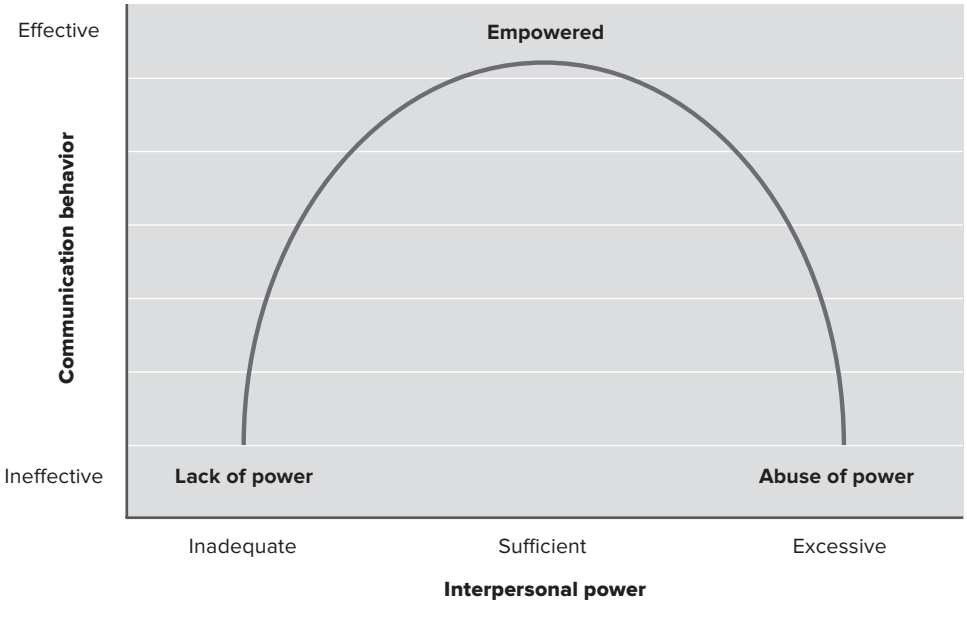
See Figure 4.3 for a concise visual summary of our view of power and its effects. Cameron and Whetten (1995) inspired this graph, which we adapted to an interpersonal orientation. As you can see, both lack of power (low power) and excessive power (high power) lead to ineffective communication behaviors. *Sufficient* power, to address a specific conflict, results in optimum communication behavior.

Up to this point, various words have been used almost interchangeably—*shared power, both/and power, power with,* and *collaboration.* Is this practice of power realistic and possible?

We have come to appreciate that *collaboration and the constructive realignment of power* is usually best for all concerned, with the following conditions:

- The high-power person is not abusing power in a way that takes away all possibility of influence by the lower-power person or persons.

Figure 4.3 Interpersonal Power



- One person is not lying, distorting, or suffering from a disorder of character, such as sociopathy. A sociopath is a person who has no conscience and is not moved by the plight of others.
- The long-term gains are worth the expenditure of energy.

Competitive power has its place, too. We view competitive power as being useful when the following conditions are in place:

- Crucial needs of one party are at stake—needs the person is not willing to compromise about unless no other option exists. These might be basic human rights, economic or personal survival, protection of children, avoidance of harm, or protection of a crucial sense of self.
- Competition can lead to collaboration—when the playing field becomes more level.

Since destructive conflicts are often set off by struggles over perceived power, and given that power is relational, power always is in a state of change. The crucial question is how one goes about changing power. If you struggle with someone because you are trying to block their exercise of power—and they are probably doing the same thing. The paradox is that the more you struggle against someone, the less power you will have with that person. From a both/and perspective, the more powerful we feel, the more we are setting ourselves up for resistance from the other party. Put bluntly, power against is eventually blocked and diminished. "Power over human beings is very complex. Other human beings can answer back, fight back, obey or disobey, argue and try to exercise power over us, which a tree never does" (Boulding 1989, 53). We must recognize that while we need to exercise appropriate power and influence, the other person needs to exercise influence as well, so we might as well cooperate with each other so we can both be effective. The both/and perspective assumes that everyone wants to accomplish their cherished goals and that you need each other to do that. Since it is the other who is blocking you (and you blocking him or her), integrative power moves beyond the tug-of-war to a new plane of relationship.

While destructive struggling for power leads to a downward spiral of more thwarting and interference and to a lessened ability to accomplish goals, shared power leads to a synergy of power creation through productive communication. As you collaborate with each other, each of you stops directly interfering with the other and actively assists the other in getting what he or she wants. The communication between you serves a transcendent function. Transcendence mean that some new way, or third way, develops that rises above what each party thought would be possible. With cooperation more power arises than each predicts. Shared power, not at all weak and tentative, creates energy. Sharing power requires great skill.

Collaboration depends on a model of shared power. Rarely will you be in a life situation in which all the power resides with the other; collaboration is almost always possible. Satisfied couples will "pass, refocus, mitigate or respond" to the other rather than struggle over power (Alberts and Driscoll 1992). The sense of "we-ness," of working together, pulls romantic couples through their first big fight (Siegert and Stamp 1994). Successful couples work together to repair their relationship instead of making the other wrong. If they do not learn to seek repairs as a matter of course, they do not stay together (Gottman 1999). When power is not shared, ultimately the relationship will end, with a firing or new job sought

and found, in divorce, abandonment, breakup, emotional withdrawing, or the continuation of a grim, joyless relationship.

Application 4.7 It's Their Fault

Bruce is the production manager of a large electronics manufacturing facility, and Len is the engineering manager. Each supervises a five-person team of managers. Len's engineers are responsible for (1) designing systems for production and (2) quality control. Bruce's production employees are responsible for output—they have to get the product out the door and shipped to customers. Over a 2-year period, the two teams seemed gridlocked. Engineering staff members complained, both in their staff meetings and to the plant manager, saying, "Those production people—we design good systems for them to follow; they don't follow them, and then quality slips. What is their problem?" Meanwhile, production employees openly criticized the engineers on the manufacturing floor by saying, "They think they are so hot—yet their elaborate designs don't work, they treat us like slaves, and they don't care how we are being held to a minimum number of units produced." Finally, the plant manager had to ask for outside help. The production and engineering managers met, as did the work teams. They agreed to (1) shift quality control to the production side, (2) ask the engineers to provide training to the production employees so they could enforce quality control, (3) not make any more negative public comments about the other team, and (4) require the production and engineering managers to attend each other's staff meetings. What was a "power-against" situation became, over a period of a month, a "power-with" situation. The plant manager was very pleased that his two key players in engineering and production were now helping each other accomplish their goals rather than interfering with one another. Production output and quality both improved. A new system of rebalanced power made collaboration possible.

In a small group in class, analyze the success of the change described in this case. What made the change possible? Specify how the either/or model changed to a shared power model. Take these steps and apply them to another power-against situation. What are some general principles you can use in the future?

Conflict participants are more likely to make a long-range relationship work if they move toward balancing power. Models for productive power balancing, although scarce, do exist. In everyday life, individuals can learn to cooperate and to reach agreements if power is distributed equitably. For relationships to work over time, people must continually realign the power balance as the situation warrants.

What can friends, co-workers, family members, or intimates do when they discover power asymmetry in their relationships? They can (1) work to make the relationships more equal, (2) try to convince themselves and their partners that the relationships are more equal than they might seem (by restoring psychological equality), or (3) eventually abandon the unbalanced relationships. For instance, family members negotiating household tasks may say, "I should get more credit for taking out the garbage than you do for cleaning the counters because I hate to take out the garbage and you don't mind doing the counters." The person who hates taking out garbage is trying to balance power by restoring psychological fairness. Without some power balancing, this relationship is headed toward distress.

An interpersonal relationship with a power disparity between participants can achieve a more productive focus by moving toward balance. The destructive attempts by

lower-power parties to balance power are a move toward balance, but power must be balanced productively to lead to effective management. Power must be realigned in order for sharing to exist.

High Power

The exercise of social power for most people in Western culture is satisfying and even produces joy. **High power** is often a goal people strive for; those with less power often feel, "If I were in charge, things would be a lot better around here." The major difficulty with maintaining higher power than someone else is that it may corrupt you. Corruption describes more than a crooked politician or business person. Corruption means moral rottenness; an inability to maintain the integrity of the self. A constant high level of power may eat into one's view of self and other, forming a perceptual distortion that may take on monstrous proportions. Higher-power persons, organizations, or nations may develop altered views of themselves and other parties. Constant feelings of higher power can result in these consequences:

1. A "taste for power" and the restless pursuit of more power as an end in itself.
2. The temptation to use institutional resources illegally as a means of self-enrichment.
3. False feedback concerning self-worth and the development of new values designed to protect power.
4. The devaluing of the less powerful and the avoidance of close social contact with them (Kipnis 1976, 178).
5. Lying with no fear of consequences.
6. Bullying, with no regard for effects on others.
7. Blindness about genuine problems—they cannot penetrate the shield of power.
8. Demeaning others.
9. Denigration of entire classes of people perceived as less powerful than oneself.
10. Physical and sexual harassment and abuse.

The undesirable consequences of a power imbalance can take many forms (Coleman, Kugler, Mitchinson, Chung, and Mussallam 2010). The person highest in power may claim benevolence, that harmful actions are actually "for the good of the other person," thereby dismissing the negative consequences to the lower-power person. When someone is fired from an organization, it is common to hear, "It was for her or his own good—he or she will be better off spending time doing X." People who are high in power condemned low-power people's cheating yet cheated more themselves—a clear case of hypocrisy (Lammars, Stapel, and Galinsky 2010). Further, when there is a recognizable victim and perpetrator, the high-power perpetrator regards the angry response of the victim as unjustified and even causing aggression (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman 1990).

Persons in helping professions, such as ministers, teachers, health workers, and therapists, can lose touch with their need to exercise power in order to feel valued and needed. Although helpers undoubtedly are in their professions in order to help, they also must have "helpees," or they have no function. How can a physician be a physician without people who need healing? How can teachers teach if no one values learning? If helpers do not

understand that helping also contributes to their own sense of self-worth and personal fulfillment, the act of helping can become a high-power move. Just as during the Inquisition, when the learned scholars were sure that they were helping the persons accused of heresy, an unrestrained high power may make the powerful party blind to the havoc wreaked on the less-powerful party. You may have had times in your personal relationships when power became unbalanced; if so, you know the harm that unrestrained power can bring, whether you were the one with too much power or the one without enough power. Striving for higher power can destroy even the best of relationships. For example, in intimate relationships, the person who is least invested in the relationship has the most power. Paradoxically, decreasing the investment for the purpose of gaining higher power is ultimately self-defeating, since you have to continue your decreasingly fragile investment in order to remain more powerful. And the lessened dependence can lead to the demise of the relationship. If you convince yourself that "I don't have to put up with this," then you usually won't have a relationship. Finally, persons, organizations, or nations with higher power can deny that power is exercised; they may deny that there is a conflict (it is a "minor disagreement") or use any of the other forms of denial mentioned earlier. Unrestrained higher power can corrupt the power holder's view of the self, view of the other, and it can set the stage for continued unproductive relationship interaction.

Power Balancing from a Position of High Power

Restraint Higher-power parties can limit their power by refusing to use all the currencies they have at their disposal. A physically powerful spouse who refuses to inflict damage on the other spouse would be one example of a higher-power party limiting power usage. A manager can decide to coach an underperforming employee rather than beginning a paper trail designed to fire the person. A man can/should decide to have sex only if his partner (or victim) is able to give consent. Parents can decide that physical punishment of young children is never justified. A person with high power can decide not to shame or humiliate others for any reason. A person who controls the money in a system can abstain from making threats based on money. If the high-power person refuses to engage in "natural" responses, this restraint can alter the automatic nature of a destructive cycle. In this self-regulating approach, power is given to a higher partnership or unit, instead of being used as an individual right. Just as a nation might avoid an invasion, preferring to work instead with the United Nations and diplomacy, so a spouse might avoid hurting the partner, with words or deeds, because he does not want to risk ending the relationship. Art, a college teacher, refuses to use punitive power when students present last-minute pleadings for more time to write final papers. Instead, Art simply says, "Why don't you set a deadline for the final paper that you can meet, and it will be fine with me. What day and time do you want to hand it in?"

A couple found a way to lower one member's economic power, thereby providing more balance in their relationship. They valued monetary equality and were used to having separate accounts and almost the same disposable income. The woman received an unexpected raise, however, and suddenly had more money to spend. They started arguing frequently because she would propose expensive weekends for recreation and her partner had difficulty paying for his half. In response to their increasingly destructive arguments, they decided to set up an automatic savings withdrawal from her monthly paycheck, to be put in a joint long-term savings plan. Then they would use this money occasionally for a

"lost weekend." Even though she still earned more money than her partner, the negative effect on them as a couple was lessened, while she gained the long-term advantages of saving more money. She limited her immediate use of higher monetary power, with positive effects on the couple's balance of power.

Empowerment of Low-Power People by High-Power People Sometimes it is clearly to the advantage of higher-power groups or individuals to purposely enhance the power of lower-power groups or individuals. Without this restructuring of power, working or intimate relationships may end or rigidify into bitter, silent, passive aggressive, and unsatisfactory entanglements. Currencies valued by higher-power people can be developed by lower-power people if they are allowed more training, more decision-making power, or more freedom. For instance, in one social service agency, Sharon was not doing well at directing a grant-funded program on finding housing for homeless people. Jan, the director of the agency, realized that Sharon was a good fund-raiser but not a good program director. By switching Sharon's job description, the agency gained a good employee instead of continuing a series of negative job evaluations that would have resulted in Sharon's eventual termination.

Empowerment also occurs when third parties are invested with the power to intervene on the behalf of less powerful persons. For instance, children who have been abused by their parents or caretakers can be empowered if their plight is reported to the proper agency. The legal system will provide attorneys, caseworkers to monitor the situation, counselors to work with the parents, judges to arbitrate decisions involving the children, and free services to help the children recover from the effects of the abuse. Our society has decided, by passing certain laws, that extreme forms of power imbalance, such as abuse, will not be allowed to continue when they are discovered. Children are empowered by laws that give them rights and give responsibilities to others.

Empowerment also works between friends, romantic partners, and co-workers. When someone is frustrated and shares that with you, he or she may be open to trying alternative approaches to heal a relationship. Paul is a general contractor who builds houses and kept talking to his friend Stan about how it was impossible for him to please the family for whom he was building. Stan asked, "So who makes the decisions that keep changing?" It turned out that Paul was responding to the architect (brother of the husband), then the wife would show up at the job site and ask for changes when the architect was not there. Then the husband would show up and ask Paul to undo the changes. Stan suggested that Paul have all three meet with him at the same time and say, "We need to clarify decision making so the costs on this house stay within your limits."

Low Power

If absolute power corrupts absolutely, does absolute powerlessness make you pure?
—Harry Shearer

Just as power can corrupt, *powerlessness can also corrupt* (May 1972). If lower-power people are continually subjected to harsh treatment or lack of goal attainment, they are likely to produce some organized resistance to the higher-power people. When one reaches the stage where "nothing matters" (one cannot attain goals through accepted means), violence or despair results.

Too much losing does not build character; it builds aggression, or apathy. Asymmetry in perceived power can lead to coercion in an attempt to "get even." Most examples of retaliation occur because the person doing the retaliating perceives himself or herself to be in a low-power situation.

In severe, repetitive conflicts, *both* parties feel **low power,** and they continually make moves to increase their power at the other's expense. If each party believes she or he has less power than the other, a destructive, escalating spiral of conflict usually results. Each party attempts to increase power at the other's expense, with the next round bringing yet more destructive moves. Each person feels "behind" and justified in engaging in manipulative moves because of what (he or she thinks) the other did.

Jake and Julie, a couple in their early 40s, have been divorced for 2 years. They share custody of their 14-year-old son, Tom. Julie works as a nurse in a highly stressful clinic. Jake works as a seasonal construction worker. At the time of their divorce, Jake and Julie both insist that the other received more of the marital resources than they should have. Feeling low power and that they were taken advantage of by the other, they have continued a bitter argument about who should pay for Tom's school expenses, even his food and clothes. Both say, "Ask your mother/father" when Tom needs anything extra. Because each feels lower power than their former partner, they are communicating to Tom that he has no power with them. More important, they are communicating helpless hostility to their son about the other parent—very damaging to the son. They are in a high-power position with their son. Tom, not surprisingly, is alternately furious and depressed, since he cannot get either parent to pay attention to his needs. He has started hanging out at his grandmother's house (Julie's mom). Grandmother feeds Tom and takes him shopping for clothes. Jake takes this as further evidence that he does not need to provide anything extra. The school counselor has asked all the adults to come in for a session to talk through how to keep Tom in school (he has been skipping school). How might the counselor talk in a productive way about recognizing the needs of each person, especially Tom? What constructive approach might get the parents to focus on their son instead of their own perceived low power? (*Hint:* Shame will not work!)

Application 4.8 Helping Tom

Counselor:	I would like to hear from all three of you about what your understanding of Tom's needs right now might be. (Tom is present with his parents and grandmother.)
Julie:	I think Tom needs to know that we all love him and want him to do well in school and life.
Jake:	He needs to understand that school is his doorway to getting a decent job.
Grandmother:	I'd rather not speculate. Tom is always welcome at my house, except when he should be at school. (The conversations progresses for a while. Tom sits silently.)

(continued)

Application 4.8 Helping Tom

Counselor: Tom, would you respond to what your folks have said? Start with what you would say your greatest concern is right now.

Tom: I'm embarrassed that I don't have money to buy my basketball uniform. I leave school sometimes because Grandma will let me have lunch at her house. I can't talk to Mom or Dad about my school expenses, money for food at school and after school. They are so pissed off at each other that no one takes me seriously. It's easier at Grandma's house.

Tom's interests should lead the adults into a more constructive conversation. When adults have divorced, counselors usually focus on problem solving, not emotions, which would lead the former couple into unresolved issues that led to the divorce. In this case, Tom's need for support for school expenses should remain the focus of problem solving.

Developing passive-aggressive behavior, a low-power tactic, affects the whole system. Lower-power parties will sometimes destroy a relationship as the ultimate move to bring about a balance of power. Jake and Julie are perilously close to destroying their relationships with their son.

The combination of denigration from the higher-power person and destructive power-balancing tactics from the lower-power person contributes to a system of interactions that is not productive for either party. A cyclical, degenerative, destructive conflict spiral characterizes the ongoing interactions. The power disparity promotes struggles over power, increases the underlying bases of the conflict, and leads to lessened involvement in the relationship for both parties. When the conflict parties enter a spiral, nobody wins.

Application 4.9 Nobody Wins

Craig is a supervisor in a community agency, and Marilyn is a staff member who works part time. Craig coerces Marilyn into taking on a community volunteer program—a job she neither wants nor has time to develop at a competent level. Marilyn resists working on the program, while deadlines come closer. Craig, noticing her avoidance, humiliates her in a public meeting by pointing out what has not been done, and asking her to agree to work hard on the program. Marilyn accedes (on the surface) but talks to her friends about how poorly she is treated. After 2 months of Craig's disapproval of her progress and of her seeking social support and a new job elsewhere, she brings Craig her resignation.

Internally, Marilyn might have some of these thoughts and feelings:

Craig should not have put me in the position to work with all these community volunteers. I am still learning my other work, and this is a job for a more experienced person. He manipulated me by telling me how important the work is. I agree, but I'm not the person to do it. I'm 20 years younger than most of the volunteers and I don't have the history with the agency to know their jobs. I feel foolish; I'm trying to do something I don't know how to do. When I ask Craig or the others for help, they brush me off. I think they want the volunteers, but don't want to put in the time to train them. And they don't want to train me. I don't

(continued)

Application 4.9 Nobody Wins

want to resign, but I can't take this. Being asked at the staff meeting if I would "work harder" was insulting. If I can find another job, I'm going.

Internally, Craig may have had some of these thoughts and feelings:

Marilyn is a smart young staff member. I wish we could hire her full time. She's perfect for the volunteer program because she is enthusiastic and inspiring. I'm disappointed at how many people she's signed up, though. I thought she would really jump on this chance. If she succeeds in setting up 20 or 30 well-trained volunteers, I'm sure I can get the funding for a full-time job for her. But lately she's seemed to me to be whining and not really trying. She's asking for help that none of us has time to give. Doesn't she know how important this task is? When I brought it up at the staff meeting, I was trying to encourage her, but I could tell she was upset. I guess I'd better talk to her. I don't want to lose her.

Answer the following questions about Craig and Marilyn:

How might Marilyn have changed her low-power stance into a constructive one? How might Craig have changed his "power-over" stance into a constructive one? What might a beginning dialogue that is constructive sound like?

Craig did not accomplish his original goal of starting the community program, and Marilyn will leave her job. They achieved a power balance in an unproductive manner, much like in a game of leapfrog. When one person is behind, he or she then jumps into the lead, and the other person, sensing that he or she is "losing," does the same. Pretty soon the relationship is suffering, and neither person has achieved any of the original goals. In cases of power disparity, agreements remain shaky. The ever-accelerating unproductive moves result from attempts to balance power. The alternative is to balance the power through productive avenues and recognize that with extreme power asymmetry, effective long-term management is not likely.

Bullying

Bullying *is "ongoing, persistent badgering, harassment and psychological terrorizing . . . that demoralizes, dehumanizes and isolates those targeted"* (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, and Alberts 2005).

Bullying depends on extremes of low and high power. Individuals who experience bullying feel helpless, hopeless, and powerless to change their situation—classic feelings that can lead to depression and despair. Attention finally is moving to the plights of bullied children and young adults. Berry (2016) summarizes the prevalence of bullying, media and organizational attention focusing on bullying, and relates stories that his students shared with him and each other. His book provides an excellent place to begin understanding bullying from a communication, relationship, and identity perspective. The statistics summarized here, reported by Berry, present the scope of the cultural problem,

- About 30% of youth in middle school report involvement in bullying as a bully or victim.
- Some researchers estimate that many more youth, up to 40–80%, experience bullying, but many do not report what happens.

- According to The Bully Project (2013), one in three schoolchildren between grades 6 and 10 are affected by bullying, and six of ten teenagers say they witness bullying once a day.
- Most students think schools respond poorly to bullying.

Hostile school environments particularly affect LGBTQ students. Berry (2016) summarizes research evidence that reports that over half of students feel unsafe at school due to sexual orientation or gender expression. Homophobic comments abound, not only from students but from teachers and school staff members. Many students, from half to three-quarters, experienced verbal and physical harassment.

Cyberbullying affects youth and young adults worldwide. The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard concluded, for example, that online bullying of peers is the number one threat to juveniles using social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace (Palfrey, Sacco, Boyd, DeBonis, and Internet Safety Technical Task Force 2009).

You undoubtedly can tell your own stories of bullying, both in person and on the media. Cyberbullying can be defined as *any repeated or hostile or aggressive behavior performed electronic or digital media intended to inflict harm or discomfort, where the victim feels powerless to stop the interaction* (Berry 2016; Davis et al. 2015; Raskauskas & Huynh 2015). With today's technology, victims receive texts, posts, or e-mail contact any time of day or night, without face-to-face contact. This immersion in social media means than victimizers can bully for revenge, shaming, peer-normative pressure, and hostile entertainment 24 hours a day (Rafferty and Vander Ven 2014). College-age young adults experience online aggression, as well as younger school-age children and teens.

Why do people engage in online aggression? One motivation is cyber sanctioning—hostile pressure for the victim to change behavior. A kind of vigilante justice seems to motivate some victimizers. A very common motivation has to do with dating behavior, with hostile messages from ex-partners being common. As one woman reported, "A girl was upset that I was dating her ex-boyfriend . . . she started posting between her and her friend bad things about me and said my boyfriend was cheating. This went on for a good six months" (Rafferty and Vander Ven 2014, 369). Insults composed most of this kind of sanctioning.

Another motivation is an attempt to struggle over power. Threats of violence and shaming, often also having to do with dating relationships, predominate. One man reported, "This guy that I stole a girlfriend from years ago. Started telling me I was going to die . . ." (Rafferty and Vender Ven 2014, 372). Recipients must decide whether the threat is credible, or whether the motivation is creating fear, and shaming the victim. Such assessment is helped greatly by support and conversation of friends.

A third motivation for online aggression was hostile entertainment—*trolling* to hurt, humiliate, annoy, or provoke, to get a response from the victim. This is a kind of indirect power struggle—"If I can get a response, I'm powerful." Anonymity gives the perpetrator a sense of power over the other person.

This kind of vicious bullying has been linked to suicidal thoughts and actual suicide, especially but not entirely with younger teens. As a parent or friend of bullying victims, you may also feel helpless to know how to intervene or provide support. Youth who employ problem-focused coping with bullying, such as taking steps to change the stressful

situation by asking for help from others and taking effective steps themselves suffer fewer negative, long-lasting effects of their victimization than do youth who try to deal with the problem by internalizing, externalizing, or avoiding. Internalizing leads to a negative view of oneself; externalizing can lead to ineffective cycles of revenge and retaliation. Avoiding can lead youth and young adults to effective action, such as blocking messages, changing one's use of social media, or taking a break from all involvement in social media. The most effective coping strategies change a young person from a low-power victim to a higher-power advocate for oneself. Self-efficacy, doing something that works, leads to much less stress and negative impact on oneself (Fitzpatrick and Bussey 2014).

Workplace bullying also occurs. Defining workplace bullying as "repeated and persistent patterns of negative workplace behavior that is ongoing for six months or longer in duration," 23% of the over 1,000 respondents had experienced bullying in a university setting (Keashly and Neuman 2008). When counting victims and witnesses to bullying, a full 45% of the survey respondents experienced bullying. In respect to the United States as a whole, a random survey of 7,000 individuals, 37% reported a direct experience with bullying (Workplace Bullying Institute and Zogby International 2007). Such bullying is four times more prevalent than illegal forms of "harassment." And as you might guess, most bullies are bosses (72%). Women are affected more than men. Further, while we hear about the United States being "lawsuit happy," only 3% of those affected filed lawsuits. Those targeted are the ones most often who lose their jobs.

The effects of workplace bullying everywhere are clear—the "target's psychological, occupational and family functioning decline" (Leymann 1990). Job performance slips and the organization's reputation is damaged (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts 2004).

Bullying at work can take many forms—"supervisors abusing subordinates, same-level workers tormenting peers, and coworkers 'ganging up' on an individual" (Einarsen 1999; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts 2004). When asked about his or her experience, the recipient of bullying feels vulnerable and tortured, that it is a "fixed fight" (Tracy et al. 2004). Targets of bullying suffer long-term, sometimes permanent, damage (Arseneault, Bowes, and Shakoor 2010; Einarsen and Mikkelsen 2003; Leymann 1990).

Bystanders who are not directly involved in the conflict can help, as long as they avoid becoming victims themselves. This means that bystanders or observers in friend groups, at school, and at work take on a sense of responsibility beyond themselves, for their peers. Conversation among friends can help bystanders make effective choices to intervene. This strategy will become especially important as we discuss sexual assault and harassment.

Sexual Assault and Harassment

Sexual assault and harassment has received so much attention in the press that it hardly needs to be documented. You can readily find resources to further investigate this problem. For the purposes of a study of conflict, several principals apply:

- Sexual assault is a crime of power, with coercive sex as the weapon.
- Men and women must recognize, discuss, and learn the elements of consent, when no means no, and when the potential victim must be seen as competent and incompetent to give consent (extreme use of alcohol and physical incapacity render consent meaningless).

- Sexual assault grows in a climate of disrespect for women, of homophobia, and when men are encouraged by peers to engage in power over behavior, and when adult administrators, coaches, and friends think the problem is not a big issue.
- Sexual assault affects same-sex people, especially men, who are both bullied and assaulted.
- Bystanders can make an important difference in the outcomes of assault and harassment. Assault and harassment are a community problem, not individual problems.

Application 4.10 My Experiences with Bullying and Assault

Write a short paper or personal essay about your own experiences with bullying, assault, or harassment. You may have been, in varying situations, a recipient (victim), perpetrator, or bystander. For each situation, answer the following questions:

1. What happened—describe without evaluating or labeling.
2. What were your emotions and so far as you know, the emotions of others?
3. What strategies did you use to deal with the situation? How effective were these?
4. What effects can you identify for each of these situations?
5. Discuss any of the above situations that you are willing to with your small group in class.
6. After the discussion, answer this question: What did I learn from listening and sharing these experiences of bullying, assault, or harassment?

Harassment is shaming, demeaning, hostile teasing, using bullying statements, drawing unwelcome attention to a person's body whether verbal or physical, and making discriminatory statements based on a person's gender expression. While laws exist to provide remedies for workplace harassment or the creation of a hostile work environment, these cases become notoriously difficult to prosecute.

Strategies for Low-Power Situations

The following strategies have proved helpful for people in low-power situations. The goal for conflict resolution is to temporarily balance power so the conflict may unfold constructively. Communication strategies derive from excellent, practiced conversation skills. All personality types sometimes experience low power, and while no one type holds an advantage in the attempt to balance power, gaining a repertoire of power-balancing tactics will add to your sense of confidence, self-efficacy, and resilience.

Focus on Interdependence Lower-power individuals can highlight the parties' dependencies as a way to balance power. Higher-power individuals usually try to minimize interdependence; therefore, lower-power individuals need to point out how the conflict parties are more related than it might appear. (The strategy of searching for overlapping interests will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8.) When individuals are scared and feeling powerless, they often angrily demand that their own needs be met or begin to use threats. These are ineffective approaches, since the higher-power person has the ability to move away or lessen the interdependence.

A thorough understanding of interdependence clarifies power relationships. People are interdependent because they need to get things done and also be acknowledged for their contributions to tasks and relationship enhancement. If John and Sarah are dating and decide to live together, they both increase their dependence on the other. Following Emerson's formula of **power-dependence relations,** as John becomes more dependent on Sarah, Sarah's power increases. Likewise, Sarah becomes more dependent on John, thereby increasing his power. When two people elevate their dependence on each other, both increase their sources of power. Notice that this process is not codependence (depending on another's weakness to feel self-esteem), but is mutual dependence (depending on each other's strengths to feel a sense of satisfaction and self-esteem). Each one expands his or her currencies that are valued by the other. Therefore, power in enduring relationships is not finite—it is an expandable commodity. The focus shouldn't be the singular amount of power each one has but the balance of power between them. John and Sarah may have little power with each other at the beginning of their relationship. Later, as each develops more power, the other's power rises approximately equally. The absolute amount of power may change, but the crucial issue is the comparative dependence that John and Sarah have on each other.

Application 4.11 Quick! It's an Emergency!

Conflict Parties: Tom, a midlevel manager in an office; Helen, the secretary for four people in the office.

Repetitive Conflict: Often when Helen is too busy to get all her work done immediately, she will set priorities and plan her schedule based on known deadlines. Tom's work makes up the largest share of Helen's work. Tom and the other three supervisors rank equally on the organizational scale. However, when Tom is busy and pressed, he rushes to Helen's desk with work that needs to be done immediately. Following is a typical exchange:

Tom: Helen, I have just this one little thing that has to go out today.

Helen [sighing]: Yes, Tom, I know—just one little thing. But I have to get this out for Joe today, and it must be done first.

Tom puts more pressure on Helen to do his job first by saying that it won't take long and that just this once she needs to respond to the emergency pressures. Helen gets angry and tries to persuade him that it can wait one more day. Then she pouts a bit.

Helen: I am only one person, you know. Just put it there and I'll try to get it done.

Tom: Helen, you're a sweetheart. When this madhouse calms down, I'll take you out to lunch. I knew I could count on you.

Helen then stays late to finish the work, but she asks her office manager to speak to Tom again about interfering with her ability to manage her work. Tom apologizes a few days later.

Tom: I didn't mean to make you mad. I didn't think that one report was going to tick you off so much.

Helen: It's not just that I was angry—it's that I can't get my work done in a way that honors each person's needs if I'm dropping what I'm doing to always focus on your work.

In the "Quick! It's an Emergency!" case, Tom appears to have more power because he is the boss and Helen has less because she occupies a lower position in the organization. A closer look reveals that the parties are fairly well balanced in power. The balancing act is, however, taking a toll on their relationship, and the work could be managed more creatively. Tom is dependent on Helen for getting his work out error free, quickly, and with the benefit of Helen's experience. He depends on Helen to respond to his needs before those of the others in the office, since he is carrying more of the work in the office than the other three at his level. He sees himself as a pleasant and noncontrolling person whose employees work because they want to. He depends on Helen to view him as a reasonable and professional person because this is how he views himself. Helen, meanwhile, depends on Tom for some of her self-esteem. She prizes her ability to skillfully organize her work so that it gets done on time. She wants to be treated as a valuable decision-making employee. She knows, too, that if Tom becomes dissatisfied with her work, he will complain to her immediate supervisor in the office, and she might be overlooked for promotions or might even lose her job. So Helen depends on Tom for positive ratings, a good work climate, and self-esteem. Restructuring their interactions could allow them to achieve more of their independent and interdependent goals. Helen could ask Tom to help her respond to disparate pressures; Tom could ask Helen how to set up a way to take care of emergencies. A problem-solving approach to conflict management would allow both to balance their power more collaboratively.

The Power of Calm Persistence Lower-power people in a conflict often can gain more equal power by persisting in their requests. Substantive change, when power is unequal, seldom comes about through intense, angry confrontation. Rather, change results from careful thinking and from planning for small, manageable moves based on a solid understanding of the problem. When intensity is high, people react rather than observe and think. We overfocus on the other instead of analyzing the problem, moving toward polarization.

Lower-power parties cannot afford to blow up. One source of power the lower-power person has, however, is careful, calm analysis that directs attention to the problem. If lower-power people have patience and avoid giving up out of frustration, they gain "persistence value"; the higher-power person or group often listens and collaborates so an ongoing problem will be solved and time can be spent on something else. If you use persistence, be sure of your facts, your thinking, and your fairness. Persuasive skills become crucial. The low-power person must analyze the situation well, taking into account what will be judged appropriate, effective, credible, and practical. The lower-power person *must* show respect.

Several examples of **calm persistence** illustrate this strategy for increasing one's power. Ellen is the head of a large, successful consulting organization. She travels a lot and has a tightly organized schedule. When her daughter was young, she whined and pouted about not being able to go horseback riding along with her mother. This was ineffective since Ellen hates whining. Finally, Linda, at age 8, hit upon a solution. She asked her mother for a "management meeting." In this meeting, she first of all impressed her mother with her relationship savvy, *and* she pointed out her complaints and asked for what she wanted. This approach so impressed her mother that, with affection and humor, they broke through an avoid-pursue spiral. Linda gained power, and Ellen felt much better about how the two of them were spending time. This was a savvy little girl!

Individuals in conflict with institutions often experience frustrating, demeaning powerlessness as they are shunted from one person to the next. Phone calls are not returned and frustration rises dramatically. Sometimes only calm, clear persistence increases an individual's power enough for him or her to be heard and dealt with. Some suggestions for dealing with large, impersonal institutions are as follows:

- Identify the individuals on the phone by name and ask for them when you call back.
- Stay pleasant and calm. State clearly what you want, and ask for help in solving the problem.
- Follow the rules even if you think they are ridiculous. If they want five copies of a form, typed and folded a certain way, give it to them. Then point out that you have followed the rules and expect results.
- Write simple, clear memos summarizing what you want, what you have done, and when you expect a response.
- Tell them all the steps you took to try to get a response from them.
- Avoid taking out your frustration on low-power individuals in the organization. They may respond with "I'm just following the rules," avoiding personal responsibility—and who could blame them? Instead, be courteous and ask for help. Humor always helps if it is not at someone else's expense.
- Escalate only reluctantly. For example, if a nurse in charge of your health care does not carry through, give her chances to correct the errors. Then, if it doesn't happen, speak directly to her supervisor or the doctor, saying "I don't want to get anyone in trouble, but my files still have not been sent and it has been a week. Can you help move this along?"

Stay Actively Engaged Remaining in a low-power position, assuming your weakness is permanent, and using destructive tactics benefits no one, not even the high-power person. The higher-power person, who has the power to define the terms of the conflict in his or her own favor, often understands only one side of the conflict. Therefore, the higher-power person may not be able to find a constructive solution. People who perceive themselves as powerless usually do not talk effectively about their own needs and, after a while, adopt a self-defeating, accommodating style that becomes fixed, or they may use passive-aggressive tactics. If the fixed power position becomes intolerable, the lower-power person may act out of desperation, doing something such as resigning, leaving a romantic relationship, blowing up and antagonizing the high-power person so that he or she ends the relationship, or threatening self-destructive behavior, such as by saying, "Just do what you want. Just tell me what to do. I'm tired of fighting. You win." This unstable situation invites escalation on the other person's part and may lead to the end of the relationship.

Rather than remaining in self-defeating spirals, Lerner (1989, 35) suggests that people in low-power positions adopt the following moves:

- *Speak up and present a balanced picture of strengths as well as weaknesses.* One might say, "It's true that I am afraid to ask my boss for a raise, even though you want me to. But I earn a steady paycheck and budget and plan well for our family. I want some credit for what I do already contribute."

- *Make clear what one's beliefs, values, and priorities are, and then keep one's behavior congruent with these.* An entry-level accountant in a large firm was asked by the comptroller to falsify taxable deductions, hiding some of the benefits given to employees. The accountant, just out of school and a single parent, said, "When you hired me I said I was committed to doing good work and being an honest accountant. What you are asking me to do is against the code of ethics and could result in my losing my license. I can't afford to take that risk. I'm sure you'll understand my position."
- *Stay emotionally connected to significant others even when things get intense.* It takes courage for a low-power person to let another person affect him or her. One teenage son was furious and hurt when his father decided to remarry, since the son did not like the wife-to-be and felt any support of his father's decision would be disloyal to his mother. After some tough thinking, he decided to tell his father honestly how he felt, what he did not like, and what he feared about the new marriage instead of taking another way out, such as angrily leaving his father's house to live with his mother in another state. This conversation balanced the power between father and son in an entirely new way.
- *State differences, and allow others to do the same.* The easiest, but often not the best, way for a low-power person to manage conflict is to avoid engagement. Again, courage is required to bring up differences when a power imbalance is in place. Brad, a college freshman, worked at a fast-food place during school. He was unhappy because the manager kept hiring unqualified people (without checking their references) and then expected Brad to train them and provide supervision, even though Brad was barely making more than minimum wage. Finally Brad told the manager, "I have a different way of looking at whom you should hire. I try to do a good job for you, but I have to work with people who have no experience and don't know how to work as a team. Would you consider letting me sit in on interviews and look over applications?" The manager was pleased with Brad's initiative and said yes.

Metacommunication

Another way to balance power is to transcend the win/lose structure by jointly working to preserve the relationship during conflict. By metacommunicating during or before conflicts (talking about the relationship or about how the parties will handle their conflicts), the parties can agree about behaviors that will not be allowed (such as leaving during a fight).

Metacommunication means being verbally explicit about the communication. Andy says, "Brian, I notice that every time I suggest an idea, you openly disagree with it. That makes me not want to contribute any new ideas. Can we figure out a way for you to not always disagree with me?" This courteous confrontation would be a forceful metacommunication.

A more intense example of metacommunication involves a woman who is being pressured for sex by a man she knows only slightly. The communication might sound like this:

He: I thought you liked me—come on, it'll be fun.

She: I thought I liked you too, but you are pressuring me, and that's not my definition of fun. It's unacceptable to me. Please stop—now!

He: Don't be such a bitch!

She: I'm saying what I need and want and I expect you to listen up. (She does not argue about his label, or call him names back.)

In a situation of sexual harassment at work, a man (bystander) who is not directly involved might say:

Friend: Hey, Matt, I don't think Ellie likes the way you talk to her. Maybe lose the comments about her body?

Matt: Oh, she knows I'm just kidding.

Friend: I'm not so sure. You could ask her. I don't think it's respectful of her, though. She's a great program manager—don't want to lose her.

Explicit comment about the communication activates different currencies and will alter the power balance. In the above example, Matt probably wants to be seen as a good manager by the people in the office. The friend who speaks up recognizes that currency, which can take the place of the teasing/hostile communication the manager has been using. The person temporarily weaker in the relationship can draw on the relationship currencies, as if the relationship were a bank and the currencies were savings. The weaker party can claim extra time, space, money, training, empathy, or other special considerations until the power is brought back into an approximation of balance. The following case presents an example of an interpersonal peacemaking agreement.

Application 4.12 I'm Not Your Slave!

Cheryl and Melissa are two teenage girls who share a room in a foster home. Cheryl is more outgoing and friendly than Melissa, who is shy in groups but demanding of Cheryl's time and attention. Recently, Melissa increased small demands for Cheryl to shut the door, turn down the radio, bring her a drink of water, include her in texting gossip, and lend her clothes, jewelry, and other items. Cheryl, after discussing the situation with several helpers, decided she did not want to continue to respond to Melissa in anger and disdain. (e.g., "Get your own water—I'm not your slave!") She then took the following steps to restore the balance of power:

1. She reminded Melissa that they had agreements about chores in the room, made at a family meeting, that Cheryl wanted to follow.
2. She voluntarily began to fill Melissa in on happenings at school that involved people whom Melissa admired.
3. She complied with Melissa's requests, such as getting her a drink of water, the first time they were made, but then said, "I'm glad to get it this once, but remember we agreed to be equal in who does what in the room. So you're on your own now."
4. She asked Melissa to go to basketball games with her and her friends. Melissa became sociable, made new friends of her own, and needed Cheryl's assistance less.

Granted, Cheryl was a remarkably compassionate teenager. But she reported that her life was better, too, since she got along so much better with her roommate.

What to Say When You Are Low Power

Some specific low-power statements can be used to balance power. When you are feeling low power, you might try the following, but remember, these won't be effective if you don't mean them:

- Validating or acknowledging the other: "Noah, I appreciate how you . . ."
- Using "I" statements: "What I would like is . . ."
- Asking the higher-power person what he or she needs: "Sara, I'm wondering what would work for you in this situation?"
- Letting the other person know what he or she can gain from helping you: "Kathy, if I'm included in the discussions, I'll be able to support the decisions more fully."
- Announcing intended escalation and looking for a way out: "Patricia, I really don't want to go to the union on this problem. I want to reach some understanding so we can put this to rest." (This is a *thromise,* a combination of a threat and a promise.)
- Expressing optimism: "Juan, I know that if we just sit down together and talk we can resolve this pretty easily."

Slow the Process.

- "I feel like a tidal wave of reasons why we can't try my idea are washing over me. Could we slow down the discussion and take my ideas one by one?"

Show Concern for the Relationship.

- "I feel like we're digging ourselves deeper and deeper into a hole. How can we get out of this?" (Fisher and Shapiro 2005, 48)

Use a Metaphor.

- "I feel like I'm trying to swim upstream. How can we make this easier for both of us?" (Fisher and Shapiro 2005, 48)

Say Something True and Affirming About the Other Person, Then Make a Request.

- "Noah, you've been open to new ideas from interns in the past. I remember how pleased I was when you let us try out a staff meeting just for interns. But now we're pretty isolated since you aren't coming to our meetings. What would make it possible for you to be involved in our internship year more fully? We all value your mentoring a lot."
- Man to his romantic partner: "Jennifer, we agreed to accommodate what each other likes for recreation. You've been fantastic about learning to cross-country ski and pushing yourself to ski farther. I really appreciate that. But you've refused to go to any sports events with me, even though I've been going to more concerts than I really want to, and I'm going to films that you choose. I'd be happy if you'd go to the major games with me. I enjoy them more when you are there. Would you be willing to do that?"

Describe the Situation.

- A 13-year-old girl to her mother: "Mom, this one week with Dad and one week with you worked okay when I was younger. But now it's impossible for me to plan and see my friends and keep doing my extracurricular activities. You and Dad don't communicate with each other except through me. I've had it. Something needs to change—please!!!"
- Student employee to boss: "Greg, I like this job a lot and am glad you've given me extra responsibility. I'm finding, however, that closing up at night when I am not able to plan for it makes me get behind on my schoolwork. It would work better for me if we set a schedule and you or I train someone else to do the closing when you aren't available."

Balancing power requires courage and creativity.

Most of us are caught in a paradox of power. To be effective people, we need to maximize our abilities, take advantage of opportunities, and use resources at our disposal so we can lead the kind of lives we desire. Yet within the confines of an ongoing relationship, *maximization of individual power is counterproductive* for both the higher-power and lower-power parties. Unrestrained maximization of individual power leads to damaged relations, destructive moves, more destructive countermoves, and the eventual ending of the relationship. Since people are going to take steps to balance power—destructively, if no other means are available—we can better manage conflict by working to balance power in productive and creative ways. Equity in power reduces violence and enables all participants to continue working for the good of all parties, even in conflict.

Summary

In this chapter we define power and note that people usually have negative connotations of power. Power use is sometimes denied. We present bases of power.

Power is presented as a relational concept rather than as an attribute of the individual. Power currencies are described as spendable items that can be used in conflict relationships. Power imbalances often impede conflict management; extreme power imbalances characterizing bullying and sexual assault and harassment are discussed. Various ways to deal with too much or too little power are described, with specific suggestions on how to balance power in positive ways. Specific communication suggestions for people in low power end the chapter.

Key Terms

power 109
power denial 112
relational theory of power 114
both/and power 115
either/or power 115
ineffective communication strategies 117
power currencies 118
designated power 119
resource control 120
interpersonal linkages 120
communication skills 120

expertise 120
perception of power 128
power imbalance 131
high power 135
empowerment 137
low power 138
bullying 140
cyberbullying 141
power-dependence relations 144
calm persistence 145
metacommunication 147

Review Questions

1. Define power.
2. Describe your own orientation to power.
3. How does power operate in a distressed system?
4. Clarify the difference between either/or power and both/and power.
5. What are the ways people deny their use of power?
6. Explain the relational theory of power.
7. What are power-dependence relations?
8. Define and give examples of power currencies.
9. What does the acronym RICE stand for?
10. What makes power difficult to assess?
11. What behaviors does feeling high power lead to?
12. What behaviors does feeling low power lead to?
13. How is bullying related to power dynamics?
14. List some approaches to balancing power.
15. What is metacommunication?
16. If you are low power, what can you do?

Chapter 5

Conflict Styles

To Get You Thinking about Conflict Styles . . .

I guess my boss is mad at me. I have left her three texts and she hasn't returned them. I wonder why she is avoiding me.

My boyfriend is really something. Every time I ask him to change something, even small things like what time we'll go out, he explodes.

John is a good manager. He can sit and listen to our problems without being defensive or jumping in to argue. He somehow gets us all to work out our problems.

I handle conflicts with my wife by not talking to her. If I tell her she is doing something I don't like, she pouts for 2 days. It's just better to avoid the whole thing.

Kevin and Susana are quite a pair! They fight all the time and don't seem to get anywhere, except ready for the next round of fighting.

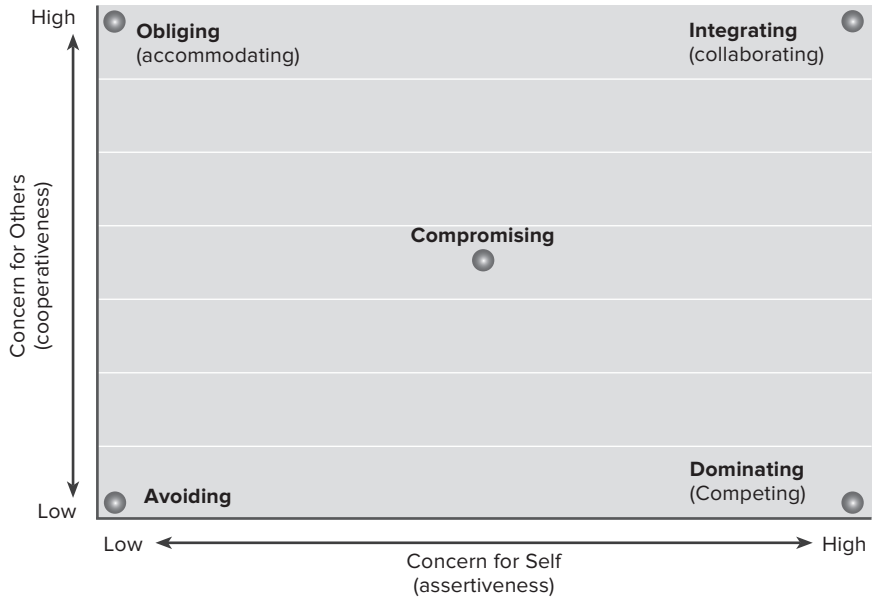
The Nature of Styles

Conflict styles are patterned responses, or clusters of behavior, that people use in conflict. **Style preferences** develop over a person's lifetime based on a complicated blend of personal characteristics, life experiences, and family background (Hamilton and Tafoya 2012; Roloff 2009; Siffert and Schwarz 2011). By the time you are an adult, your basic orientation to conflicts in particular contexts has developed. Your preferences for either harmony and calm, or high-energy engagement, remain fairly consistent, depending on context. For instance, with your siblings, you may engage in spirited conversation over the dinner table, or you might avoid any direct talk about difficult issues with them. In most relationships, we develop repetitive conflict styles.

Developing a repertoire of diverse styles may stretch you out of your comfort zone. However, having a choice of styles will enhance your chances for productive conflict. This chapter will introduce you to a variety of styles and their impact on relationships.

While you were born with various personality orientations, such as introversion and extraversion, a preference for particular conflict styles develops based on your learning and experience. You can change your style for a particular conflict once you become familiar with different approaches. You may continue to prefer a certain style, but you also can make choices.

Figure 5.1 Conflict Styles



We use the Rahim (2011) classification of five conflict styles throughout this chapter. The five styles are presented in Figure 5.1.[1]

The Rahim model can be called the *dual concern model,* meaning concern for self and concern for other. Notice that *avoiding* represents low concern for the self and low concern for the other. *Obliging,* commonly called accommodation, represents a low level of concern for yourself but a high level of concern for others (you give them what they want). The opposite of obliging is *dominating*—you are highly concerned for yourself but have only a low level of concern for the other (you "go for it" regardless of the desires of the other). Dominating was formerly termed *competing*. *Integrating* includes both your concerns and the other's concerns. *Compromising* is a middle ground, where moderate degrees of concern both for yourself and the other show in the resolution of conflict. As you will discover, communication nuances provide a complex understanding of conflict styles. Styles look differently and impact others differently depending on how they are communicated (Guerrero and Gross 2014).

Assessing Your Styles

Before proceeding, take the style measure in the following box. This measure is adapted from Rahim and Magner (1995) and will give you scores on each of the five styles of avoiding, obliging, dominating, integrating, and compromising.

[1] An overview of approaches to conflict styles can be found In Wilmot and Hocker (2011, 145); Rahim (2011, 23–32); and a different approach in Runde and Flanagan (2007). Rahim's chart is modified to fit with the more standard presentation of low to high for a 2X2 matrix. Though the fundamental dimensions of Rahim and Kilmann and Thomas (1975) are identical—assertiveness/cooperativeness (Kilmann and Thomas) and concern for self/concern for others (Rahim), they use different labels for the styles. Our thanks to Wang and Nasr 2011 for their rendition of the styles.

As you will see later, conflict styles often depend on different contexts and relationships (Speakman and Ryals 2010). Therefore, fill out the style measure for two different situations, A and B. For situation A describe a personal relationship—with a friend, romantic partner, or close family member. Then, for situation B, pick a less personal relationship—someone you are doing a class project with, someone you don't know well at work, or some other less personal close relation. The key is to pick specific people for situation A and situation B. Do not fill out the scales "in general."

To widen your perspective on styles, ask two different people, one whom you know in a family or intimate relationship, and one person who knows you well from a group or work environment. Choose people with whom you are not in a current conflict, and whom you trust. Tell them that they will help you with your conflict class project, and that any way they describe you will be helpful. Give them time to do this thoughtfully. Ask your two friends to fill out Application 5.1 with your name, rather than person A and person B.

Application 5.1 Assessing Your Conflict Style

STYLES

Think of two different contexts (A and B) where you have/have experienced a conflict, disagreement, argument, or disappointment with someone. An example might be someone you live with and a work or group associate. Then, according to the following scale, fill in your scores for situation A and situation B. *For each question, you will have two scares.* For example, on question 1 the scoring might look like this: 1.2 | 4

Write the name of each person for the two contexts here:

Person A _____ Person B _____

1 = never 2 = seldom 3 = sometimes 4 = often 5 = always

Person | Person A | B

1. _____|_____ I avoid being "put on the spot"; I keep conflicts to myself.
2. _____|_____ I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.
3. _____|_____ I usually try to "split the difference" in order to resolve an issue.
4. _____|_____ I generally try to satisfy the other's needs.
5. _____|_____ I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to us.
6. _____|_____ I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with the other.
7. _____|_____ I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.
8. _____|_____ I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.
9. _____|_____ I usually accommodate the other's wishes.
10. _____|_____ I try to integrate my ideas with the other's to come up with a decision jointly.
11. _____|_____ I try to stay away from disagreement with the other.

(continued)

Application 5.1 Assessing Your Conflict Style

12. _____|_____ I use my expertise to make a decision that favors me.
13. _____|_____ I propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.
14. _____|_____ I give in to the other's wishes.
15. _____|_____ I try to work with the other to find solutions that satisfy both our expectations.
16. _____|_____ I try to keep my disagreements myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
17. _____|_____ I generally pursue my side of an issue.
18. _____|_____ I negotiate with the other to reach a compromise.
19. _____|_____ I often go with the other's suggestions.
20. _____|_____ I exchange accurate information with the other so we can solve a problem together.
21. _____|_____ I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other
22. _____|_____ I sometimes use my power to win.
23. _____|_____ I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.
24. _____|_____ I try to satisfy the other's expectations.
25. _____|_____ I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved.

Scoring: Add up your scores on the following questions:

A | B	A | B	A | B	A | B	A | B
1. _____|_____	2. _____|_____	3. _____|_____	4. _____|_____	5. _____|_____
6. _____|_____	7. _____|_____	8. _____|_____	9. _____|_____	10. _____|_____
11. _____|_____	12. _____|_____	13. _____|_____	14. _____|_____	15. _____|_____
16. _____|_____	17. _____|_____	18. _____|_____	19. _____|_____	20. _____|_____
21. _____|_____	22. _____|_____	23. _____|_____	24. _____|_____	25. _____|_____
_____|_____	_____|_____	_____|_____	_____|_____	_____|_____
A | B	A | B	A | B	A | B	A | B
Avoiding Totals	Dominating (competing) Totals	Compromising Totals	Obliging (accommodating) Totals	Integrating (collaborating) Totals

Source: Adapted from M. A. Rahim and N. R. Magner (1995), "Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict: First-Order Factor Model and Its Invariance across Groups," *Journal of Applied Psychology 80,* no. 1, 122–132.

Now that you have self-assessments for the five styles, across two different contexts, and information from two others, you have four scores with which you can begin to assess how your styles can be described. You may have different styles across the contexts (slightly more than 50% of people do), or you may be consistent across the relationships.

Before we examine the five styles in depth, we look at our most fundamental orientation to conflict—**avoidance** or **engagement.**

Will You Avoid or Engage?

Look at your scores on the styles instrument. The scores for *integrating, compromising,* and *dominating* flow from engaging the other. The scores for *obliging* and *avoiding* reflect a tendency to move away from conflict. Take a moment and recall an intensely emotional conflict. What was your first impulse—to engage the conflict or avoid it? For example, people who have experienced trauma, whether the trauma has been physical violence, sexual abuse, observing violent events, or trauma from separation from caregivers, traumatized people tend to avoid conflict (Johnson 2002, 42). Others, who, for instance, come from a family where loud arguments are the norm, find engaging with the other a natural choice. The following couple is struggling over how much engagement they will have:

Application 5.2 Styles in Your Group

Compare your scores on the styles measure for situation A and situation B, and your scores from your two friends. In small groups, address these questions:

1. How many people of your group have relatively consistent styles in different contexts?
2. For those who have different answers, answer this question: "What is it about the two situations that prompts me to use different styles?"
3. As a group, discuss the advantages of using the same style across two different situations.
4. What are the advantages of using different styles across the two situations?
5. Do personal situations and less personal situations call for different styles?
6. How do you respond to the scores provided by your two friends? What can you learn from their responses?

Application 5.3 Avoid or Engage?

Brent: There is something bothering me.

Janette: I'm way too stressed out to talk about anything right now.

Brent: I'm upset about what you said about me at the party.

Janette: You're picking on me. Leave me alone! Another time!

Brent: When are we going to talk about things that bug me? You never want to talk if I'm upset.

Janette: You aren't respecting what I told you about my stress. I'm going for a walk. See you later.

Role-play the couple portrayed above. What could each have done to:

- Assert his/her needs even more articulately, while
- Working with the stated needs of the other person?

Brent wants to engage in the conflict and Janette wants to protect herself by avoiding it. Every time an issue surfaces, they will have to reach agreement on avoidance/engagement, or this meta-conflict will override any other emerging issues. Their fundamental

issue is "How much conflict am I willing to risk to get what I want?" (Stuart 1980, 295) of course, during the next conflict on a different topic, she may push for engagement and he may avoid, but usually people in a relationship specialize in one approach or the other. This overriding preference limits their ability to resolve their conflicts well.

Application 5.4 Thinking about Styles

Which is the best style for use in conflict? Read the four statements below and put a check mark by the one that you feel is the most accurate:

1. Avoidance of conflicts leads to unhappy partnership and work relationships—it keeps important issues buried.
2. Avoidance of unnecessary conflict helps promote harmony and keeps people from getting involved in unnecessary upsets.
3. The only way to really manage conflict is to work through it by engaging the other person.
4. Engagement in conflict leads to escalatory spirals and hurt for all parties.

Both avoidance and engagement are workable options in different circumstances. Recall the example of the couple struggling over their level of engagement. The woman's avoidance may have prompted the man to examine his reaction, decide that he was too reactive in social situations, and back off to reduce the conflict. Or her avoidance may have signaled to him that she did not care for his feelings and that he should start exiting the relationship. Avoidance and lack of overt conflict may indicate that the participants are unable to reach agreement and that they will gradually drift apart.

Avoidance of conflict often leads to a cycle that is self-perpetuating. Here is a typical pattern that occurs when one avoids conflict:

- We think of conflict as bad.
- We get nervous about a conflict we are experiencing.
- We avoid the conflict as long as possible.
- The conflict gets out of control and must be confronted.
- We handle it badly (Lulofs 1994, 42).

Kristin, a conflict student, wrote an apt description of avoidance. "Whenever the conflict is one that is remotely serious, it gets dodged. Rather than stay and confront a problem, and heaven forbid hurt someone's feelings, I run like mad. I find myself becoming a snail, silent in my shell." Avoidance is designed to protect the self and other from discord and to preserve a relationship, yet the avoidance may lead to lack of clarity, set the stage for later uncontrollable conflict, and lead back to even more avoidance.

Avoidance sometimes helps a relationship. Avoidance serves as a defense against engagement, or confrontation, with a partner or co-worker when the person avoiding decides that engaging a conflict would not serve a good purpose. Spouses who practice avoidance within a bond of mutual affection often describe their marriage as happy. Furthermore, if the relationship is not important to you, avoidance can conserve energy that

would be expended needlessly. Similarly, if an issue is trivial to you, your easiest choice may be avoidance. In the workplace, you may have a supervisor who dislikes any conflict, so avoiding touchy topics may be a wise choice for you, as long as you can determine how to bring up new ideas.

The tension between avoiding and engaging can be seen in the following dialogue:

Application 5.5 Should I Bring Up the Problem or Let It Go?

Marjorie: Hi, Terry, what's going on?

Terry: Oh, not much. [He is thinking, "If I say how upset I am, we'll get into it, and I just want to chill out."]

Marjorie: You don't look very happy. [She's thinking, "I know you're upset about my mother's criticism of your job search plans. We might as well talk about it."]

Terry: No big deal. ["I hope she just lets it go."]

Marjorie: Are you mad at my mother? ["He must be more angry than I thought. This doesn't look good. Uh-oh."]

Terry: Why do you always have to blow everything out of proportion?

The conflict then escalates as they struggle tacitly over whether to engage or avoid. In Application 5.3 we asked you to role-play better options that preserved both individual needs and relational needs. In the case of Marjorie and Terry, discuss how more self-disclosure could help this couple keep from getting stuck in avoidance, or contain their escalation so the relationship is preserved.

In the following section, avoidance *as a style* will be presented.

Avoidance

We have discussed the basic choice of whether to avoid or to engage. In this section we will explore the dynamics of *avoidance as a style* characterized by denial of the conflict, changing and avoiding topics, being noncommittal, and joking rather than dealing with the conflict at hand. The avoider may sidestep an issue by changing the topic or simply withdrawing from dealing with the issue. Just as use of the competitive or dominating style does not mean that one will get what one wants (because of interdependence with the other party), the use of avoidance as a style does not mean that the avoider will be ineffective. For instance, if a person is engaging in a conflict with a large organization, the organization can enhance its position by not responding to correspondence on the matter. By pretending that the conflict does not exist, the high-power party is freed from dealing with the low-power party.

Recent research calls into question some of the underlying assumptions of the dual concern model. Avoidance may be more of a neutral style than one low in concern for self and others. Nuances of motivation, skill, and context determine when and how people avoid. For instance, *argumentativeness* as a skill or trait influences the approach of someone in conflict. If people do not have the skills of argumentation, or if they do not enjoy arguing with others, they may be judged by others and by themselves as using an avoiding style (Guerrero and Gross 2015). Argumentativeness differs from verbal aggressiveness, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Avoidance can serve similar functions in interpersonal conflicts. If two roommates are both interested in the same woman, they may refuse to discuss the subject openly, even if both of them are aware of the potential problem. If a couple is having difficulty dealing with each other's families, they may not feel free to discuss the problem. Avoiding a conflict, however, does not prevent it. Conflict occurs when parties have the perception of incompatible goals, regardless of the style they choose to use in responding to this perception. Avoidance is simply an alternative mode of conflict expression. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of avoidance are presented in the following box.

Avoidance

ADVANTAGES

Avoidance can supply time to think of some other response to the conflict, as some people cannot "think on their feet." It is useful if the issue is trivial or if other important issues demand one's attention. If the relationship itself is unimportant to one person or if others can manage the conflict without his or her involvement, avoidance is a wise choice. Avoidance can also keep one from harm if he or she is in a relationship in which anything other than avoidance will bring a negative response from the other party. If one's goal is to keep the other party from influencing him or her, then avoidance helps to accomplish that goal.

EXAMPLE:

Shirley is a 23-year-old graduate who has recently broken off a long relationship with a man her parents like very much. They ask her to tell them "what went wrong" and offer to pay for a trip to visit him. Shirley decides not to take them up on the trip offer and says, "Many things happened to make us want to break up. Thanks for caring about me." She avoided a discussion that she felt would end in conflict.

DISADVANTAGES

Avoidance may signal to others that you do not "care enough to confront" them. It also gives the impression that you cannot change. It allows conflict to simmer and heat up unnecessarily rather than providing an avenue for reducing it. It keeps one from working through a conflict and reinforces the notion that conflict is best avoided. It allows partners each to follow their own course and pretend there is no mutual influence when, in fact, each influences the other. It usually preserves the conflict and sets the stage for a later explosion or backlash.

EXAMPLE:

Take the case of Sarah. She lives with her father who was recently divorced. He planned dinners each night, but with Valentine's Day approaching Sarah planned a dinner with her boyfriend, Brent. When Dad found out, he said, "Well the three of us could just go out." Sarah, instead of engaging a discussion about it, said, "It is ok if you come, it wasn't like we were planning on a fancy restaurant or anything." Later, Sarah said, "I know it is stupid that I can't stand up for myself to my dad, but I feel sorry for him. He is so lonely and misses mom so much that it would break his heart if I told him he smothers me and treats me like a child. I cannot figure out a way to explain my feelings to him without offending him." The chances are that sometime later, Sarah will explode at her dad.

In marriages, avoidance of conflict relates to lower satisfaction in general. Be aware that stonewalling and avoidance are different approaches—stonewalling is a hostile tactic (see Chapter 1). In one study, partners who believed in their first year of marriage that conflicts should be avoided also reported lower levels of happiness in the first 3 years of marriage than those who believed that conflicts should not be avoided (Crohan 1992). In some traditional marriages, however, stability and predictability are emphasized and continual renegotiation of what the spouses expect of one another is not useful. As Pike and Sillars (1985) found, "Satisfied couples used conflict avoidance to a greater extent than dissatisfied couples" (319). Similarly, for couples who are not traditional and who lead somewhat independent lives, "Avoidance may be a satisfying style of communication" (321).

Avoidance also can affect the one avoiding. Avoidance of important issues tends to result in health problems, and worsens a sense of well-being avoidance (Braman 1998; Nicolotti, el-Sheikh, and Whitson 2003).

Finally, older couples in our culture who avoid conflict can often be characterized as happy, although inexpressive (Zietlow and Sillars 1988). Avoidance can be useful and appropriate when (1) open communication is not an integral part of the system (family or organization); (2) one does not want to invest the energy to "work through" the conflict to reach agreement with the other—he or she wants to stay at arm's length and not get close; (3) the costs of confrontation are too high; or (4) one simply hasn't learned how to engage in collaborative conflict management.

Avoidance and Culture

Whether avoidance is productive or destructive generally depends on the cultural contexts (Komarraju, Dollinger, and Lovell 2008). People within diverse cultures often have different reasons for avoiding. For instance, in one study comparing American and Chinese people, three different reasons emerged for avoiding: (1) protecting the avoider from harm, (2) maintaining positive mood, or (3) for spiritual or philosophical reasons (Feng and Wilson 2011). There are, of course, differences across different collectivist cultures on avoidance (Leung, Brew, Zhang, and Zang 2011). One study compared Chinese, Korean, and Japanese employees and found that the Japanese were more likely to avoid (Kim, Wang, Kondo, and Kim 2007). The Japanese avoid conflict in order to preserve congeniality and consensus and out of sensitivity to others' feelings. In Japan, when one avoids, the implicit social hierarchy is reinforced—so avoidance makes sure the social bonds are not disrupted (Ohbuchi and Atsumi 2010). In China, the appropriateness of conflict behavior may be judged more positively than the effectiveness of the behavior. In the United States, effectiveness of a partner's conflict behavior ranks as more important than appropriateness (Qin Zhang 2015).

In such collectivistic cultures, when you avoid a conflict, others will talk to you about how to heal wounds, make amends, and solve the conflict in indirect ways. In individualistic cultures, like the United States, on the other hand, if you avoid someone as the result of a conflict, your friends might cheer you on, suggesting that you "don't have to take that junk" and making other escalatory suggestions. Depending on the culture, those around you push you either to reconciliation or into continual fighting. In collectivistic cultures, one is "more concerned with the group's needs, goals and interests than with individualistic-oriented interest" (Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, and Lin 1991, 67). Thus, avoidance serves different

functions in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic ones (Ohbuchi and Atsumi 2010). In collectivistic cultures, avoidance represents "indirect working through," but in individualistic cultures, avoidance represents "indirect escalation."

In Arab cultures, usually united by language and religion, ethnic identity remains stronger than in the highly multicultural U.S. environment. Young Arab men, residing temporarily in the United States, seem to prefer the avoiding style more than American young men, which preserves the needs of the group rather than the individual (Khakimova, Yan Bing Zhang, and Hall 2012). Because young people in Arab cultures are used to calling on elders and community leaders for intervention in conflict (a third-party approach), we would be mistaken to assume that Arab young men prefer avoidance. Again, this picture of conflict styles remains nuanced and complicated.

The Avoid/Criticize Loop

In the **avoid/criticize loop,** two destructive communication behaviors come into play; avoiding the topic while criticizing another person directly or indirectly. You avoid talking about the actual conflict issues while at the same time criticizing. Examples of this avoid/criticize construction follow:

- "I will talk with you about finances when you stop spending every single extra dollar you make on your stupid, expensive toys."
- "Barbara is really too sensitive to talk with about anything this important. I thought you and I could work it out." (criticizing another and forming a coalition)
- "I tried to talk with Peter about his leadership style, but he blew me off, so I called this team meeting." (gossip, coalitions, using power indirectly, avoiding the real issue of Peter's leadership style)
- "I will not deal with someone so devious."

In these examples, the speakers indirectly ask others to accept a negative description of their behavior before they talk, or the speakers avoid by involving others in indirect criticism. No one wants to accept an unflattering description as a prerequisite for continuing a conversation. The avoid/criticize system usually continues both avoidance and escalation, because of frustration, resentment, and defensiveness. When you are the recipient of such communication, say something like, "I don't want to argue with you about your perception of me. I'd like to talk about the issue of finances. If we have a trust issue, or disagree, I am willing to talk about that. It doesn't work for you to attack me and then expect me to be open." If you are brought into an indirect avoid/criticize situation, you might say, "I'd prefer you talk with Peter about that, or if we all do," or "I haven't found Barbara impossible to talk with. What have you tried?"

The avoid/criticize loop is common in professional circles and the business world. One talks about others, but doesn't join with them face-to-face to solve the problem. Especially if you are good at your job, you can really get involved in criticizing others—"He doesn't understand the new initiative," "She hasn't the training to see this accurately," "He is just so negative I can't stand to be in meetings with him." Critical statements substitute for a constructive request. We make the other wrong, through blaming and criticism, yet do not give the other a chance to correct. When you add self-righteous indignation to the mix, the conflict will not reach resolution.

Avoidant Communication Strategies

Below are some of the ways one can avoid a conflict.[2]

- Not speaking and remaining quiet.
- Refusing to answer or talk saying "I don't have an opinion" or "Whatever you think is fine with me" or "We will not have that discussion in this house."
- Deflecting or changing the topic: "What do you think about this storm forecast?" or "I don't want to talk about it."
- Talking in abstract terms (when someone is attacking your lack of commitment), saying, "What do you think about the effects of long engagements?"
- Leave the scene—to physically exit a situation.
- Joking. Making a joke that diffuses the anger, changes the topic, or alters the mood to impact the conflict.
- Smiling or laughing to change the mood.
- Asking questions—"Gee John, tell me again what was it like growing up in Iowa?"
- Supplying conflict irrelevant information.

Avoidance of the topic is, however, different from postponement. In the first example Gloria uses avoidance, in the second, postponement.

Gloria is upset. She wants to talk to her husband, Sam, late at night. Sam, however, has an appointment at eight o'clock in the morning.

Gloria: I am so upset that I can't sleep. Whatever possessed you to talk about our summer plans to Sara and Josh at the party? You know we've been trying to get free of doing things with them. You said last week—

Sam: Can't we talk about this in the morning?

[2] For a complete listing of different coding schemes for avoidance and other styles, *see* Sillars, Canary, and Tafoya 2004, Table 1.

Gloria: It's fine for you to say that. You don't have to deal with Sara when she calls tomorrow to decide where we'll travel for a joint vacation. I have to talk to her and tell her we changed our minds.

Sam: I'm sorry I brought it up. But I'm sleepy, and I don't want to talk about it.

At this point, the avoidance tactic Sam is using—"Maybe if I close my eyes all this hassle will go away"—is certainly not productive. His twin goals—to get some sleep and to avoid further antagonizing his wife—are not likely to be met. By this time Gloria is probably angry not only about his lack of discretion at the party but also about his refusal to talk to her about it. An example of a productive postponement tactic follows:

Sam: Gloria, I know you're upset. I also feel foolish. But I am exhausted, and I really don't want to deal with all the issues now. When Sara calls tomorrow, tell her we haven't had a chance to talk yet and you'll call her back. Then when I come home from work tomorrow, we'll discuss the whole thing.

Gloria: You always say that, and we never talk.

Sam: This time we will. We'll sit down before dinner, banish the kids, and the two of us will talk. I know you're upset.

Gloria: OK, if we really will. I know it's hard to know what to say in public like that. They presume so much . . .

Postponement as a tactic works best when several conditions are present. First of all, the emotional content of the conflict needs to be acknowledged while other issues are deferred to a later time. Sam said, "I know you're upset," acknowledging the depth of Gloria's feelings. She would not probably go along with the postponement if he had said, "It's stupid for you to be upset. We'll work it out later." After the emotional content is acknowledged, all parties have to agree on a time that is soon and realistic. If Sam had said, "We'll talk about it sometime soon," that would not have been precise enough. The other party has to believe that the postponer really means to bring up the issue later. Postponement does not work well as a tactic if the other people involved think they are being put off, never to return to the issue. Vague statements such as "We'll have to work on that sometime" or "Let's all try harder to get along" are often giveaways that the person wants avoidance rather than genuine postponement. Postponement can enhance or damage the relationship conflict.

Although avoidance comes in many costumes, its function is always to deflect, avoid, and not engage in the conflict. Whether a professor who is confronted about a grade says, "That's an interesting point. It brings up an interesting question" (abstract remark), or a supervisor says, "That's enough complaining. Let's get back to the job" (topic shift), the basic dynamic is the same—to avoid the conflict.

Dominating

A dominating, competitive, or "power over" style is characterized by aggressive and uncooperative behavior—pursuing your own concerns at the expense of another. People with dominating styles attempt to gain power by direct confrontation, by trying to "win" the argument without adjusting to the other's goals and desires. A person with a competitive style is one who usually thinks it necessary to engage the other participant in overt disagreement. The conflict is seen as a "battleground," where winning is the goal, and

concern for the other is of little or no importance. Someone who adopts a competitive style in conflicts would probably agree with statements such as, "Once I get wound up in a heated discussion, I find it difficult to stop," and "I like the excitement of engaging in verbal fights."

Dominating tactics can be employed in an **assertive** rather than an aggressive manner. In this case, *competition* is a more descriptive word than dominating. Usually, however, aggression creeps into a competitive style. Whereas nonassertive people deny themselves and inhibit their expression of feelings and open striving for goals, assertive people enhance the self, work toward achieving desired goals, and are expressive. The aggressive person, however, carries the desire for self-expression to the extreme. Goals are accomplished at the expense of others. The aggressive style results in a put-down of others while the aggressor actively works against their goals. The assertive person can be competitive without berating, ridiculing, or damaging the other. The aggressive person is competitive primarily by trying to destroy the opponent's options. Verbal aggressiveness hurts the face, self-esteem, or reputation of the other. When a person is argumentative, but not aggressive, the ability to work toward shared problem solving remains alive (Guerrero and Gross 2014).

The dominating style of managing conflict can turn out to be productive if you compete to accomplish individual goals without destroying the other person. The *relationship focus* is maintained even while the *topic* is debated. Competition can be productively used in conflict, especially if the participants agree about the amount of aggressiveness that can legitimately be used in their conflict. The following box summarizes the advantages, as well as the disadvantages, of **dominating.**

Dominating

ADVANTAGES

Verbal domination can be appropriate and useful when one has to take quick, decisive action, such as in an emergency. Such verbal strength can generate creative ideas when others respond well to it or when one is in a situation in which the best performance or ideas are rewarded. It is useful if the external goal is more important than the relationship with the other person, such as in a short-term, nonrepeating relationship.

Dominating also informs the other of one's degree of commitment to the issue and can be used to demonstrate to the other party the importance of the issue. When everyone agrees that dominating behavior is a sign of strength and when the behavior is treated as a natural response, such as in games, sports, or in a court battle, the style serves good purposes. In these cases, other styles may not bring the expected closure.

EXAMPLE:

A human services agency competes with others for grant money from United Way. A limited amount is available, so the best proposal for solving a human services problem will be funded. The director of the agency competes with other directors for funding. The larger good of the community is served by the best program's gaining support.

(continued)

Dominating

DISADVANTAGES

Dominating responses can harm the relationship between the parties because of the focus on external goals. Competition can be harmful if one party is unable or unwilling to deal with conflict in a head-on manner. Conflict waged competitively can encourage one party to go underground and use covert means to make the other pay. Domination tends to reduce all conflicts to two options—"either you are against me or with me," which limits one's role to "winning" or "losing."

EXAMPLE:

Greg and Marcie, both young, competitive salespeople for the same company, live together. High sales, naturally, are rewarded by their manager. The couple keeps track of who's ahead of the other by placing a chart on the refrigerator. The week's loser has to do the laundry for the week. However, when Marcie's sales are low because she has been ill and has missed a lot of work, she angrily proclaims to Greg, "I'm not your slave! Do your own damn laundry!" Their relationship and her identity suffered from the "loss."

Especially when both parties agree that a competitive style is the norm, the style can be useful. Competitiveness can be a sign of strength or commitment. For example, two attorneys who one-up each other during negotiation are each attempting to persuade the other to alter his or her position. This dominating style may actually be a form of bluffing.

On the other hand, dominating or competitive tactics can damage a relationship, lock the participants into round-robin sequences of attack on each other, and deprive the participants of cooperative solutions to their problems. In severe cases a dominating style can become self-encapsulating—the participants can't give up or stop because they get too caught up in winning at any cost. When people launch never-ending court challenges against one another or continue to verbally abuse their ex-spouses for many decades, such approaches indicate a frozen position of dominating. The ever-competitive combatants lose all perspective on the original goal, and they dedicate their energies to triumphing over the other.

Threats

The most commonly used dominating tactic is the **threat.** We rush to use threats because we believe they are effective (Thompson, Ting, Gonzalez, and Ryan 2011). Many parents are too quick to say, "Do your homework or you're grounded" or in the grocery store, "Touch those cans again and I'll lock you in the truck of the car!" Supervisors will say, "My way or the highway"—a misguided attempt to build a team.

Figure 5.2 shows that a threat has to meet two criteria: The source of the threat must control the outcome and the threat must be seen as negative by the recipient. If you (the source) control the outcome ("If you don't go to bed in three minutes, I won't read you a story") and the sanction is seen as negative, then it is a threat. Similarly, if the professor says, "If you don't get your paper in on time, I will dock your grade," it is a threat. However, if the source does not control the outcome (a friend says, "If you don't get your paper in on time, it will hurt your grade"), the comment is not a threat—it is a **warning.**

Figure 5.2 The Nature of Threats

	Source controls the outcome	Source does not control the outcome
Negative sanction	Threat	Warning
Positive sanction	Promise	Recommendation

Many parents get confused between warnings and threats. For example, "If you drink too much, you'll never graduate" seems like a threat, but it is not because the parent does not control the outcome. (If, on the other hand, the parent says, "Stop partying so much or I won't pay for next semester" it *is* a threat.) Or, if you say to a friend, "If you cheat on your boyfriend, he will leave you," you are issuing a warning. If you say, "I wouldn't challenge her on that topic," you are recommending a course of action to your friend.

Small children understand the difference between a positive and a negative sanction. If the parent says, "If you don't do the dishes, you'll have to spend the evening in your room," and the child has a computer or TV so going to the room is not negative, the child may well retort, "Is that a threat or a promise?" As you can see, if the source controls the outcome and the recipient sees the outcome as positive, the threat is, instead, a **promise.**

A threat is credible only if (1) the source is in a position to administer the punishment, (2) the source appears willing to invoke the punishment, and (3) the punishment is something to be avoided. Often the other party is able to administer a threat but not willing to follow through. A co-worker who threatens to tell the boss you broke a rule may not carry out the threat if the boss dislikes "whistle-blowers." Similarly, in an intimate relationship, one partner might say, "If you want to make your summer plans alone, go ahead. But if you do, then don't expect to find me here when you come back." Such a threat (relational suicide) is effective only if the person who makes the threat is willing to lose the other person over this one issue. The perception that the other party is willing to carry out the threat makes it effective. As a result, intimates often avoid testing the willingness of the other party to invoke the threat and instead live under the control of the other person for years. In poker, a "bluff" is when you bet a lot (but have a weak group of cards) as a way to get the other people to "fold" and give you the winnings. The only successful bluff is one that the other party believes is true.

Finally, threats are effective only if the sanction is something the threatened party wants to avoid. One faculty member was offered a job at a competing university; when he went to the department chair and threatened to leave unless his salary was raised, the chair replied, "I hope you enjoy the climate down South."

As you have seen, threats can be either constructive or destructive. They can be used constructively to highlight the importance of the conflict topic to you, to get the attention of the other party, and to clarify one's perceptions of the power balance. On the other

hand, threats tend to elicit the same behavior from the other, starting escalatory conflict spirals. They also block collaborative agreements and undermine trust in the relationship. Worse, we can become enamored of them (Kellermann and Shea 1996). If two dormitory roommates have been getting along well except for the issue of sweeping the floor, then a threat of "If you don't sweep more often, I'll process a room change!" might damage the trust in an otherwise good relationship. The recipient of the threat is likely to respond with a feeling of "OK, then go ahead. Who needs you anyway?" Unless trust can be regained, forging agreements will be extremely difficult. Once a threat has damaged the trust in the relationship, it often leads to further destructive tactics. Threats are overused, used too quickly, destroy trust, and tend to promote retaliation.

Application 5.6 Threats in Personal Relationships

Think of a time when you were threatened, or you used threats. What happened? Looking back, do you think the threats were effective in solving a problem and keeping the relationship intact? Were they harmful? What have you learned about your personal response to using threats or being threatened verbally?

Which of the following was true for you when you were the recipient of a threat or when you used a threat?

- I felt justified and right.
- I could not think of anything else to do.
- I wanted to hurt the other person.
- I wanted to get even after I was threatened.
- My feelings for/with the other person changed to fear, contempt, humiliation, rage, helplessness, or vengeance.
- I managed to avoid the other person.
- I broke the relationship, finally.
- I didn't like myself for issuing the threat.
- I didn't like myself for changing my behavior when someone threatened me.
- I felt hate/hated.
- I felt regret or remorse.

Can you think of positive outcomes of giving or receiving a threat? Discuss these with your small group.

Threats introduce a risk in a relationship. Even if a credible threat is carried out, with the resulting win–lose negative sanction, what is gained? The immediate problem may be temporarily resolved, but the main goals (1) to solve the problem and (2) to preserve the relationship for work or closeness have not been met. The use of the threat automatically damages the second goal, "preserve the relationship."

Destructive Domination

Dominating tactics involve being verbally competitive—striving for an individual "win." These tactics have a win/lose orientation and reflect a belief that what one person gets, the other loses. As a result, the party using competitive tactics will try to one-up the other party to gain an advantage.

If someone personally criticizes you, rejects your statements, or acts in a verbally hostile manner (with threats, jokes, or questions), you become vividly aware of the competitive nature of the exchange. Confrontational remarks are at the heart of "I win–you lose" perspectives on conflict. Just as with avoidance tactics, dominating tactics are often used in combination. A dominating approach demands that the other give in, take responsibility for the conflict, and solve it.

Illustrations of Dominating Statements

"Oh, come on"

"You're exaggerating"

"If you do that once more, you are grounded"

"I am the expert here"

"Listen, when you are in the kitchen I am the boss"

"Who told you that I would care about your opinion?"

"You are just stupid"

"I am not going to stop until I win"

Most of us know that drugs and alcohol make conflict worse. We often hear stories about someone being drunk physically or verbally aggressive. Research on this is quite clear—there is a definite link between substance abuse and harmful competitive tactics. Alcohol especially makes conflict episodes much more damaging (Edelgard and Colsman 2002; Huang, White, Kosterman, Catalano, and Hawkins 2001; MacDonald, Zanna, and Holmes 2000). It is so common that we say, *Never engage in a conflict when you or the other has been drinking.* Of course, other drugs have even more dramatic effects. The recent surge in methamphetamine use is often correlated with violent interpersonal aggression. So, if you want your conflicts to be less damaging, avoid engaging difficult issues when you or the other is under the influence of a substance.

The dominating style often leads the other to mirror that style. Often, the person who feels powerless and victimized escalates the conflict to a point, then gives up, thinking, "There's nothing I can do to win anyway." In effect, the participants cooperate in the escalation. A very angry person was once observed trying to take over the microphone and the floor at a convention. He shouted loudly, disrupted the proceedings, and was finally given 5 minutes to state his case. He did so, supporting with vehemence the pullout of his church group from a large national group, which he perceived as being too progressive. He chose the dominating style to escalate the conflict—soon he and the chairman were yelling back

and forth at each other. When he gained the microphone, however, he followed the rules, spoke, and sat down.

Verbal Aggressiveness and Verbal Abuse

Verbal aggressiveness and **verbal abuse** are forms of communication violence. Rather than just telling others what might happen to them (using a threat or warning), people using verbal aggression attack the self-concepts of the others (Infante and Wigley 2011). Character attacks ("You are just a rotten wife"), insults ("Well, I suppose someone with your intelligence would see it that way"), rough teasing, ridicule, humiliation, and profanity all are forms of verbal aggression. In individualistic cultures, aggressive and **abusive talk** is common. It attacks the other's character, background, abilities, physical appearance, and the like. The more important your relationship with someone, the more the verbal aggression hurts (Avtgis and Rancer 2010; Martin, Anderson, and Horvath 1996). In a collectivistic culture, on the other hand, the most damaging verbal abuse is directed toward a person's group, clan, tribe, village, or family, such as when you say, "He's a drunken Irishman" (Vissing and Baily 1996), or "You people are all animals."

Many conflict parties, those who use a dominating style, immediately begin to verbally attack with abusive language. Once you focus on the other as the sole cause of the difficulties, it is easy to slip into disparaging personal remarks. The following are examples of verbal abuse and aggressiveness:

You're so stupid.

You're an imbecile.

You're ugly.

You're low class.

I wish you would die/get hit by a car/fall off the face of the earth.

No one else would have you.

One study examined the use of verbal aggression in college-age couples and found that based on 5,000 American couples, men and women engage in equal amounts of verbal aggression (Sabourin 1995) and other studies show this to be the case (Archer 2000; Ehrensaft, Moffitt, and Caspi 2006). If an occasional lapse into verbal aggression occurred, partners seemed able to absorb it, but in distressed relationships, verbal aggression was associated with ineffective conversation skills and was much more frequent than in satisfactory relationships. The most damaging style results from people knowing little about how to argue (argument can be positive), who therefore resort to verbal aggressiveness. (See Guerrero and Gross [2014] for an overview of the issues surrounding argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness.)

Most people recognize verbal abuse. When we hear someone in public verbally abusing another, we cringe. The person engaging in verbal aggression most often doesn't perceive their communication as aggressive. People who exhibit **high verbal aggressiveness** claim that 46% of their verbally aggressive messages are humorous (Infante, Rancer, and Wigley 2011; Infante, Riddle, Horvath, and Tumlin 1992). Labeling a verbally aggressive comment as humor convinces no one except the aggressive speaker. Outsiders view verbally aggressive people as less credible and as having fewer valid arguments than those

who don't use aggressive language (Guerrero and Gross 2014; Infante, Hartley, Martin, Higgins, Bruning, and Hur 1992). If a couple is verbally aggressive, they tend to infuriate each other and lack the skill to undo the relationship damage (Sabourin 1995).

Verbal aggression is closely associated with physical abuse. Verbal aggression precedes and predicts physical aggression in adolescents and in marriage and other romantic relationships (Murphy and Smith 2010; Sabourin and Stamp 1995; White and Humphrey 1994). Adding injury to insult, verbally aggressive couples usually do not perceive their aggression as a problem (Vivian and Langhinrichsen-Rohling 1994).

Sometimes, researchers label verbally aggressive tactics as **harassment.** A direct verbal attack on another can have serious consequences. In Sweden, for example, an estimated 100 to 300 people each year commit suicide as a result of harassment by work colleagues (Bjorkqvist et al. 1994). One study found that in a Finnish university, women were more often harassed than men, and women holding administrative and service jobs were harassed more than female professors (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Hjelt-Back 1994). Making negative comments about appearance or clothing is considered harassment if the speaker is in a high-power relationship with the "target" person. Additionally, if a high-power person ridicules a low-power person's mode of speech or makes sexually explicit suggestions or observations, harassment is occurring. Finally, when a high-power person negatively labels a low-power person's personality, using words such as "brain-dead," "loser," "whiner," "bitch," or "wimp," the target person is being harassed. Such comments, whether labeled "harassment" or "verbal aggression," can occur at home, on the job, in public, or in any type of relationship. And sometimes, these destructive verbal tactics escalate to the next level—physical violence.

Extremely verbally abusive tactics can be characterized by the "rapist" style. In the rapist style (this metaphor is not meant to imply only sexual behavior but all kinds of dominating communicative behavior), participants "function through power, through an ability to apply psychic and physical sanctions, through rewards and especially punishments, and through commands and threats" (Brockriede 1972, 2). The conflict or argument is often escalated, since participants are interested in coercion rather than agreement. The intent of those using the rapist style is to manipulate and violate the personhood of the "victims," or other parties in the conflict. Verbal aggression feels like, and is, violation of the humanity of the other, like rape.

Coercive control also characterizes extreme domination, resting on highly unequal power. Coercive control is a form of intimate partner violence, since extreme coercion often does escalate into physical violence. Dominators use invisible chains to control every aspect of an intimate partner's life, in order to gain power over the partner. Even well-educated people can become enmeshed in coercive control. As in other forms of domination, knowing the signs of coercion help the potential victim stop the pattern before violence occurs.

Bullying is another extreme form of dominating. The prevalence of bullying was presented in Chapter 4. Some dominators resort to bullying so frequently that it should be considered a subset of the style of domination.

Bullying begins with verbal aggression, a feature of the dominating style. Until aggression results in physical violence, verbal communication creates and reinforces aggression. As Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, and Alberts (2005) write, "Workplace bullying does not arise out of a vacuum. Rather, it is often a consequence of **unmanaged incivility,**

rudeness, and injustice that contaminates the workplace. Incivility, over time, can develop into bullying as repeated, long-term acts wear down, demoralize, stigmatize, and isolate those targeted"(7).

In intimate partner violence, verbal aggression almost always precedes a pattern of coercive control, and continues throughout all levels of intimate partner violence. Dominating communication creates and carries intimate partner violence.

Because verbal aggression leads to bullying and intimate partner or family violence, children and adults must be given opportunities in school, friend groups, support groups, popular books, and on the media to recognize and confront verbal aggression. One of the most helpful practical books on verbal aggression remains *The Verbally Abusive Relationship* (Evans 2010). You can find many other good resources on verbal aggression on the Web.

Abuse occurs digitally as well as in person. Technology presents new opportunities for indirect, but powerful, verbal abuse (indirect only because people are not face-to-face). Regardless of gender and age, many people experience online dating violence, relationship abuse, and intimate partner abuse.

People can be, however, trained to stop using verbal aggression (Brinkert 2010; Infante and Wigley 2011; Krueger 2011). Learning how to argue without attacking the other's self is one of the key steps in stopping verbal aggression, as well as controlling the emotional flooding associated with verbal abuse and verbal aggression. On the other side, if individuals can recognize the signs of possible escalation, they might be able to seek help (Murphy and Smith 2010). The popular "That's Not Cool" media campaign against verbal abuse helps educate people on both sides of the verbal abuse divide. Communication strategies that helped women in heterosexual relationships deal with digital verbal abuse were grouped around avoiding, such as maintaining boundaries, and speaking out on behalf of victims. Teens and young women can be taught to delete offensive messages, to network with other women, and to make connections with dominant group members (men) who will help them (Weathers and Hopson 2016). The support of dominant group members is essential in overcoming various forms of verbal abuse and bullying.

Compromise

Compromise is an intermediate style resulting in some gains and some losses for each party. It is moderately assertive and cooperative. A compromising style is characterized by beliefs such as "You can be satisfied with part of the pie" and "Give a little and get a little." When compromising, parties give up some important goals to gain others. Compromise is dependent on shared power because if the other party is perceived as powerless, no compelling reason to compromise exists.

Compromise is frequently confused with integrating, which requires creative solutions and flexibility. Compromise differs, however, in that it requires trade-offs and exchanges. Many times people avoid using compromise because something valuable has to be given up. While North American norms, especially in public life, encourage compromising, the style is not often the first choice in personal relationships. When power is unequal, compromising is usually seen as giving in or giving up. The following box summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of compromising.

Compromising

ADVANTAGES

Compromise sometimes lets conflict parties accomplish important goals with less time expenditure than integrating requires. It also reinforces a power balance that can be used to achieve temporary or expedient settlements in time-pressured situations. It can be used as a backup method for decision making when other styles fail. Further, it has the advantage of external moral force; therefore, it appears reasonable to most parties. Compromise works best when other styles have failed or are clearly unsuitable.

EXAMPLE:

Mark and Sheila, ages 10 and 8, both want to play with the new computer game they received for Christmas. After a noisy argument, their parents tell them to work something out that is fair. They decide that if no one else is using the game, they can play without asking, but if they both want to play at the same time, they have to either play a game together or take turns by hours (every other hour). The compromise of taking turns works well as a conflict reduction device. The parents can intervene simply by asking, "Whose turn is it?"

DISADVANTAGES

Compromise can become an easy way out—a "formula" solution not based on the demands of a particular situation. For some people, compromise always seems to be a form of "loss" rather than a form of "win." It prevents creative new options because it is easy and handy to use. Flipping a coin or "splitting the difference" can be a sophisticated form of avoidance of issues that need to be discussed. These chance measures, such as drawing straws or picking a number, are not really compromise. They are arbitration, with the "arbiter" being chance. True compromise requires each side giving something in order to get an agreement; she is selling a bike and I pay more than I want to and she gets less than she wants for the bike.

EXAMPLE:

Two friends from home decide to room together at college. Sarah wants to live in Jesse dorm with some other friends she has met. Kate wants to live in Brantley, an all-female dorm, so she can have more privacy. They decide that it wouldn't be fair for either one to get her first choice, so they compromise on Craig, where neither knows anyone. At midyear, they want to change roommates since neither is happy with the choice. Sarah and Kate might have been able to come up with a better solution if they had worked at it.

Research has not specified compromise tactics to the degrees of specificity of avoidance and dominating, but some samples are:

- Fairness ("I gave in last time, now it is your turn")
- Split the difference ("I have come up $10,000 and if you would come down by a similar amount, we could complete the sale")
- Change roles ("You did it last time, now it is my turn to lead")

- Meet in the middle ("We both have to give something in order to get something—I suggest a middle ground")
- Temporary solution ("Since we don't have time to work out all the details, how about we agree on all the major points and set a time for working on the rest?")

One's view of compromise is a good litmus test of how you view conflict in general. Think about the famous "the cup is half empty" versus "the cup is half full" aphorism that applies to compromise. Some see compromise as "both of us lose something" and others see it as "both of us win something." Clearly, compromise means a middle ground between you and the other and involves a moderate and balanced amount of concern for self and concern for other. "Compromises" can result from good-faith efforts, and may be very effective solutions. Compromise as a *style* sometimes shortchanges the conflict process, while at other times it effectively deals with the reality that not everyone can get everything they want. Compromise should not be viewed simply as a passive approach, since sometimes personal restraint, goodwill, and taking care of the relationship require a high degree of concentration and energy.

Obliging

The term *obliging* is the same as *accommodation.* The dictionary defines **obliging** as "willing to do a service or kindness; helpful." You oblige or accommodate to the other's needs. One who practices obliging does not assert individual needs but prefers a cooperative and harmonizing approach (Neff and Harter 2002). The individual sets aside his or her concerns in favor of pleasing the other people involved (this relational goal may be the most important goal for the accommodating person).

One may gladly yield to someone else or may do so grudgingly and bitterly. The accompanying emotion can differ for those using obliging, from gentle pleasure at smoothing ruffled feelings to angry, hostile compliance. The accommodating person may think that he or she is serving the good of the group, family, or team by giving in, sacrificing, or stepping aside. Sometimes this is true; other times, however, the accommodator could better serve the needs of the larger group by staying engaged longer and using a more assertive style. Sometimes people who habitually use this style play the role of the martyr, bitter complainer, whiner, or saboteur. They may yield in a passive way or concede.

The following box summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of obliging.

Obliging

ADVANTAGES

When one finds that he or she is wrong, it can be best to accommodate the other to demonstrate reasonableness. If an issue is important to one person and not important to the other, the latter can give a little to gain a lot. In addition, obliging can prevent one party from harming the other—one can minimize losses when he or she will probably lose anyway. If harmony or maintenance of the relationship is currently the most crucial goal, obliging allows the relationship to continue without overt conflict. Obliging to a senior or seasoned person can be a way of managing conflict by betting on the most experienced person's judgment.

(continued)

Obliging

EXAMPLE:

A forest service manager asks the newest staff member if he is interested in learning about land trades with other federal agencies. The new employee knows that the manager must assign someone from his office to help the person in charge of land trades. The employee says, "It's not something I know much about, but I wouldn't mind learning." The manager, who could have assigned the new employee anyway, thanks him for his positive attitude about new responsibilities. The new employee's goals would not have been well served by his saying, "I have no interest in getting into that area. There is too much red tape, and it moves too slowly."

DISADVANTAGES

Obliging can foster an undertone of competitiveness if people develop a pattern of showing each other how nice they can be. People can one-up others by showing how eminently reasonable they are. Obliging of this type tends to reduce creative options. Further, if partners overuse obliging, their commitment to the relationship is never tested, since one or the other always gives in. This pattern can result in a pseudo-solution, especially if one or both parties resent the obliging; it will almost surely boomerang later. Obliging can further one person's lack of power. It may signal to that person that the other is not invested enough in the conflict to struggle through, thus encouraging the low-power party to withhold energy and caring. A female student wrote the following example of a learned pattern of avoidance and its resulting obliging.

EXAMPLE:

"In our home, conflict was avoided or denied at all costs, so I grew up without seeing conflicts managed in a satisfactory way, and I felt that conflict was somehow 'bad' and would never be resolved. This experience fit well with the rewards of being a 'good' girl (accommodating to others), which combined so I was not even sensitive to wishes and desires that might lead to conflict."

Some of the common responses of obliging or accommodating are:

"Whatever"

"It just does not matter to me—I will agree to see any movie you want"

"If you want to move out of state, I'm sure we can make it work long distance"

"I don't want to fight about this"

"Whatever you say"

"I'm really ok about any restaurant you pick"

"Its ok, I'll just work on the weekend to complete the contract"

"It is more important to me that we are OK, rather than get what I want"

Obliging is one of the most common responses to conflict between people, but it is often the least noticed. One of the reasons is that when someone accommodates, you may not even be aware of it. If you say, "I want to go sledding" and your brother says, "whatever," obliging has occurred. If it were more overt, like dominating moves, it would be

easier to see. As a result, few communication studies look intensely at obliging—they just don't see it. Recently, the trait of *verbal benevolence* has attracted the attention of researchers (Guerrero and Gross 2014). Those who make sincere, supportive comments to their conflict partners may be obliging or avoiding; the addition of kind and courteous comments helps mitigate against possible downsides of avoiding and obliging. Supportive comments, if truthful, always help the relational and identity levels of conflict. Even process conflict can benefit from verbal benevolence, as when someone says, "I can see why you want to continue discussing this. You have studied this for a long time, and have a lot to contribute. I regret that we must make a decision now, because of the time demands."

If you automatically agree with everything your romantic partner suggests, this may have become such a patterned response that you don't even realize you are obliging him or her. In a traditional marriage, if the husband comes home for dinner and says, "How about turkey tonight?" an accommodating wife will say, "OK, I bet I have some frozen we can thaw out, and I can make gravy." While she was planning on beef stroganoff, she automatically adjusts to his preferences and accommodates. In a conventional heterosexual relationship, the man may try to make his partner happy by agreeing to do whatever she wants to do on a date night. In less conventional relationships, these obliging patterns are less stereotyped.

Obliging may be linked to **codependence.** In codependent relationships, what one person does, thinks, or feels is dependent on what someone else does, thinks, or feels. Codependent relationships often result from a person growing up in an alcoholic or abusive family, or in any family in which power differences are very obvious. The extreme escalation of the alcoholic or abusive person causes the spouse or child to become hypervigilant, to tune in with exquisite attention to the moods, needs, feelings, and predicted behavior of a powerful other. Ultimately, the vigilant person does not know what she or he thinks, feels, or needs, except to feel safe. One of the hardest questions a counselor asks many women and some men is, "What are you feeling?" For the person who has lived with a system of obliging or codependence, the answer is usually, "I don't know."

Obliging responses are often seen as being kind, being responsive to the partner, or as promoting calm. Certainly it is true that not every issue needs to be addressed, and obliging can be a helpful part of anyone's repertoire. On the other hand, obliging can reflect a position of "I have no choice." That power imbalance, as we have discovered, harms ongoing relationships. As we become more sensitized to obliging moves, we should be able to expand our understanding of them and their role in conflict events. If you care about the long-term relationship, want to resolve a conflict to accomplish an important task, and can avoid reactivity, obliging can help create goodwill.

Integrating

Collaborative processes unleash this catalytic power and mobilize joint action among the stakeholders.
—Barbara Gray, *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems*

Integrating, or **collaborating,** demands the most constructive, engaged engagement of any of the conflict styles. Integrating shows a high level of concern for one's own goals, the goals of others, the successful solution of the problem, and the enhancement of the

relationship. Note that integrating, unlike compromise, involves not a moderate level of concern for goals but a high level of concern for them. Integrating is an invitation to all others so you can reach a joint resolution.

A collaborative conflict does not conclude until both parties are reasonably satisfied and can jointly support a solution. Relationships are better, not worse, than when the conflict began. No one person ends up feeling run over or overpowered. The style is cooperative, effective, and focused on team effort, partnership, or shared personal goals. It is also sometimes called mutual problem solving. Integrating is the style that calls on all your best communication skills.

Integrating involves making descriptive and disclosing statements and soliciting reactions from the other party. You make concessions when necessary and accept responsibility for your part in the conflict. Integrating does not mean taking total responsibility, such as saying, "It's all my fault. I shouldn't have gotten angry." Rather, integrating is a struggle *with* others to find mutually agreeable solutions. Parties engage at an exploratory, problem-solving level rather than avoiding or destroying each other. Integrating is the search for a *new* way.

Integrating is characterized by statements such as "When I get in conflict with someone, I try to work creatively with them to find new options" or "I like to assert myself, and I also like to cooperate with others." Integrating differs from compromise because in compromise, the parties look for an easy intermediate position that partially satisfies them both, whereas in integrating, the parties work creatively to find new solutions that will maximize goals for them both.

Application 5.7

Salary, Public Regard, and Secret Agreements

Both Lillian and Greg had been working in a hospital, Lillian as the vice president for financial affairs and Greg as a program director for financial campaigns. Both Lillian and Greg reported directly to the CFO, who retired. Both applied for his job, but were disappointed when someone from another state was hired. However, both Lillian, the VP, and Greg came to like and respect Karen, the new CFO. Lillian had the higher position, although Greg also reported to the CFO, not to Lillian. The conflict arose when time for pay raises and performance reviews came around. Karen told Greg that she valued him, and did not want to lose him. He had been looking for another job. So she promoted him to "vice president for financial growth," with a salary increase slightly above Lillian's. Lillian retained her position as vice president.

What were they thinking and feeling?

Karen: I am so new here that I don't want to train another campaign director. Greg knows everyone in town. When he told me he was thinking of going back to his previous hospital as CFO, I believed him. He is a competitive, aggressive person who wants to be at the top. I couldn't afford to lose him. However, I don't quite trust him. He is doing a lot of public forums where he says he speaks for the hospital, without checking with me. He is a lone ranger. And now I have alienated Lillian who, while

(continued)

Application 5.7

Salary, Public Regard, and Secret Agreements

quiet, is really the heart and soul of this office. She has years of institutional history and everyone trusts her. She is willing to do the hard, daily work of financial oversight. I should not have caved in to Greg's request without talking it over with Lillian and my president. I can see that I put her in a one-down position with Greg. I'm going to have to fix this, and quick. She could easily retire early and then we'd all lose.

Lillian: I am sure Karen does not know how much Greg upstages me. He never includes me in the conversation when we are with higher-ups or big donors. He treats me like the secretary. I didn't mind so much, because I know Karen values me and after all, I was second to her. Now she has effectively raised Greg above me, although I don't have to report to him. And I heard from someone I trust that he wants Karen's job. I am upset, but more with Greg than Karen. Karen, I think, got bullied, and I'm paying the price. It's not OK with me. We need to talk. I do not want to retire, but I will never put myself in the position to report to Greg.

Greg: I am pleased that Karen sees my worth. I have brought a lot of money to the hospital, and I'm developing a good public presence. I don't respect Lillian's unassuming style. She lets a lot of opportunities go by without telling donors what we need. She's more of an accountant than a vice president. I don't like it that Karen goes to her for everything. I really dislike the team meetings when nothing gets done. Karen's always talking about a "team plan," but I just want to be left alone to make connections with donors and then let the president figure out what the priorities are. I do fine on my own.

Of the following options, pick the one that you think has the best chance of getting all three people to come up with a collaborative (win–win) solution. Then role-play your preferred option with all three people.

Option 1. Karen calls a meeting with Greg and Lillian and says that she has made a mistake in raising Greg without including Lillian. She calls for a team decision about how to rectify the relationship, content, identity, and process issues.

Option 2. Karen talks with Greg and Lillian separately, asking Greg to change some of his public behavior, and telling Lillian that Karen made a mistake and wants to brainstorm how to resolve the issue.

Option 3. Karen calls a meeting with the president and Lillian and Greg and explains that Greg is extremely valuable to the team, but no more so than Lillian, so she is going to raise Lillian's salary to Greg's level. She asks them to collaborate more in public.

Option 4. None of the above. Develop a plan that you think might work, including beginning language, based on what the three parties think and feel. The object is a collaborative outcome.

Research on the effect of an integrating style consistently demonstrates that when one learns how to use it, integrating is a successful tool for conflict management (Kuhn and Poole 2000). Integrating results in joint benefits and provides a constructive response to the conflict. Collaborative styles in a variety of contexts result in better decisions and greater satisfaction with partners (Gayle-Hackett 1989b; Pruitt 1981; Tutzauer and Roloff 1988; Wall and Galanes 1986). Cooperative styles allow conflict parties to find mutually agreeable solutions, whether the conflict occurs in an intimate or work situation.

The following box summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of integrating.

Integrating

ADVANTAGES

Integrating works well to find a collaborative solution that will satisfy all parties. It generates new ideas, shows respect for the other parties, and gains commitment to the solution from everyone. Because integrating incorporates the feelings of the concerned parties, they both feel the solutions are reality based. Integrating is a high-energy style that fits people in long-term, committed relationships, whether personal or professional. Integrating actively affirms the importance of relationship and content goals and thus builds a team or partnership approach to conflict management. When integrating works, it prevents one from using destructive means such as violence. It demonstrates to the parties that conflict can be productive.

EXAMPLE:

Anne, an intern at a hospital, has been given a "mission impossible" that requires that she diagnose and keep charts on patients under the supervision of four different doctors. Her fellow interns work collaboratively to relieve her of some of the work. They want to demonstrate the need for more reasonable assignments, support Anne as a friend, and avoid being assigned Anne's work if she gets sick or resigns.

DISADVANTAGES

As with any style, if integrating is the only style used, one can become imprisoned in it. If investment in the relationship or issue is low, integrating may not be worth the time and energy consumed. Further, people who are more verbally skilled than others can use integrating in manipulative ways, which results in a continued power discrepancy between the parties. For example, if one party uses integrating, he or she may accuse the other of being uncaring by choosing a different style, such as avoidance. Often, high-power persons use pseudo-integrating to maintain the power imbalance. Pseudo-integrating is when you say all the right things, but ultimately you always gain at the other's expense.

EXAMPLE:

Members of a small group in a communication class are under time pressure to finish their project, due in 1 week. They overuse collaborative techniques such as consensus building, brainstorming, paraphrasing, and bringing out silent members. Quickly breaking up into subgroups would better serve the individual and relational goals of the group, but the group clings to a time-consuming method of making decisions long after they should have adapted their style to meet the deadline.

When you integrate, you induce, or persuade, the other party to cooperate in finding a mutually favorable resolution to the conflict. You have a "mutual versus individual" orientation. Integrating involves both parties working together for solutions that not only end the conflict but also maximize the gains for both parties. Collaborative tactics also have been labeled "prosocial" (Roloff 2009). The goals of the individuals and the relationship as a whole are paramount.

Some sample integrative statements are:

"I want to make sure this works for the two of us."

"Yes, I know you would like to flip a coin, but let's chat some more and come up with a more creative solution."

"Tell me again why this solution will or will not work for you."

"I see you are upset, tell me what you need so we can move on."

"Let's not decide right away, but come together this afternoon and figure out a solution that will work for both of us."

"You are an important part of our team and I'd like to hear your preferences before we decide."

"Let's each lay out our concerns and then figure out how to address them."

Some other guidelines are:

- Describe without interpretation. Describe what you feel, see, hear, touch, and smell instead of your guesses about the behavior.

  Example: "You're so quiet. Ever since I said I didn't want to go out tonight and would rather stay home and read, you haven't spoken to me," not "You never understand when I want to spend some time alone!"

- Focus on what is, instead of what should be.

  Example: "You look angry. Are you?" not "You shouldn't be angry just because I want to stay home."

- Describe your own experience instead of attributing things to the other person.

  Example: "I'm finding myself not wanting to bring up any ideas because I'm afraid you will ignore them," not "You are getting more critical all the time."

Integrative, or collaborative, tactics are very different from dominating tactics. A dominating tactic assumes that the size of the pie is finite; therefore, one's tactics are designed to maximize gains for oneself and losses for the other. Integrative tactics, however, assume that the size of the pie can be increased by working with the other party. Both can leave the conflict with something they value.

Some people experience only avoidant or dominating attitudes toward conflict and have a difficult time visualizing an integrative approach. If each time you have conflict you immediately say to your conflict partner, "You are wrong," you are likely to receive a dominating response in return. Integrating calls for a willingness to move *with* rather than against the other—a willingness to explore and struggle precisely when you may not feel like it. You do not give up your self-interest; you integrate it with the other's self-interest to reach agreement.

You do not have to like the other party, but *you do have to communicate respect.* Integrating does require "we" language rather than "I" language. Because parties work together for mutually desirable outcomes and protect their own as well as each other's interests, many times respect and caring develop as by-products of the collaborative effort. One makes disclosing statements by saying such things as "I am having trouble tracking this issue" or otherwise reporting one's feelings while in the conflict. When you state your feelings, of course you will use I language, since you know how you feel. Remember that "I feel that you do not understand this issue" is not a feeling statement, but a judgment. You can also solicit disclosure from the other party by saying, "What makes you upset when I bring up the summer plans?" One can also make qualifying statements and solicit criticism as ways to move the conflict toward integrating.

The final three categories of integrative tactics, classified as conciliatory remarks, are (1) supportive remarks ("I can see why that is difficult—we have all been ganging up on you"); (2) concessions ("OK, I agree I need to find new ways to deal with this problem"); and (3) acceptance of responsibility ("Yes, I have been acting uncooperatively lately"). All conciliatory remarks acknowledge one's own role in the conflict and offer an "olive branch" of hope and reconciliation to the other, paving the way to successful management of the conflict. All of the integrative tactics move the conflict into a third dimension where partners neither avoid nor blame but grapple with the conflict as a joint problem to be solved.

Collaborative, or integrative, tactics are associated with successful conflict management. Popular prescriptions for conflict management specify that one should work with the partner to establish mutual gain and to preserve the relationship and should engage in neither avoidance nor verbal aggressiveness but try to find mutual solutions to the problems (Fisher and Shapiro 2005).

Cautions about Styles

Because conflict styles are generating so much research, some cautions are in order. As noted previously, one's *culture* may make a difference. If the cultural studies could be grouped according to the degree of individualism and collectivism in each culture that would be helpful.[3] One study, however, suggests, "Overall the pattern of the five conflict modes did not vary greatly across countries or in comparison to the U.S. Norm Sample" (Herk, Thompson, Thomas, and Kilmann 2011, p. 1).[4]

[3] Recent work has been performed in India, Turkey, China, Oman, Australia, South Africa, Japan, Sweden, Pakistan, Taiwan, Germany, and Serbia among others (Al-Hamdan, Shukri, and Anthony 2011; Aliakbiri & Amiri 2016; Branislava, Tomislav, Vera, and Dragana 2011; Chaudhry, Sajjad, and I. Khan 2011; Croucher 2011; Croucher et al. 2012; Gultekin, Karapinar, Camgoz, and Ergeneli 2011; Kantek and Gezer 2005; Milton et al. 2015; Oetzel, Garcia, and Ting-Toomey 2008; Ozkalp, Sungur, and Ozdemir 2009; Randeree and Faramawy 2010; Ting-Toomey 2010; Wang 2010; Wang and Nasr 2011; Yuan 2010; Zhang 2015). There is also data on styles of Muslim and Hindu students in the United States (Croucher, Hicks, Oommen, and Demais 2011).

[4] Note that this was based on the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument, while most of the other studies used the Rahim measure. For another use, *see* Tjosvold, Wu, and Chen (2010); and Peng and Tjosvold (2011).

Regardless of the cultural context, one consistent and serious limitation to the studies is the *focus on self-reports.*[5] Your perception of conflict style depends on *whether you are rating yourself or others are rating you.* In some research and in workshops two patterns emerge:

- People most often see themselves as trying to solve the problem (using integrative styles) (McCready, Roberts, Bengala, Harris, Kingsely, and Krikorian 1996).
- People most often see others using controlling or aggressive styles.

Most of us see ourselves as trying to solve the conflict, while the other obstructs or interferes. In one workshop, participants, all who had disputes with someone else in the room, filled out the instrument as you did earlier in this chapter on *my styles* and the *other's styles.* When the results were tallied, an interesting result emerged. Almost all participants said, "I integrated and the other dominated." Two earlier studies found that managers see themselves as cooperative and others as competitive, demanding, or refusing (Thomas and Pondy 1977).

Self-reports carry a social desirability bias (giving answers that "look good"). One person's "narrative" about the conflict will probably not match that of the other person. In conflict, we tend to see ourselves in a positive light and others in a negative light. Unfortunately, most research on styles still uses self-reports, assuming they tell us what "style" someone actually used. At a minimum, studies need to look at the following:

Person A—my styles, person B's styles

Person B—my styles, person A's styles

Without such joint data, any conclusions about style are problematic.

The *relational context* often triggers an idiosyncratic style (Doucet, Poitras, and Chenevert 2009). Look at this list. Do you use the same style in all these relationships?

Best Friend

Mother/Father

Stepparent

Roommate

Brother or sister (or both)

President of student body

Uncle or aunt

Former romantic partner

Current romantic partner

Supervisor at work

Peers at work Classmate you like

Classmate you dislike

Classroom instructor

Childhood friend

New friend

[5] Sierau and Herzberg (2011) assess both actor and partner perspectives.

Whether the rater is you or the other, many people do not use a consistent style across a variety of relationships. One example is Eric, a college debater, who uses different styles in different contexts. When he is in public, he competes every chance he gets. He loves to match wits with others, push hard for what he wants, and win arguments. He is a good-humored and driven young man in public situations. Yet in private with his wife, he avoids conflict as though it were a dreaded disease. When Joan brings up conflicting issues, Eric either avoids or completely obliges her—he cannot stand conflict within an intimate relationship. Yet if Eric were to fill out a widely used style instrument, he would give a different answer depending on the relational context. But since a significant number of people adapt to different situations with different styles, to give them a single label, such as a "compromiser," is a gross oversimplification.

Research takes a "snapshot" of conflict styles, asking you what you did in a relationship. For many people, the style changes across time in a given relationship. Some people develop preferred *sequences* of styles; for example, one may begin a conflict by avoiding, then move to dominating, then finally integrate with the other party. The accurate assessment of one's conflict style should measure change over time. The following chart illustrates predominant styles with fluctuations across time. Note the variability within the styles used by the two people, both of whom predominantly avoid conflict.

	Time 1	**Time 2**	**Time 3**	**Time 4**	**Time 5**	**Time 6**	**Time 7**	**Time 8**	**Time 9**
Person A:	avoiding	avoiding	dominating	avoiding	avoiding	avoiding	dominating	avoiding	avoiding
Person B:	avoiding	avoiding	obliging	avoiding	avoiding	avoiding	obliging	avoiding	avoiding

Both would score as "avoiders" on a general style measure, yet over time, each one demonstrates distinctly different patterns. In ongoing relationships, multiple episodes span time, which a "snapshot" will not capture (Speakman and Ryals 2010).

Furthermore, one's overall *relationship history* is typically not assessed. If you are in a long-term relationship (with friends, employer, romantic partner, or family member), you have a rich history of interaction with them influencing your style, and your and the other's perception of it. For example, here is what Jen said. "In my marriage I never stood up for myself and instead kept it all bottled inside to where I detested him. In the end, I completely exploded."

Like Jen above, each of us develops a *conflict style narrative* based on our self-perception. Jen sees herself as an avoider who only once dominated, but don't you wonder how her ex-husband's narrative about her would diverge? He might say, "Oh, she didn't avoid, she was just a weak compromiser" or her "true self " came out when she exploded. Furthermore, Jen may be different in her next serious relationship. Similarly, a young man who is always dominating learns from his romantic partner how to collaborate. Styles change with learning. One who avoids conflict learns through trial and error to engage in the conflict earlier, thus changing her predominant mode. One can change a preferred conflict style, especially if the old style ceases to work well.

Your style is often triggered by your perception of the other's choices. The other's style influences the choices we make. For example, in Ellen's first marriage, she developed the pattern of occasionally throwing dishes when she was intensely angry. Her first husband would flee the house. A few years later, after she had married Mick, they got into an argument. Ellen threw a dish at Mick, who promptly went to the kitchen, picked up most of the available dishes on the counter, smashed them on the floor, and said, firmly, "Well,

if we are going to break dishes, let's do it!" Ellen immediately burst into tears. She wanted a partner who would stay and work out the problem instead of leaving the scene. Neither has thrown a dish since.

Conflict styles can provide good beginning point for analysis. Knowing *your* perception of self and other and *the other's* perception of self and of you gives you valuable insight into what fuels the ongoing conflict. In a close relationship, what is the best way to find out how your friend, partner, or family member perceives you? *Ask them.*

Beyond Styles: Violence

Each of the five styles presented so far in this chapter has a place in conflict management, except the subset of domination, verbal aggressiveness, and verbal abuse. As we have seen, bullying and verbal violence always lead to negative outcomes. They violate the core principles of good communication. They rest on a win–lose approach to conflict.

Violence occurs when conflict interactions move beyond threats, verbal abuse, and verbal aggressiveness. A working definition of violence is "an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person" (Gelles and Cornell 1990, 22). In conflict terms, violent behavior is an attempt to force one's will on the other—to get him or her to stop doing something or to start doing something. Clearly, it is a one-sided tactic designed to force the other to do one's bidding. Violence substitutes physical threats for verbal persuasion. Violence occurs in the home, on dates, and in the workplace. Specifying the details of violence, the two most researched scales are CTS and CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman 1996). The two versions, CTS and CTS2, use items on negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury. Some sample items from the two scales are:[6]

- Threw something at my partner that could hurt.
- Twisted my partner's arm or hair.
- Pushed or shoved my partner.
- Had a broken bone from a fight with my partner.
- Used force like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon to make my partner have sex.
- Grabbed my partner.
- Used a knife or gun on my partner.
- Punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt.
- Choked my partner.
- Slammed my partner against a wall.
- Beat up my partner.
- Kicked my partner.

First responders and family violence counselors now can use excellent tools to help them quickly assess the potential lethality of the situation in which they intervene. The Karolinska Violence Scale (2010) provides an interview guide to help assess the potential

[6] There are many items on the scales and because this section is on violence, we are focusing on the more violent ones rather than the negotiation items.

for continuing violent behavior when a person has entered the social service or criminal justice system. The State of Maryland has developed a Lethality Assessment Program that first responders may use to quickly decide how dangerous an intimate partner or family situation might be, so the people involved can be referred for further services or apprehended (www.mnadv.org, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence). The field of intimate partner violence (IPV) risk assessment is a rapidly growing area of inquiry and application. Administration of the assessment devices and interpretation of their predictive validity continue to be refined by researchers (Messing and Thaller 2013).

Violence remains tragically pervasive, even though the seriousness of such violence, especially domestic violence, continues to come into question too frequently, even being termed "ordinary decent domestic violence" by a judge in one study (Haughton et al. 2015). Ponder for a moment these rates:

- In the United States, almost 20% of people reported experiencing a violent episode in the prior year of their romantic relationship (Marshall 1994) and more than 4 million women each year are physically harmed by their husbands, boyfriends, or other intimate partners. Similarly, in Australia more than 20% of couples have experienced violence (Halford, Farrugia, Lizzio, and Wilson 2009).[7]
- Premarital violence is a serious social problem that affects more than 30% of the young people in the United States who date (Buttell and Carney 2006; Sugarman and Hotaling 1989).
- In unhappy marriages, 71% of the couples reported physical aggression in the prior year (Vivian and Langhinrichsen-Rohling 1994).
- Men commit about 13 million violent crimes each year, with only half being simple assaults, while women commit about 2.1 million violent crimes a year, with three-quarters being simple assaults (Buttel and Carney 2006). Male violence carries much more risk of danger and lethality than female violence.

In another study of dating relationships, 23% of students reported being pushed, grabbed, or shoved by their dating partner (Deal and Wampler 1986). Studies of college students have indicated that rates of physical aggression against a current mate are between 20% and 35%, with all forms of physical assault decreasing dramatically with age. The most common forms of physical aggression practiced by both men and women were pushing, shoving, and slapping (O'Leary, Barling, Arias, Rosenbaum, Malone, and Tyree 1989). Additionally, 16.3 out of 1,000 children were reported to have been abused and/or neglected, and in 16% of homes, some kind of violence between spouses had occurred in the year prior to the survey (Gelles and Cornell 1990).

In summary, most researchers conclude that violence is indeed common in American families, and current rates of violence are updated each year. Further, "These incidents of violence are not isolated attacks nor are they just pushes and shoves. In many families, violence is patterned and regular and often results in broken bones and sutured cuts" (192). Violence spans all social and economic boundaries, though it is more prevalent in families with low income, low educational achievement, and low-status employment.[8]

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[7] See the special issue of *Journal of the American Medical Association,* August 4, 2010.

[8] The rates of violence come from various sources and differ whether from national surveys, crime victim surveys, police calls, or FBI statistics.

Patterns of Violence

The following are some tenets of violence, based on research (adapted from Bartholomew and Cobb 2011):

Tenet 1: Physical Aggression Is Almost Always Preceded by Verbal Aggression Small, insignificant acts lead to verbal sparring, which then escalates into physical aggression or abuse. For instance, you burn the toast, your spouse screams at you, "Why can't you even do simple things right?" You shout back, "So what makes you think you are so high and mighty?" and the cycle continues unabated with the two of you shoving each other around the kitchen. The spiral of destruction continues until the physically stronger one, usually the man, gets an upper hand. The important feature here is that the physical abuse does not just arise out of nowhere—it follows hostile, dominating verbal acts (Evans 1992; Lloyd and Emery 1994). The partners engage in an "aggression ritual" that ends in violence (Harris, Gergen, and Lannamann 1986).

Tenet 2: Intimate Violence Is Usually Reciprocal—Both Participate Aggression and violence are reciprocal—once one partner engages in violence, the other is likely to respond in kind. In intimate male–female relationships, the woman is more likely than the man to engage in violent low-power tactics: The woman is 14 times more likely than the man to throw something and 15 times more likely than the man to slap (Stets and Henderson 1991). However, 40% of all women who are murdered are killed by someone close to them. Major differences in male and female violence show up in the seriousness and the effects of violence. There is no question that women are seriously victimized much more often than are men. Both participants are likely to report being both victims and perpetrators of physical aggression; 85% of couples report that the aggression is bidirectional (Vivian and Langhinrichsen-Rohling 1994). These statistics suggest that there is an attack–counterattack sequence to the majority of violent episodes Once violence begins, both people tend to participate—it is a dyadic, interactive event.

Tenet 3: Women and Children Suffer Many More Injuries Violence, regardless of the cycle of interaction leading up to it, damages women and children more than men. Advocates for battered women point to a "cohesive pattern of coercive controls that include verbal abuse, threats, psychological manipulation, sexual coercion, and control of economic resources" (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Additionally, many women learn not to confront, and remain unskilled in effective verbal defense. Many women try to placate rather than leave the scene. Socialization of women that teaches them to be forgiving also leads to women staying in abusive relationships.

All you have to do is volunteer at a battered women's shelter or read in the newspaper about child abuse to see who loses. As Gelles says, "When men hit women and women hit men, the real victims are almost certainly going to be the women" (1981, 128). Even when women use weapons as a way to gain the upper hand, they are still injured more often (Felson 1996). Throughout history, women have been the victims of violence.

Tenet 4: Victims of Abuse Are in a No-Win Situation Once the cycle of abuse begins, the victim of the abuse has few good options (Lloyd and Emery 1994). For example, it is fruitless to try to use aggression against a stronger and more violent person. Yet, on the other hand, it is extraordinarily difficult to leave because the perpetrator is trying to

control all the victim's actions. The complexity of abusive relationships is evidenced by the fact that nearly 40% of victims of dating violence continue their relationships and that most women who seek help from a battered women's shelter return to their spouses (Bartholomew and Cobb 2011; Sugarman and Hotaling 1989). Many women go back to abusive situations because with children they cannot make a living. Many women feel guilty about the failure of the relationship and go back, believing the abuser's promises to change. One study documented that 70% of fathers who sought custody of their children were successful, so many women, especially poor women, are afraid of losing their children if they stay away (Marano 1996). Tragically, abusers escalate their control tactics when victims try to leave. More domestic abuse victims are killed when they try to leave than at any other time. It is difficult for women with children to flee when they are so dependent on the very person who is violent with them.

Tenet 5: Perpetrators and Victims Have Discrepant Narratives about Violence (Bartholomew and Cobb 2011; Moffitt et al. 1997) One of the reasons that it is so difficult to decrease violence is that perpetrators of violent acts see their behavior as something "that could not be helped or as due to external, mitigating circumstances. Thus, they may cast themselves as unjustly persecuted for a minor, unavoidable, or nonexistent offense" (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman 1990, 1003). One provocative study asked the participants to recall situations where they were perpetrators of violence and then write about the events. They also were asked to recall situations where they were victims and reflect on those events. What emerged was that "perpetrators apparently see the incident as a brief, uncharacteristic episode that has little or no relation to present circumstances whereas victims apparently continue to see harmful consequences and to feel lasting grievances" (1001). The **discrepancies in accounts of violence** extend to the underreporting of violence. Husbands are more likely than wives to minimize and deny their violence (Bartholomew and Cobb 2011; Browning and Dotton 1986). Furthermore, husbands are more likely than wives to count choking, punching, and beating someone up as self-defense rather than violence (Brygger and Edleson 1984), but what abusers often report as "self-defense" is in reality violent retaliation.

Even though violence from women to men occurs (Ridley and Feldman 2003), it is far less common. In any event, *the accounts of the abuser and victim will be discrepant.*

Explanations for Violence

Why does violence occur in personal relationships? One explanation is that violent responses to conflict are learned—those who experience violence have experienced it before, have witnessed it in their family of origin or in previous relationships (Yexley and Borowsky 2002). Perpetrators of violence were often victims of violence in their childhood and in their earlier relationships. Yet, saying that "violence is passed on" is not a totally satisfying answer. We need to know much more about people who do not continue the patterns. Why do some people who are exposed to violence and aggression in childhood stop these patterns in adulthood (Lenton 1995a, 1995b)? Patricia, for example, suffered both verbal and physical abuse at the hand of her father. He said and did terrible things to her when she was a child, and she ran away from home at age 17. Yet, in raising her children, she did not once verbally or physically abuse them. We need much more research

on resilient people like this who break the intergenerational transmission of aggression. Similarly, what about people in families and romantic relationships who stop escalating sequences of verbal aggression that might lead to violence? And, on the other hand, why do some people who were not previously exposed to violence and aggression develop violent and aggressive behaviors?

A second explanation for violence centers on the elements of a patriarchal culture that insists the man is always right. The more discrepant the power between the husband and the wife, the greater the violence (Kim and Emery 2003). In "asymmetric power structures" (husband-dominant or wife-dominant marriages), there is "a much greater risk of violence than when conflict occurs among the equalitarian couples" (Coleman and Straus 1986, 152). When the power is "asymmetric," conflict episodes more often trigger violence. Extreme dependency leads to tolerance of violence. Research shows multiple factors leading to abuse and that patriarchal explanations, while part of the picture, are too simplistic (Bell and Forde 1999; Buttell and Carney 2006; Greene and Bogo 2002). For example, incidences of violence are higher in the United States than Hong Kong—seen as a patriarchal culture as well (Kam and Bond 2008).

A third explanation for violent tactics is that violence is the result of lack of communication skills in a situation of powerlessness. Physically aggressive wives and husbands display rigid communication patterns, automatically responding in kind to their partner rather than with an alternative response (Rosen 1996). If you can effectively argue (without being verbally aggressive), then you have a sense of power and impact. If you feel that you can have an impact on your spouse, there is no need to resort to physical aggression, even in the heat of conflict. Yet, there are also people who are both verbally skillful and physically violent.

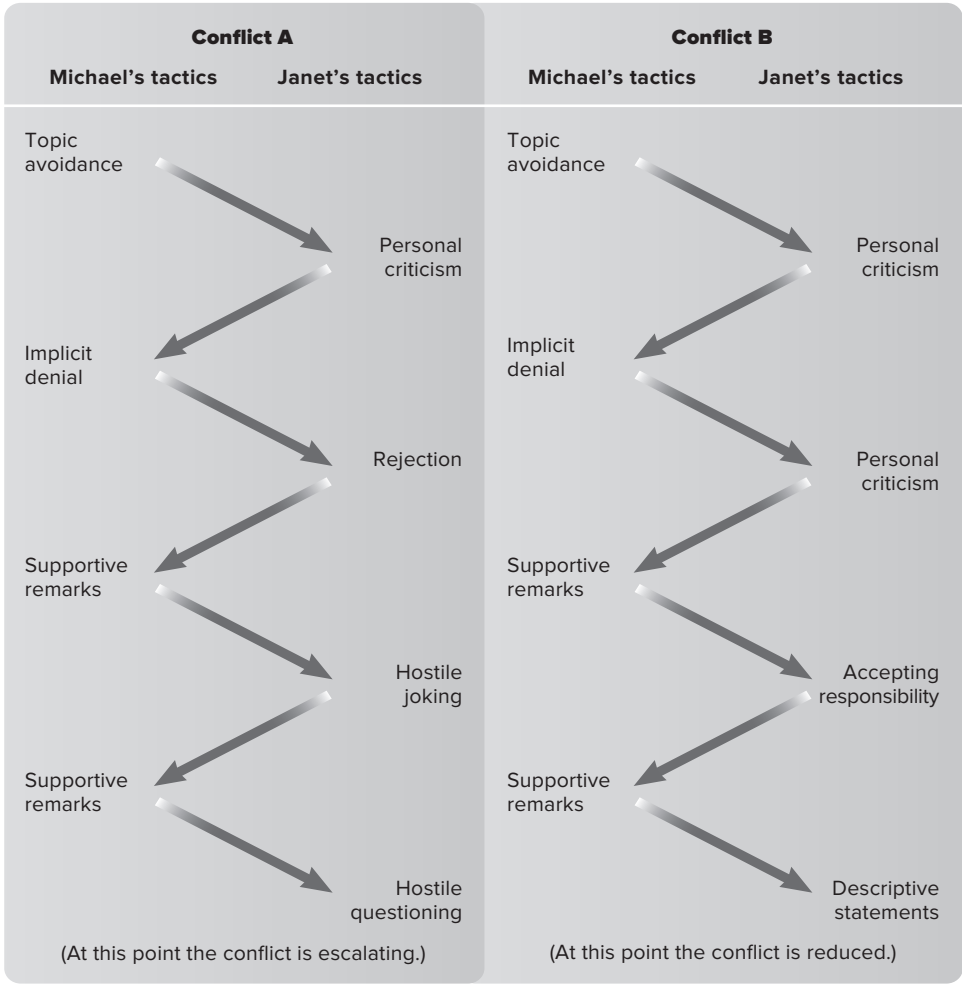
Clearly, no one explanation can account for violence. For example, why does a strong belief in pacifism correlate to fewer violent behaviors for Quaker women but not for Quaker men (Brutz and Allen 1986)? Why do surveys indicate that men are more often the recipients of violence than women? Is it because males are more likely to see any violence as a violation and report it? And why do people in marriages with a lot of physical aggression often not see it as a problem (Vivian and Langhinrichsen-Rohling 1994)?

Regardless of one's explanation of violence, it is past time for us as a culture to take a firm stand on it. We desperately need to approach violence from a variety of platforms—in the home; in the schools; in places of worship; and in the workplace. We need programs to teach us how to stop violence in all contexts and give assistance to both perpetrators and victims so the cycles of destruction can be stopped.

Interaction Dynamics

We cannot understand conflict dynamics by examining individual styles in isolation. *The interlocking interaction of two or more people determines the outcome of the conflict.* No matter how hard one person tries to resolve a conflict, the outcome will not be constructive unless the other person is involved in working things out, too. Figure 5.3 shows two very different outcomes of conflict even though Michael uses exactly the same tactics throughout. In one case, the conflict escalates between the two participants. In the other, Janet's alternative tactics reduce the conflict. The outcome is the *joint product of both choices,* not the result of some inherent personality trait of either participant.

Figure 5.3 Tactics in an Interaction Context



One chooses his or her conflict tactics and styles based on the view of the other's intent and actions. Analysis must shift from the individual to the relationship level, viewing conflict preferences as resulting from a system of interlocking behaviors rather than as a function of personality. Relational variables (whom you interact with, how congruent your perceptions are with those of the other party, what intent you think the other party has, and the mirroring of each other's responses) explain conflict style choices better than personality. In organizations, when a manager is perceived to use an integrating style, subordinates are less likely to use threats to resign, and more likely to use verbal engagement for dissent. When a manager's style is perceived to be dominating, subordinates are more likely to threaten to resign, to go around the manager, and to repeat demands (Redmond, Jameson, and Bender 2016).

Even though each conflict interaction is unique, two patterns of interlocking behaviors are worthy of note. They are (1) *complementary patterns* and (2) *symmetrical patterns.*

Complementary patterns are tactics or styles that are different from one another but mutually reinforcing. For example, if one person tries to engage and talk about the conflict and the other avoids, each one's moves reinforce those of the other. The engager begins to think, "If I don't force the issue, he will never talk to me," while the avoider thinks, "If she would just leave me alone, it would be all right." The more she engages, the more he avoids; the more he avoids, the more she engages; and they produce a "communication spiral" with each one magnifying his or her chosen response.

Such complementary patterns occur in many contexts. In business settings, for example, supervisors and subordinates use different styles, and in personal relationships, one person is often conciliatory and the other coercive. In intimate relationships that are unsatisfactory, partners may experiment with different styles, trying to find an interaction pattern that will improve the relationship.

Two people can engage in complementary interactions that do not cause serious relationship difficulties. For example, 9-year-old Carina, when confronted by her father about being responsible, says, "Who cares?" (with a giggle) But, if the patterns persist for years, they can keep the two parties in recurring conflict.

Symmetrical sequences occur in conflicts when the participants' tactics mirror one another—both parties escalating, for example. One type of symmetrical pattern occurs when the parties both avoid a conflict, refuse to engage in the conflict overtly, and create a devitalized spiral. As a result, the relationship loses vitality and the partners become so independent of each other that the relationship withers away. Gottman (1982) noted that there is a "chaining" of identical tactics in distressed marriages. Distressed spouses might get stuck in cycles of competitive tactics. For example, a sequence might occur as follows:

Husband:	threat
Wife:	counterthreat
Husband:	intensified threat
Wife:	intensified counterthreat
John:	Don't even think of walking away from me when I'm talking.
Anita:	I'll walk away, and I'll walk right out of the marriage if I do. You can't stop me.
John:	Try it, and see how you get to work without a car. It's in my name, so you don't have a car!
Anita:	And you don't have children. We're history!

People match their spouses' competitive tactics with an increase in their own. Such escalatory spirals lead the couple into irresolvable conflicts. In organizations, what starts as an "attack-defend" pattern evolves into symmetrical "attack-attack" patterns, with each party trying to one-up the other (Putnam and Jones 1982b). These patterns have been characterized in the following ways:

- attack-attack
- retaliatory chaining
- negative reciprocity
- cross-complaining

- threat-counterthreat
- round-robin attacks
- escalatory spirals

Conflict styles are best seen in the context of the relationship. Based on available research, the following conclusions are warranted:

1. If the conflict parties both want to avoid the conflict and, as a norm, do not generally work through conflicts, joint avoidance can be functional (Pike and Sillars 1985).
2. Once a conflict is engaged, dissatisfaction can be caused by either fight-flight or threat-threat patterns. Either the complementary pattern or the symmetrical pattern can be dysfunctional for the parties, especially when they get rigidly locked into habitual tactics and styles.
3. Once engagement has occurred, the conflict is best managed by moving to collaborative/ integrative tactics (Pike and Sillars 1985). One useful sequence is (a) the agenda-building phase, (b) the arguing phase, and (c) the final, integrative negotiation phase (Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, and Markman 1976).

In summary, to preserve a good relationship while pursuing a goal that appears incompatible with that of the other person, integrative tactics work best. You may begin the conflict by avoiding, obliging, compromising, or dominating, but at some point collaborative engagement is usually necessary. Competent communicators are those who use constructive, prosocial, collaborative tactics at some stage of the conflict (Cupach 1982). As Schuetz (1978) says, "In situations of conflict, as in other communicative events, the competent communicator engages in cooperative interaction that permits both persons (factions) involved to achieve their goals" (10).

Family researchers have clearly demonstrated the link between integrating and relationship satisfaction (Gottman 1994; Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, and Callan 1994). Collaborative tactics involve supporting a positive, autonomous identity for the other while working toward your own goals. Such multiple demands, although difficult to master, lead to productive results for all parties, for in the end you are working with rather than against the other for mutual integrative gains.

Whatever communication moves you make, the basic question is whether those choices lead to the effective management of the conflict over time. No one set of choices at any point will guarantee productive conflict, but integrative tactics at least set the stage for the containment and management of the conflict if both parties move toward a problem-solving perspective. When in doubt, collaborate.

Flexibility Creates Constructive Conflict

Being Stuck

People often stay frozen into a conflict style rather than developing style flexibility. Each time they are in a conflict, they make the same choices. The work associate who always avoids any conflict, smoothes over everyone's feelings, and habitually refuses to talk about the difficulties between her and others, is frozen in a particular style. Individual lack of adaptation can occur in many forms. For example, a person might always avoid conflict

until a situation heats up, at which point he or she engages in violent behavior. The pattern is self-sealing and difficult to alter. The person who competes on the job and is unable to relax off the job is just as stuck as the person who is unable to openly admit that conflict exists. People who are inflexible in their style selection are often unaware that their choice of style is an important contributor to the conflict.

People often get stuck in behaviors from their "golden age." The golden age is that period in which you felt best about yourself and from which you possibly still draw many positive feelings. The 45-year-old history teacher who fondly recalls participating in high school athletics might operate from the rule that "the way to handle conflict is to get out there and give it everything you've got, fight to win, and never let anything keep you from your goal." This rule probably worked beautifully in a football game, but it may cause real havoc if the principal does not want to work with aggressive teachers and recommends this teacher's transfer to another school.

Often people are stuck in a personal style because of early family experiences and gender identity (Neff and Harter 2002). Young girls may have been taught to smooth others' feelings and not "make waves." If you were raised with such prescriptions and bring them to a conflict situation, you will accommodate the other and fail to assert your own desires. In the following excerpt, Karen details some of the disadvantages of this particular lack of flexibility:

> As a child, I was forbidden to "talk back." As a result, I stifled all my replies until I was of sufficient age to walk out and did so. That was fifteen years ago—I have never been back . . . Thus, my strategy has been one of avoidance of a conflict to which I can see no resolution. Because I was raised by my father and stepmother, I scarcely knew my mother. When I was seventeen, I went to live with her. She wanted a mother-daughter relationship to which I could not respond. Legally bound to her, my attempts at confrontation ended in failure. Once again I walked out—this time into marriage. After seven years of marriage and abortive attempts at communication, I again walked out—this time with two children.

Likewise, many men are taught to compete regardless of the situation, learning that obliging, compromise, and integrating are all signs of weakness. Although a competitive style might be appropriate for certain business situations where everyone understands the tacit rules, dominating as your only response in an intimate relationship may destroy it. Gender conditioning, whatever its particular form, is just one kind of learning that helps keep people stuck in conflict styles that may not work in certain situations.

Are You Stuck?

How can you tell if you are *stuck in a conflict style?* Use the following diagnostic aid to determine if you are **stuck in a style** that does not work well for you:

1. *Does your current conflict response feel like the only natural one?* For example, if your friends or family members suggest that you "might try talking it through" rather than repetitively escalating conflict, do such new options seem alien and almost impossible for you to enact? When stuck, "do what comes unnaturally!"
2. *Does your conflict style remain constant across a number of conflicts that have similar characteristics?* For example, in every public conflict, do you accommodate others regardless of the issues at hand or your relationship with the others involved?

3. *Do you have a set of responses that follow a preset pattern?* For instance, do you "go for the jugular" then back off and accommodate the other because you fear you have made a "scene"? If you follow regular cycles of behavior, whatever the particulars, you may be stuck.
4. *Do others seem to do the same thing with you?* If different people engage in similar behavior with you, you may be doing something that triggers their response. For instance, has it been your experience that in public conflicts, others are always dominating? If so, their behavior may be a reaction to a dominating posture that you take toward public conflict. If you were more conciliatory, integrative, or obliging, others might not feel the need to respond competitively to you.
5. *Do you carry a label that is used to describe you?* If you grew up as "our little fireball," you may not have learned how to collaborate. If you are referred to as a "powerhouse," a "mover and a shaker," or "a bulldog," your conflict style might be overly inflexible. If you're known as "the judge," "the warrior," or "the dictator," you probably have an overly rigid style. Labels, although they often hurt and overgeneralize, may carry embedded grains of truth.

Application 5.8 Your Responses

Answer the above five questions, privately first, then with your small group. What did you learn? Is there anything you want to change about your style across various contexts? Maybe it's time for a change.

Individuals who can *change and adapt* are more likely to be effective conflict participants, accomplishing private and group goals better than people who avoid change. Hart and Burks (1972) discuss the concept of **rhetorical sensitivity,** the idea that people change their communication style based on the demands of different situations. The following five communication characteristics describe people who are rhetorically sensitive:

1. They are comfortable altering their roles in response to the behaviors of others.
2. They avoid stylizing their communication behavior, so they are able to adapt.
3. They develop skills to deal with different audiences and are able to withstand the pressure and ambiguity of constant adaptation.
4. They are able to monitor talk with others to make it purposive rather than expressive. They speak not so much to "spill their guts" as to solve problems.
5. They adapt and alter behaviors in a rational and orderly way.

In other words, effective communicators adapt to others. They avoid getting "stuck" in certain conflict styles.

If you have a repertoire of styles, it prompts you to see others in a different, more objective light. When we see we make choices depending on circumstances, we then can see others doing the same thing. We are far less likely to judge the behavior of others automatically as having bad intent, being childish, or being improper.

Another reason for having a repertoire of conflict styles is many styles were developed from rules for children. Although it may be appropriate to "respect your elders" when you are 8 years old, overgeneralizing that rule to include avoiding conflict with respected elders when you are an adult is much less appropriate. Learning to seek permission to speak might be fine behavior in the third grade, but waiting for permission to speak in a bargaining session, whether formal or informal, will ensure that you will never be heard. As an adult, raising one's voice may not be as great a sin as stifling it.

By unfreezing your style options, you can adapt to the context and the other person and be more productive in conflicts.

Summary

Conflict participants face the basic choice of avoiding or engaging in a conflict. This choice leads to the five individual styles of conflict management: avoiding, dominating, compromising, obliging, and integrating. An adapted Rahim assessment instrument was included to measure your and other's conflict styles. Then, the specific advantages and disadvantages of each style were discussed. Looking at your conflict styles can be a good first step in learning how to manage your conflicts.

Caution is, however, in order when looking at styles. While it easy to assume your "style" can be precisely measured, they still are "self-report" biased by wanting to look good. Measures are also affected by culture, the relational context, and time of measurement (one point in time). The entire history with the other party is usually not factored in either. In reporting styles, avoidance is often underreported, the effects of interaction ignored, and we need to be cautious about assuming that some styles are "destructive" and others "constructive." Finally, group studies are not able to give you precise suggestions about what to do in your own conflict situation.

We discussed extreme forms of reacting in a conflict—verbal aggression, bullying, and physical violence. These are more than "styles" of conflict. They are choices that damage others. Verbal aggression is placed as a subset of dominating. Causes for violence are discussed.

We discussed the interaction dynamics in some detail and concluded by noting that flexibility in style choice enhances your chance for productive conflict.

Key Terms

conflict styles 152
style preferences 152
avoidance 155
engagement 155
avoid/criticize loop 161
postponement 163
assertive 164
dominating 164
threat 165
warning 165
promises 166
verbal aggressiveness 169
verbal abuse 169
abusive talk 169
high verbal aggressiveness 169
harassment 170
coercive control 170
bullying 170
unmanaged incivility 170
compromise 171
obliging 173
codependence 175
integrating 175
collaborating 175
violence 183
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Review Questions

1. Define *conflict styles.*
2. Reproduce the graph showing styles varying in concern for self and concern for other.
3. Define *avoidance.*
4. Give an example of the avoid/criticize loop.
5. How does avoidance function differently in diverse cultures?
6. Give examples of avoidance moves.
7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a dominating style?
8. Define *threats* and give examples of them.
9. Distinguish between threats, warnings, promises, and recommendations.
10. What is verbal aggressiveness?
11. Give examples of abusive talk.
12. What is bullying and what effects does it have?
13. Give examples of types of violence.
14. What different explanations are there for the incidence of violence?
15. Define *compromising,* listing its advantages and disadvantages.
16. How does obliging differ from avoidance?
17. What are the advantages and disadvantages of obliging?
18. Clarify integrating and specify its advantages and disadvantages.
19. What are some cautions we should keep in mind when discussing styles?
20. Specify how styles are linked in interaction sequences.
21. Discuss the gender differences in violent communication.
22. Discuss differing accounts of violent behavior.
23. How can you tell if you are stuck in a style?
24. Describe rhetorically sensitive people.
25. What do you gain by having a flexible set of styles?

Chapter 6

Emotions in Conflict

Introducing Emotion

Most of us associate strong emotions with conflict. This chapter will help you prepare ahead of time for the inevitable storms of feeling that sweep through your conflicts. Conflict always takes place on the *emotional dimension* (Jones 2000). Human beings might be called *Homo emoticus,* (Shapiro 2016) rather than merely *Homo sapiens.* To be in conflict means you will feel some emotional charge. Part of the reason conflict is so uncomfortable is due to the accompanying emotion (Bodtker and Jameson 2001). Can you recall a genuine conflict situation that did not involve feelings?

A modern theory of emotions rests on Darwin's evolutionary research (Nesse & Ellsworth 2009). When humans feel safe we are much more likely to employ constructive conflict management approaches than when we are filled with fear. Darwin (1872/1965) recognized from his research that evolution shaped humankind's mental responses and behavioral repertoire just as much as natural selection shaped physical characteristics of organisms. Just like other animals, when we are attacked or perceive a threat to our identity or goals, we will feel some kind of strong emotion. Therefore, avoidance of extreme fear and threat and promotion of safety and connection underlie one's ability to engage in constructive conflict.

Emotions can be defined as *modes of functioning, shaped by natural selection, that coordinate physiological, cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and subjective responses in patterns that increase the ability to meet the adaptive challenges of situations that have recurred over evolutionary time* (Nesse 1990). Emotions developed in human beings so people could meet immediate challenges. An emotion is both an *experience that we feel* and *who we are* at that moment in time (Shapiro 2010, 467). We say, "I am afraid" or "I am elated." We identify so strongly with these emotional states that we cannot separate what we "feel" from who we are, at least at that particular moment. Recall that all conflicts may be analyzed in the light of the topic, the relational implications, the process used, and identity concerns. Emotions are most allied with *identity and relationship concerns.* You may have heard someone say, "I am not a jealous person!" at the same time he feels jealous. This sets up a situation of dissonance and turmoil—"How can I feel jealous when I am not a jealous person?" You may have felt fury or scorn when you thought, "I will *not* allow him to treat me that way." We all experience these contradictions, experiencing emotion that does not align with one's identity, or feeling an emotion that does not seem to fit in one's relationship. These incongruities contribute to the anxiety of conflict.

Other languages express the role of emotion and feeling differently. In both French and Spanish, the linguistic construction is "I *have* anger" or "I *have* sadness." This construction avoids overidentification with the feeling being described.

States of emotional arousal are *labeled as different feelings,* depending on what one *believes* to be true. This means that feelings are connected to our appraisal of what is real and true in a situation (Lazarus 1991). Conflicts arise about feelings because the person experiencing the feeling believes the feeling is true. It is, for that person. But someone else may experience an entirely different feeling, equally true. For instance, a student may be upset and angry with her professor, who will not change a paper deadline even slightly, while the student has very good, legitimate reasons to ask for an extension. She may feel "defeated," "enraged," "mistrusted," or "insignificant," depending on what she believes about herself, her professor, and their relationship. *Feelings are facts;* we feel what we feel. Interpretations are subject to change based on conversation and new information. A basic approach of conflict transformation depends on changing interpretations. We transform our feelings when we derive new information, practice empathy, hold ourselves open for a third story (not mine or yours, but ours, or one an outsider gives us), and abandon bad habits that keep us from learning (defensiveness, blame, criticism, not listening, and contradicting the other).

Wise use of emotions facilitates the transformation of conflicts, as long as you listen to what emotions tell you. In the same way that hunger alerts you to eat, emotions can alert you to unmet personal needs (Shapiro 2016). Paying attention to feelings, your own and those of others, creates the ability to change your behavior, and to experience empathy. Transformation of conflicts depends on empathy.

Feelings rise from a generalized state of arousal we call emotion. Specific feelings come and go, but the emotional dimension of life is a constant (Shapiro 2011). Emotion sets actions "into motion," leading to your own unique subjective experience. Your subjective experience makes reflecting others' feelings so important, and so challenging. You may say, with all the best intentions, "So, you are feeling dismissed and disrespected by Walt's assignment of project teams." Then your team member says, "No, not exactly. I feel invisible and unimportant." Her subjective experience is a little different from what you imagined. Mirroring exactly what another person feels and how she or he experiences the moment subjectively is a key step in conflict resolution. Conflicts remain unresolved when the other person feels misunderstood. Simply parroting back feelings, with good-enough active listening skills, does not transform a conflict. Experiencing, for a while, what the other person actually feels helps to break down sides in conflict. This kind of listening to feelings, your own and others, requires concentration, vulnerability, and openness.

Emotions are like moving water. Water that is dammed up with no inlet or outlet becomes stagnant, dries up, becomes toxic, or freezes. Like water, emotions were designed by evolution to move through the body. We feel them, they change, they transform. Constructive conflict resolution depends upon our ability to work with and transform emotion, not close off or repress, normal human emotion. Approaches to emotions that are current, and informed by neuroscience, explain that emotions are both hard-wired (nature) and malleable (nurture), and are adaptive to social and cultural influences (Lindner 2014).

Feelings function as facts; they aren't right or wrong, they simply exist. What you do with those feelings is a key element in managing conflict. You cannot maintain perfect equanimity and "not feel" when you are in conflict, and neither can the other. You may have experienced how futile it is to tell someone, "Don't be angry! I didn't intend to hurt you." Worse yet may be the comment, "You should not feel that way." Feelings are facts.

You Can't Ignore Emotions

You may want to ignore emotions, but they will not ignore you (Fisher and Shapiro 2005). *Emotion affects your body,* causing you to perspire, experience rapid heart rate, blush, laugh, tense up, or feel nervous. Your emotions are a *felt, physiological experience* in the body (Hein and Singer 2008).

Emotions affect your thinking. You may criticize yourself or others, feel overtaken by negative thoughts, temporarily be unable to think clearly, or not even hear what others are saying. Thinking and interpretation are based on our appraisal of what is happening (Lazarus 1991). Based on neuroscience research, we are learning that "humans (and animals in general) use emotion to navigate the world by *filtering* for safety and danger." We survive and thrive based on how intelligently we navigate the world. The mind takes care of the *body-in-the-world* (Early and Early 2011, 11).

Emotions affect your behavior. Almost every emotion motivates you to act, to move in some way. Sometimes you can stop yourself from acting in ways you will regret, but sometimes you cannot (Fisher and Shapiro 2005, 11). Emotions are both intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomena. We feel them inside ourselves and we express them as nonverbal and verbal communication (Jameson, Bodtker, Porch, and Jordan 2009). Specific emotions lead people to particular tendencies to act or behave in certain ways (Bell and Song 2005; Frijda, Manstead, and Bem 2000; Guerrero and LaValley 2006).

Application 6.1 The Matter of Lights

Here is one example of the way emotions affect bodily experience, thinking, and behavior. Carrie and Jim live together. Jim feels strongly about the environment and wants to change most of the lights in their apartment to LEDs or compact florescent bulbs. He follows current information about the difference in energy use between incandescent and compact florescent bulbs or LEDs. He thinks he and Carrie should do their part to help the environment in this way. Carrie prefers the warm ambience of incandescent bulbs. She has been attempting to turn off lights frequently when they aren't in use, and is willing to turn the thermostat down in the winter to conserve energy. Carrie comes home one day to find her favorite reading lamps converted to CFLs. She feels, literally, hot and bothered. Carrie then confronts Jim angrily, telling him that he had no right to change out the lamps she uses most without talking to her. Jim replies that he knew she would never agree so he just went ahead, hoping she would see that it was the right thing to do. What might happen next on the emotional level?

What might Jim *sense* in his body, *think* about the situation, and how might he *express* all this? What about Carrie? With your small group, answer the questions for Jim and Carrie, then discuss your responses. What opportunities for conflict and danger exist? What opportunities do you see for a constructive conversation?

We will start with the physiological level of their emotional response: Both might experience a tightening in their stomach, heightened blood pressure, and a felt sense of urgency. Both will feel aroused. They certainly feel "stirred up." The exact nature of their *feelings* depends on their personal history, relationship history, interpretations, appraisal of what this means separately and for the relationship, and their sense of connection with each other. What specific feeling labels might they put to their "stirred up" state? Now continue your discussion with your small group. Now describe what Carrie and Jim's attributions (thinking) might be, and how they might behave and communicate.

Throughout this book we have emphasized that conflict brings both danger and opportunity for creative adaptation and change. The same is true of emotional states—your skill at making informed choices while feeling strong emotions can bring either danger or opportunity. Humans feel as well as think. Scientists used to imagine "left brain" solutions as coming from a rational place, and "right brain" solutions coming from an emotional place. But our sense of self is not compartmentalized into a pocket in the brain. The brain, like the whole person, is an inextricably entwined system (Coy 2005). No matter how much we might argue differently, no purely "rational/logical" or "emotional" reactions exist in complicated human beings.[1]

Negative beliefs about emotions might include the following. Which resonates with you?

Misconceptions of Emotion in Conflict

- Emotions are either real or unreal.
- Emotions can't be controlled and will escalate if expressed or released.
- One should ignore emotions to resolve conflict well.
- Emotions hinder good decision making.
- Emotions are for the powerless (women, children, and marginalized people).
- Emotions are not to be expressed at work.
- Mature, well-developed people should be beyond emotions.
- I can express emotions if I can justify my feelings logically.
- Emotions should be saved for "later."
- People will avoid me if I express emotions (except "nice" feelings).
- Other people should not burden me with their emotions.
- If other people express emotions, I have a responsibility to do something about them.
- If I express anger, it means I don't love or respect the object of my anger. If others express anger it means they don't respect me. (Adapted from Cloke and Goldsmith 2000.)

Application 6. 2 Discussion on Emotions

With your small group, discuss the following questions, which explore what you learned about emotion as a child, and what you have learned since you became an adult.

1. How did your parents/stepparents express emotion? What did they teach you, implicitly and explicitly, about the place of emotion in difficult situations? Give specific examples.
2. Were you punished or rewarded for displaying certain emotions?
3. Who serves as a constructive model for you in dealing with emotions in conflict situations?
4. What would you like to learn or change about how to use emotions in difficult situations?

[1] In the 5th century BCE, Aristotle compartmentalized rhetorical arguments as logos (logic) or pathos (emotions), as did other writers throughout the centuries.

How Does Emotion Function in Conflict?

1. *Conflict depends upon enough emotional arousal to "get the job done."* Without enough energetic emotion moving us to engage in interaction, avoidance seems like an easy alternative. When you are unhappy, distressed, excited, or angry, you may exert enough energy to resolve a conflict. When we want to close the uncomfortable gap with an intimate with whom we feel distant, we are moved by love and attachment. In this book, we highlight the importance of solving problems while maintaining relationships. The process of conflict transformation takes energy—it is not a passive, placid process. The emotional charge enables the confrontation to take place (DiPaola, Roloff, and Peters 2010).
2. *Emotional events trigger familiar patterns of responses.* We realize we are in conflict when we begin to sense something uncomfortable. We become agitated on the bodily level; this bodily response takes on a label as a certain emotion or feeling. For instance, Patricia, a junior, has just become engaged. She realizes that she is feeling distress and discomfort around her fiancé's family. Josh's family is large, gregarious, and warm. They often invite Josh and Patricia to join family events. Yet recently Patricia has noticed that she feels resentful and hurt, and is making up excuses to keep from seeing them. In a conflict with Josh, Patricia realized that she feels left out or "blotted out" by the large, enthusiastic family. Her feelings alerted her to a problem. She had felt unseen in her family of origin. We may desperately want to avoid an apology to a partner when we have betrayed them. We can think of many reasons why the betrayal occurred, we aren't over being angry at the way our betrayal was discovered, but at the same time we feel afraid of losing the relationship. Fear interacts with resentment and shame, mediated by love, to move us to a specific action—in this case, apology. If we were only afraid, we would avoid. If we were only resentful, we might escalate. Emotions interact in layered ways. Conflicts are difficult and complex because feelings and thoughts are often mixed.
3. *Intensity of emotion varies through the conflict process.* You may feel very strongly at the beginning of a conflict, then less intensely as resolution or processing continues. For instance, you may begin by feeling fury, move to irritation, and then realize you are feeling relief. Try to avoid making a prediction based on an early emotion, such as describing someone as "an angry person who can't be reasoned with." In one study, people who initiated a confrontation experienced more intensity and disruption in their lives than did the "target" of the confrontation. This may be because the one who initiates experiences a buildup of emotion. The emotional charge enables the confrontation to take place (DiPaola et al. 2010).
4. *Individual personalities are built upon the blocks of emotion-behavior patterns.* For instance, consistently high levels of joy or positive emotions often lead to positive social relationships and ease with people (Abe and Izard 1999). We bring our personality structures into conflict resolution activities. People differ, for example, in how long they can tolerate anger, or uncertainty, or hostility from others before they are motivated to do something about the unhappy situation. Personalities are constructed upon many learning situations. We inherit certain traits such as extraversion and introversion, but our unique personalities result from many different experiences. Some people learn

to move toward people in ambiguous situations. They grew up in a trusting environment that rewarded an outgoing nature; they may be seen as "gregarious" in adulthood. We can change aspects of our personalities by focusing on what works and does not work. For instance, we can learn to express more warmth and compassion, to wait longer while experiencing discomfort, and to think instead of simply reacting.

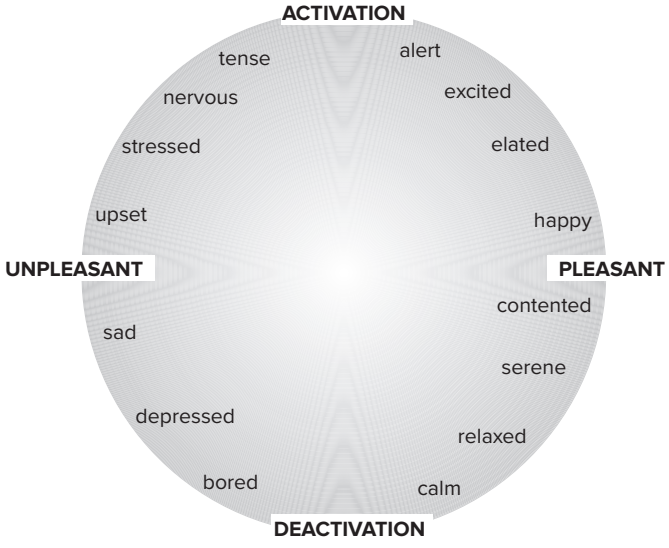
5. *We experience emotion as good or bad,* positive or negative (Sanford 2007), pleasant or unpleasant, and helpful or destructive. We humans *evaluate* our emotions; we don't experience emotions objectively from a distance. Not many people enjoy fury, resentment, anger, or fear; most prefer the positive emotions such as joy, elation, love/bonding, or pleasure. Since we experience specific feelings, rising from emotional arousal, as positive, negative, or neutral, we learn to push away negative ones and hold on to positive ones. We will explore the role of both positive and negative emotions in greater detail later.
6. We become emotional because *something is at stake for us* (see Chapter 3; Fisher and Shapiro 2005). Often one person in a couple will say, "I can't discuss this while you are so emotional." Yet when important identity and relationship issues are at stake, emotion is simply part of the picture. We can regulate our *expression* of emotion, but one should never require oneself or others "not to feel." You could adopt a great new habit—never again say and mean, "You shouldn't feel that way!"
7. *Maturity mediates strong emotion.* Older adults may feel that less is at stake in conflict, since they report fewer conflicts than do young adults (Almeida 2005; Almeida and Horn 2004) and when they do have conflict, they report lower overall distress (Charles and Carstensen 2008). Older adults even reported fewer negative emotions in conflicts than did middle-aged adults (Carstensen, Gottman, and Levenson 2004). It may be that maturity for most people increases their options to place conflicts into perspective. With maturity we define ourselves less by the outcome of each conflict because we simply have more of a sense of who we are.
8. *Relationships are defined by the kind of emotion expressed.* Two acquaintances are working on a project in class. One person feels upset because the quality of work done by the other is disappointing and the due date is coming up soon. When she expresses disappointment, the project partner says, "If you don't like it, do it yourself. I am overwhelmed by work." The relationship suggests that even moderate emotion (disappointment) cannot be safely expressed. These two will not remain friends after the project is turned in—and they may not even be speaking at that point!

The most intense conflicts, if overcome, leave behind a sense of security and calm that is not easily disturbed. It is just these intense conflicts, and their conflagration, which are needed to produce valuable and lasting results.
—C. G. Jung

A Model of Emotions

How many emotions exist, and what are these emotions? Researchers compile different lists of basic emotions. All include fear and anger, and most include joy and sorrow

Figure 6.1 A Circumplex Model of Affect



(Nesse and Ellsworth 2009). One of the leading researchers on emotion suggests that no general theory of emotions needs to be adopted because emotions are complicated, nuanced, layered, and change with fluidity during any encounter (Nesse 2014). One way to organize emotions is the **circumplex model of affect** (Figure 6.1).[2]

You will notice that emotions are classified as *Activated or Deactivated* and *Unpleasant or Pleasant.*[3] Look at the northeast quadrant of the model. In this quadrant, emotions are activated and pleasant (alert, excited, elated, and happy). Study the other quadrants, then answer the questions in Application 6.3.

Application 6.3 Mapping Emotions

Think of a recent conflict. Describe to your small group, in just 3 minutes, the feelings you and others expressed in the conflict. Include verbal and nonverbal expressions. The group takes notes on what you report. Draw a circle for each party, placing the feelings in the correct quadrant. After each of you finishes, discuss what you notice about the emotions expressed. Might a *process conflict* show up in this discussion; that is, do the parties prefer to express emotion differently? Remember that sometimes conflict intensifies because parties disagree (implicitly) on how to express the conflict.

In conflict, a *tension of opposites* is presented—do we open up or close down? Do we soften or harden? (Baxter 2011; Sanford 2007; Welwood 1990) Do we avoid or engage; tighten up and turn away or relax and turn toward? (Cloke and Goldsmith 2000) For the

[2] See Nesse and Ellsworth (2009) for a complete literature review of the different ways theories of emotions have developed.

[3] Nesse and Ellsworth (2009), adapted from Posner, Russell, and Peterson (2005).

purposes of conflict transformation, we are concerned about whether the feelings open, broaden, and help people come toward each other for problem solving, or whether they shut us down, close us off, and lead us to withdraw from the person or the problem that arouses our feelings. Do we respond to emotions with communication that leads to healing and movement, or constriction of self, other, and relationship? Hard emotions lead to blame, criticism, threats—tearing the fragile fabric of the web of connection—whereas softer emotions lead to openings for transformation. The circumplex model provides a map so you can locate yourself in relationship to your usual style of emotional experience in conflict.

Core Concerns: Organizing Positive Emotions

Researchers at the Harvard Negotiation Project have pioneered the inclusion of emotion in conflict resolution, especially negotiation. (See the website to gain a comprehensive overview of their research over the past three decades.) The concept of *Core Concerns* helps organize their many good ideas about creative negotiating and conflict resolution (Fisher and Shapiro 2005; Shapiro 2011; Shapiro 2016). The **Core Concerns Framework** provides a system for dealing with the emotional dimension of conflict resolution. In the middle of a conflict, we find it difficult to remember all our communication skills, the best principles, how to use positive emotions, avoid negative emotional triggers, and how to avoid ineffective practices. Students of conflict can use a simple-to-remember set of core concerns that will serve as a *lens* through which to view conflict and a *lever* to stimulate integrative approaches. Transformation of conflicts depends on taking into account these core concerns. These concerns, similar to the interests and goals explored in Chapter 3, are:

- *Appreciation* (recognition of value). No one wants to search for an integrative solution when being demeaned and dismissed.
- *Autonomy* (freedom to feel, think, take action, or decide). When an intimate says to you, through clenched teeth, "We are *not* talking about this. Now change the subject," your response might be, "You do *not* dictate to me what we will talk about. Who do you think you are?" Coercion guarantees lack of cooperation.
- *Affiliation* (emotional connection to others). Affiliation has to do with your emotional connection with a person or group. Stable connections generate positive emotions. Rejection, the flip side of affiliation, creates acute pain in the part of the brain that processes physical pain. When people are rejected, they stop cooperating, even if their best interests would be served by cooperating.
- *Status* (standing compared to others). Status also designates the relational concerns of a conflict—who we are to each other. Everyone wants enough status to feel empowered, or else, why engage in conflict?
- *Role* (effectiveness and meaningfulness of job label, designation of the person, and recognition) (Adapted from Shapiro 2016.)

These motives appear to be hardwired into the motivational needs of people. They are moderated by different cultures and different neurobiology and personal background. If you memorize them and practice using the principles, you will lay the foundation for your own "best practices in conflict resolution" approach. Conflict choices that take the core concerns into account result in more positive and productive emotions, which lead to integrative conflict resolution.

Finding Feelings

People sometimes find it difficult to talk about feelings, so let's explore **feeling words** in more detail. Figure 6.2 provides an exhaustive list of feeling words that are commonly used when one's needs are not satisfied. Choose words that might be clustered with anger, fear/anxiety, sadness, shame, or disgust to describe how Darlene and her father (presented in the case below) might be feeling. In the next section, we will discuss the function of positive and negative emotions. For now, expand your feeling-words repertoire by studying the words that describe what the two parties might be feeling.

Case 6.1 How to Help a Difficult Father

Darlene's father lives across the country from her. Darlene's two brothers, Hal and Mark, live in neighboring towns from their dad, a popular doctor in his community. Darlene's dad, commonly called "Doc," has been diagnosed with colon cancer. Darlene is a social work student, with excellent communication skills. After several conversations with her brothers, Darlene talks on the phone with Doc.

Darlene: Dad, I am so sorry your cancer has come back in this form. I want you to know that I want to help. I can talk with my professors and get some time away from my classes. This is really important and you are going to need some help. (Darlene's parents have been divorced a long time.)

Doc: Oh, Hal (one of his sons) is going to take me to the surgeon's consultation, and I imagine he'll help out.

Darlene: But if you go through chemo, you are going to need some help at home, especially at first. I can come for that first week or more.

Doc: Well, nobody thought my prostate cancer (5 years ago) was a big deal, so I don't know what everyone is getting so upset about now.

Darlene: Dad, we all cared about your cancer, and we care now. Will you stay in touch with me and let me know what your plans are? I will be glad to help coordinate home health care, and help you get set up with your treatment plans.

Doc: Oh, I think I'll be all right. You have your school.

Darlene: Dad, you're telling me that last time you felt that we didn't care, and I want you to know that's not the way I feel. I would like to be involved.

Doc: Don't worry about me. I'll be fine.

What do you think Darlene is feeling? Go through the list of feeling words from the "when your needs are not being met" and circle the relevant words, then locate them on the circumplex model.

What is Doc feeling? Go through the list of feeling words, circle the relevant words, then locate them on the circumplex model.

Given the different locations of her Dad's feelings as compared to Darlene's on the circumplex model, what might Darlene change about her approach to her father?

As you discuss this case, assume that Darlene is the person most likely to initiate a different set of communication interventions. You might also notice that the father and daughter are indeed engaging in conflict, although their family affection stays intact.

Figure 6.2 Feelings Inventory

There are two parts to this list: feelings we may have when our needs are being met and feelings we may have when our needs are not being met.

Feelings when your needs are satisfied

AFFECTIONATE
compassionate
friendly
loving
open hearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

ENGAGED
absorbed
alert
curious
engrossed
enchanted
entranced
fascinated
interested
intrigued
involved
spellbound
stimulated

HOPEFUL
expectant
encouraged
optimistic

CONFIDENT
empowered
open
proud
safe
secure

EXCITED
amazed
animated
ardent
aroused
astonished
dazzled
eager
energetic
enthusiastic
giddy
invigorated
lively
passionate
surprised
vibrant

GRATEFUL
appreciative
moved
thankful
touched

INSPIRED
amazed
awed
wonder

JOYFUL
amused
delighted
glad
happy
jubilant
pleased
tickled

EXHILARATED
blissful
ecstatic
elated
enthralled
exuberant
radiant
rapturous
thrilled

PEACEFUL
calm
clear headed
comfortable
centered
content
equanimous
fulfilled
mellow
quiet
relaxed
relieved
satisfied
serene
still
tranquil
trusting

REFRESHED
enlivened
rejuvenated
renewed
rested
restored
revived

Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

AFRAID
apprehensive
dread
foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

ANNOYED
aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked

ANGRY
enraged
furious
incensed

(continued)

indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful

AVERSION
animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

CONFUSED
ambivalent
baffled
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn

DISCONNECTED
alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed
uninterested
withdrawn

DISQUIET
agitated
alarmed
discombobulated
disconcerted
disturbed
perturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

EMBARRASSED
ashamed
chagrined
flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious

FATIGUE
beat
burnt out
depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired
weary
worn out

PAIN
agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

SAD
depressed
dejected
despair
despondent
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted
hopeless
melancholy
unhappy
wretched

TENSE
anxious
cranky
distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety
frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

VULNERABLE
fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
leery
reserved
sensitive
shaky

YEARNING
envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful[4]

[4] *Source:* 2005 by Center for Nonviolent Communication | Website: www.cnvc.org | Email: cnvc@cnvc.org | Phone: +1.505.244.4041

Functions of Negative Emotions

Emotions fit, although not "neatly," into two subjective categories. In addition to recognizing and categorizing emotions according to the circumplex model and the feeling words organized by the Nonviolent Communication Center, parties in conflict use a more informal and personal way to categorize emotions. People commonly refer to (1) *negative* emotions and (2) *positive* emotions. As discussed previously, all emotions serve some adaptive function. Nevertheless, people typically refer to emotions as negative or positive. People who can distinguish among discrete emotions are better able to regulate negative emotions than those who make fewer distinctions and remain less knowledgeable (Rivers, Brackett, Katulak, and Salovey 2006). The good news about research on positive emotions in conflict resolution is that positive emotions are finally receiving more attention. However, since anger and fear remain the emotions most people think of when they imagine or experience conflict, those troublesome and common emotions are presented first.

Anger

Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure, defined as a reaction to a perceived threat to person, belongings, or identity that can range in intensity from mild irritation to frustration and rage. Angry emotion threatens most people; few healthy people enjoy feeling angry or having others direct anger at them. Anger is manifested verbally by yelling, using command language, using sarcasm, and employing clipped and short tones. Anger shows nonverbally with closed off body language, glaring, frowning, and slamming objects. Anger differs from aggression in that aggression is an attack, whereas "anger is the feeling connected to a perceived unfairness or injustice" (Young-Eisendrath 1997, 26). In this sense, anger helps people set boundaries when they need to be set, and to right wrongs. When we believe an action is unjust or wrong, our usual response is anger (Mikula, Scherer, and Athenstaedt 1998). People who have an unrealistically high sense of self-esteem ride the horse of angry aggression more than people who are also motivated by the desire to solve problems, not seek vengeance, and avoid negative consequences (Baumeister, Smart, and Boden 1996).

Anger can be a wake-up call, a motivator, and an energizer—a source of empowerment (usually) for the person who feels it (Planalp 1999). Anger can mobilize and sustain energy at very high levels. Anger is sensed in our bodies by the awareness of heightened blood pressure, flushed face, sweating, muscle tightness, fast breathing, and a loud or high voice. When anger is expressed directly, the person to whom it is directed receives a warning—change or face the consequences (Planalp 1999). Self-responsibility calls for understanding our anger well enough so we don't justify ineffective and harmful behavior "because she made me mad." We can use anger to act, while we question which actions will be most helpful, effective, and will avoid backfiring into a spiral of hostility and revenge. In certain bureaucratic, high-pressure situations such as in the courtroom (judges) and Transportation Security Organization employees, anger, intimidation, and sarcasm were found to help put role distance between employees and others and to build cohesion with colleagues. The authors of a study on these two organizations point out that anger expression must be subtle for employees to be seen as professional (Scarduzio and Redden 2015). Even in high-stress environment, we would hardly respect a judge or TSO official who began screaming at a defendant.

Anger was termed "the moral emotion" by the ancients because it is based on a fast, reflective judgment that we have been wronged or threatened. We feel anger when

our safety or our core values are threatened. Anger is "rooted in reason; it is equally of the heart and the head" (Young-Eisendrath 1994, 154). When an offense is real and important, the desire for revenge makes sense. However, in the flush of fresh anger, we may exaggerate an offense, plan revenge, and then charge off into unproductive conflict (Planalp 1999). Thinking about revenge can make people feel better as they imagine vengeful acts, but remorse sets in when people commit acts that may come back to shame or sanction them (Yoshimura 2007).

Expressing anger in an unrestrained way creates more anger. *Venting* (unrestrained expression of anger) does not discharge the emotion or reduce the feelings (Tavris 1989). In the 1960s and 1970s the idea that "anger is cathartic" gained prominence; that discharging anger would make anger lessen. This idea was especially helpful for people, often women, who had learned to repress their anger, and above all, to be "nice." Repression of anger leads to somatic concerns and an inauthentic way of living. Many people in the post–World War II era learned to conform, to repress their anger and other emotions, and to just "get on with it." Women, especially, learned that their anger was seen as unfeminine. The second women's movement of the 1970s and beyond helped change this harmful belief. Researchers now know that talking anger through in a way that does not escalate can be helpful; escalating verbal or physical anger usually escalates the anger emotion. Repression makes people sick and unhappy. Anger can be worked with in conversation.

The following suggestions will help you deal with your own anger constructively:

- Use your anger to *restore your sense of justice* and control over an intolerable situation (Cahn and Abigail 2007). Avoid creating harm. You can address a situation without making it worse or causing emotional injury.
- *Seek information* rather than immediately acting on anger. Deliberation in groups improves when people have more information, which mediates anger. The more information you have about facts, others' perspectives and feelings, and background, the less likely you will be to act in a destructive manner, based on anger.
- *Direct your anger at the right person* (adapted from Cahn and Abigail 2007). Avoid venting to "the world in general when you actually need to speak to a specific person." Notice how insincere your response is when someone says, "Oh, I'm not mad at you—you're just the only one who will listen." Venting is not constructive, with the possible exception of a trusted intimate who will not take your anger personally. Be careful!
- *Reflect, calm down, and think* before you express your anger. Yes, you can "think while feeling." Going with angry words before you have thought them through usually makes everything worse.
- *Use all your best communication skills,* such as "I" statements, reflections, rephrasing, open-ended questions, soft start-ups, and showing respect for the other while stating your own feelings and needs clearly.
- *Be courageous.* Rather than use indirect communication (sarcasm, snide comments, passive aggression, avoidance, and hiding behind e-mail or other electronic communication), pick up the phone, find the person, speak directly, and look him or her in the face.

- *Develop a keen awareness of how people react to you nonverbally.* Take seriously any criticism that you look or sound enraged, threatening, hostile, or demeaning.

The voice of intelligence is drowned out by the roar of fear. It is ignored by the voice of desire. It is contradicted by the voice of shame. It is biased by hate and extinguished by anger. Most of all, it is silenced by ignorance.
—Karl Menninger

Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety figure heavily in conflict resolution activities. These emotions can be found on the left quadrant of the circumplex model. Most experience fear and anxiety as actively unpleasant. During a conflict, to reap any advantage of fear, such as enhanced alertness, we need to cool down and help our opponents to calm their fears as well (Lindner 2014, 291). Fear leads people, first, to avoid. Fear does not have to involve "flight" in the commonplace "fight" or "flight" choice. Just as anger does not necessarily lead to fighting, fear does not necessarily lead to fleeing. Fear sometimes disables the physical and emotional systems as we "freeze," not able to mobilize ourselves to do anything for a while. We may dissociate, or withdraw (even without knowing it) from the painful emotion of a situation. The threat often is perceived as personal and psychological. We feel threats to our integrity, or our sense of well-being, or the painful threat of loss of a person, position, or role that we value. Fear can create "tunnel vision" as we focus only on the threat and forget to look around and assess what else might be happening (Izard and Ackerman 2000). Fear is the key emotion in anxiety. When we worry about what may happen, we are *anxious or afraid.*

The phrase "dreading ahead" describes what many people feel when they describe their anxiety. One man described to us his anxiety about his wife taking a job in another town. He was worried (anxious) about both not wanting to give up his job and move, and not being able to find a new job as good as the one he would be leaving. He was temporarily frozen, experiencing great anxiety, dread, sadness, hurt, and depression. He was not able to discern what bothered him most until he began to list his anxious fears. Not surprisingly, he also discovered that he was angry that his wife presumed that she should go ahead and accept the new job without considering his feelings more fully.

Fear and anger often interact in a patterned way. When one focuses on the "target" of anger, the person or situation that may threaten something valuable, the **anger-fear sequence** is set into motion (Figure 6.3).

Consider the list of the dynamics of anger and fear below. Fear and hurt underlie most emotions of anger. Fear makes human beings experience **vulnerability** that we then experience as anger, more socially acceptable for adults than fear. The following list gives some examples of interpersonal anger situations along with possible intermixed fears/anxieties. Study these, then list a few angry situations of your own and see if you can determine how fear/anxiety might be mixed in with your own anger.

Anger Situations

1. A woman is angry with her friend for calling her a name in public. (She is fearful of not being accepted by others and of losing face.)

Figure 6.3 Anger-Fear Sequence

2. A newly promoted employee is angry because his secretary didn't get the final report to him on time. (He is afraid that his own supervisor will think he is not working hard enough, and he really needs this job.)
3. A husband is furious that his wife has disclosed their private life to others in a hurtful way. (He is frightened that their bond is no longer strong and that their relationship is ending.)
4. A single parent overreacts to a child's misbehaving at a family reunion by raising his voice and ordering the child into a time out. (He is afraid that other family members will criticize his parenting.)
5. An intimate partner casually indicates that she might change her plans and not visit her fiancé when she had planned. Her partner says, "Well, if you have better things to do than honor your commitments, go ahead." (He has asked an old friend to meet his significant other and fears looking foolish after speaking in glowing terms about the wonderful woman he wants his friend to meet. He is afraid he is unimportant to her, and he doesn't want to lose face with his friend.)

Hurt

Hurt is an intense emotion that comes from feeling psychologically injured by another person (Guerrero and LaValley 2006; Vangelisti and Sprague 1998). Hurt is inherently interpersonal, even if the injury happened long ago. When people are deeply hurt, they experience intensely strong feelings such as agony, despair, anger, sadness, and suffering. Hurt is a difficult emotion to experience without looking for someone to blame. The feeling of being injured is painful enough that human nature causes us, often, to look for a cause of the hurt. Often, someone has caused the hurt—true enough. When a partner betrays another, the "cause," or at least the trigger, of the hurt is very clear. When the injured party stays frozen in the hurt/blame cycle, little changes. (We will discuss this situation in detail in Chapter 10.) Great skill is required for both the injured party and the person causing the harm to reconcile with each other, if they want to do so. Many times, hurt is made worse when the person causing the injury will not listen or will not accept any

responsibility. Relationships end when the hurt is too great and the attempts at repair are inadequate.

Common relational transgressions (Metts 1994) include betraying a confidence, leaving someone out, sexual infidelity, lying and covering up, forgetting plans or special occasions, flirting with a former partner, and physical abuse and making unfair comparisons to other people (Bachman and Guerrero 2003a; Metts 1994). The best conflict resolution approach when someone tells you they are hurt, or even, "you hurt my feelings," is to inquire about what happened and how they interpreted the action. Listen and don't defend. You will be able to have your say, but the hurt person (whether you think the hurt is reasonable or not) needs to be heard first. Then you can say, "I would like to tell you my perspective; can you listen to me now?" (*after* you have reflected what you heard)

Attachment theory currently explains not only to infant/caregiver bonds, but also adult relationships. Secure connections remain essential for physical health and human thriving (Coan 2010; Early and Early 2011). The purpose of constructive conflict resolution is to solve problems and preserve relationships. In the case of hurt and disrupted attachment (anxious/ambivalent, avoidant, insecure, or disorganized) (Cozolino 2010) a key moment of *rupture* can change everything. One long-term friendship between two women changed irrevocably due to one woman's angry attack on her friend in front of a group of women on vacation together. They were not able to *repair* the rupture even though both tried. When an "attachment injury" occurs, the needed response is repair. The good news is that ruptures can be repaired and connections can be woven together again (Early and Early 2011). Dynamics can shift from danger through safety by creating a new story, a co-constructed narrative, or a "third way." Ignoring a rupture by denying that the other "should" not feel hurt usually ends the relationship, or at least a relationship of depth.

Application 6.4 What Would Have Helped?

Think of a time when you hurt someone, or someone hurt you. First, write the feelings or emotions you felt. Then write your assumptions about the other person, about yourself, and about your relationship. What were the behaviors? From your perspective now, what might have helped? This could be something either of you could have done. You could share only the last part of this activity, "What might have helped?" with your small group if you would like to preserve your privacy. It may be the case that nothing could have helped; the rupture brought too much hurt. Not all hurts can be repaired, but the basic movement of "rupture/ repair" restores connection and safety.

Humiliation

While fear is basic, anger more complex, hurt even more complex, humiliation carries even deeper layers of emotion, and is more complex than anger, fear, and hurt. The act of humiliation involves putting someone down, holding them down, while rendering them helpless to resist the debasement (Lindner 2014). Humiliation administers a devastating identity injury. For a while, researchers viewed humiliation as another form of shame. Given the violence unleashed in the world (such as in terrorism), as well as among those known to each other, humiliation deserves more attention in conflict resolution. When a person feels debased and humiliated that person is not available for integrative conflict resolution.

Differences can lead to transformation of difficult conflicts, but only in the framework of respect. When condescension, patronizing, and arrogance (all forms of disrespect) braid through any relationship, no transformation of a conflict is possible (Lindner 2014). Verbal forms of humiliation reflect a dominating style of communication. Fear of being overcome underlies the feelings of a bully or a dominator. If the person doing the humiliating, in an interpersonal context, is not amenable to change, it may rest on the skill of bystanders, people who are not the victims of humiliation, to speak up. Not everyone being humiliated has the power to say, "I will not allow you to disrespect me," stopping the dangerous interaction. You may, however. You might say, "Kevin, David does not deserve to be spoken to that way. The way I see it is. . . ." Or "This line of conversation is not productive. Would you be willing to say what you are saying another way?" Then if the bully keeps going, you can say, forcefully, "Please, stop now."

Sadness and Depression

Sadness and depression also influence conflict resolution. These feelings comprise the southwest quadrant of the circumplex model. Sadness is not always a "negative" emotion, although few like to feel sad. Sadness, mourning, and grief can in fact strengthen social bonds. For instance, when loved ones come together around the death of a friend or family member, the values of community and friendship are reaffirmed. Averill (1968) suggests that in the course of evolution, grief increased the probability of surviving because of the ways that enduring bonds are formed. Social media presents both a way to communicate about a loss and express grief in an online community. Caution should be taken, however, in using social media for communicating with glibness about a life-changing event for the bereaved (Rosetto, Lannutti, and Strauman 2015). Social media provides both an opportunity for community connection and a reason to take care.

Sadness slows a person down. This may give a chance for deeper reflection on what is happening, giving the sad person more choices to take care of oneself and others. Sadness communicates that there is trouble (Tomkins 1963) so the person should pay attention to one's circumstances. Sadness is adaptive as well, because it may create a bridge of empathy to another person. Unrelieved sadness may create anger or resentment over a long time; this may turn into depression. In addition, many clinicians report elevated feelings of anger, along with sadness and anxiety, when people are depressed (Rutter, Izard, and Read 1986). Extreme sadness causes an almost total loss of pleasure and interest in one's surroundings, and leads to dejection and withdrawal. A person who is overwhelmingly sad cannot participate in creative conflict transformation. It's too difficult. Sadness and depression refer to different emotional states. When sadness turns into clinical depression, you will help yourself by seeking professional help, or your friends by suggesting they seek assistance. If you experience overwhelming sadness, a flat feeling, or an inability to motivate yourself to do the things that will help yourself (exercise; seeking positive activities; socializing with friends; reflecting on your automatic, negative thoughts), then you will benefit from professional assistance.

Sadness may help advance conflict resolution because feeling sad all the time is so unpleasant that we are moved to find new solutions to problems. When we are so depressed we can hardly get out of bed to function normally, we may ask, "What is wrong and what can I do about it?" For example, Pamela found herself very sad every time she turned into her driveway after work. Even though the day might have gone well enough at work, when

she came home she found herself feeling sad. One day she went to her friend's house after work and told her she just didn't want to go home, then burst into tears. Pamela's mother had died a few months before. Her husband Baird went to the farthest end of the house and turned on the TV when Pamela cried. Several times Pamela told Baird that she needed comfort when she was so sad. Baird, however, felt extremely uncomfortable with Pamela's tears. He said once, when she asked for comfort, "But there's nothing I can do. I am sorry your mother is gone but I can't change anything." Pamela felt more sorrow and loneliness at this point. Finally, after talking with her friend, Pamela decided to talk with Baird. After explaining how she felt about coming home, their dialogue sounded like this:

Application 6.5 Sadness Leads to a Better Solution

Pamela:	Baird, I know you care that my mother died and that I am so sad. But when you go to the den and turn on the TV when I'm crying, I feel more lonely than ever. I start to tell myself that you don't care.
Baird:	I care a lot but there's nothing I can do.
Pamela:	There is a *lot* you can do. You can listen to me, hold my hand, tell me you are here for me, and that you are sorry I'm feeling so awful.
Baird:	But that's not doing anything. I can't change anything and I feel helpless.
Pamela:	You could change a lot for me. I wouldn't feel so alone. I didn't know you felt helpless.
Baird:	Yes—I see you so miserable and feel awful that I can't do anything.

As this conversation progressed, both Pamela and Baird softened instead of hardened. Pamela had been hardening into the perspective that "He doesn't care." Baird had been hardening into the story that "Nothing I do makes any difference." They found different ways to stay together through Pamela's sadness.

Some **gender differences** *occur in the expression of sadness.* Women are more likely to express sadness and cover up their anger, whereas men are more likely to express anger and cover up sadness (Timmers, Fischer, and Manstead 1998). In the previous example, Pamela moved from sadness to anger at her husband's inability to comfort her. Baird felt angry at himself that he didn't know what to do. Then he retreated into sadness. Both misunderstood the emotions of the other until they talked through their dilemma.

Too little sadness expression leads to distorted emotional expression; too much sadness expression can burden others. One function of sadness is that people experiencing sadness are more likely than others to attempt to change their situation by cognitive reappraisal ("I don't think he meant to hurt me in the way he did; he was busy and distracted") or by apologizing or listening to music or doing other activities to change their mood. Women have been found to be more skillful at emotion regulation in general (Rivers et al. 2007). This gender-skill difference brings many challenges to heterosexual couple relationships. Same-sex relationships with women often benefit from both partners being willing to deal with sadness in conversation. More depends on personality than gender, however. Some female couples experience the same challenges as opposite-sex relationships.

Disgust, Contempt, and Revulsion

Disgust, contempt, and revulsion are emotions that move to expel something noxious or repulsive. In an adaptive sense, it makes sense to think that humans who learned to "spit out" or expel bad food or water were more likely to survive. In interpersonal communication, we may be trying to "get rid of " something (someone) repulsive when we use disdain, contempt, condescension, and demeaning comments. We explored earlier in the book how damaging contempt is in intimate relationships. Humiliation depends on contemptuous communication and must be interrupted for anything positive to occur.

Disgust is one of those emotions to feel, reflect upon, and *not communicate* about until you understand and process the raw emotion. Revulsion and disgust both break relationship connections on the emotional level. Yet, disgust and revulsion might serve a positive function, as the following example shows. Kristin was a new bank employee. She was mentored by a senior banker, a man with a very strong, dominating personality. In one session, Mark, the senior executive, was upset with Kristin's handling of a client. He said, "We're just about done here. I don't have time to sit around all day and keep telling you how to cultivate clients like this who have a lot of money. You're not getting it. I'll give you one more chance. Watch me more closely next time." Kristin felt angry, hurt, belittled, threatened—and also noticed when she left Mark's office that she felt nauseated. Her revulsion led her to question whether she wanted to continue under Mark's verbally abusive mentoring. She asked her senior manager to assign her to someone else. Gottman's research (1993) points out the *cascade effect* that often goes into motion when disgust and contempt are expressed. We referred to "the four horsemen of the apocalypse" in Chapter 1. Gottman found that couples headed for divorce exhibit this pattern: "complaining and criticizing, which leads to contempt, which leads to defensiveness, which leads to . . . withdrawal from interaction (stonewalling)" (110).

Contempt *expressed* is like pointing a loaded gun at someone, pulling the trigger, and then being surprised when they fall over (or the relationship is killed). Worse, sometimes contempt is used consciously as a weapon to weaken the other person and gain power in a relationship. It's a good idea to get out of contemptuous relationships if you cannot influence the other, or yourself, to change.

Shame, Guilt, and Regret

Shame and guilt play an important role in regulating conflict. When people break social norms, and receive formal or informal social sanctions ("How could you have done that?") they may be feeling shame, guilt, embarrassment, regret, or remorse (Nugier, Niedenthal, Brauer, and Chekroun 2007). When you act in a way that is incompatible with your own standards, your ideal self, or your own sociocultural values, you may feel these uncomfortable emotions (Frijda 1986; Fisher and Shapiro 2005).

Shame increases social cohesion, as long as one does not stay stuck in personal shame. We try to avoid shameful situations because we lose face, lose self-esteem, and generally feel miserable (Izard and Ackerman 2000, 260). Shame may also be present in fear and anxiety. "Shaming" others usually leads to defensiveness, and works poorly as a conflict resolution tactic. When we recognize that others feel shame or embarrassment, we can further the cause of good conflict management by remaining gentle and considerate. Shame hurts.

Shame also creates negative responses. Berry (2016, 130) recounts a story of Ena, a high school girl who had repeatedly suffered sexual bullying in school. When a bully approached her in class, in front of other students, and with the teacher not far away, she reported, "I did not move, though I was screaming inside to do so. I never understood how fear could do that to bodies. I did not 'fight,' nor did I experience 'flight.' I just took it . . . At the same time I felt guilt and confusion. . . ." Ena experienced freezing, shame, fear, and guilt all at the same time. In this way, shame can function to keep a desperately needed change of power from happening.

People experience guilt when they perceive that they have injured, unjustly hurt, or failed to help someone (Guerrero and LaValley 2006, 79). Guilt that comes when people actually do or do not do things they value can motivate people to act differently, for instance, to choose a nonreactive approach and to collaborate more quickly. Some people feel guilt all the time, but that feeling is more akin to shame (about who one is as a person). Real guilt comes from real actions or lack of actions. Making amends, as the 12-step programs require, helps. Making amends means expressing that you are aware of the harm you caused and that you take responsibility for it. Making amends, a form of repair, restores connections and restores self-esteem for all parties. The feeling of guilt is so unpleasant for most people that if they can avoid their "run and hide" impulse, and move toward the injured party, the guilty person will feel a lot better.

Regret can also serve a helpful role in conflict resolution. Painful regret can push one to action rather than leave you mired in a sense of sorrow, self-pity, or helplessness (Buechler 2008). You can undoubtedly remember times of painful regret, when something you did could not be undone, but haunted you with feelings of regret. Regret can heal relationships when we atone for mistakes and when we learn from the past situation how to manage our lives differently in the future. One example might be a situation in which you neglect an important friendship. When your friend inquires, "Is something wrong? Did I do something to offend you?" this inquiry might well move you to take action if you value the friendship. You can invite your friend to do something, make her a priority, set aside time, and restore connections between you. Regret ignored can turn into self-pity ("I never seem to get it right"), which does no one any good.

Functions of Positive Emotions

Many times we do not think of positive emotions in relation to the effective management of conflict. Several decades of research, especially the ideas of Seligman when he was president of the American Psychological Association, Isen (1987), Frederickson (2003), Fisher and Shapiro (2005), Socha (2008), and Shapiro (2011) point out the creative value of positive emotions. Positive emotions radiate outward into integrative and transformative conflict.

Joy, Love, and Laughter

Joy, love, and laughter clearly provided an adaptive role in human development. For instance, altruistic individuals were more likely to "tend and befriend," and therefore survive catastrophes. Positive emotions broaden an individual's mindset, allowing one to *broaden and build.* Whether in the lab or in everyday life, when people feel positive emotions such as interest, joy, altruism, hope, sympathy, and empathy, they are more likely to think creatively. When people feel good they are more likely to integrate new ideas, be

flexible, and remain open to information (Fredrickson 2003). When people feel safe, they are able to grasp the opportunities of conflict instead of remaining paralyzed by the danger of conflict.

Some organizations use these ideas for team building. When colleagues are able to play together, they are more likely to clarify their life priorities, strengthen social ties, and build skills to express love and care. In work-related conflicts, colleagues are more likely to choose cooperative modes of conflict resolution when they like each other and have shared positive emotional experiences (DeSilvilya and Yagil 2005). When students were asked to think of positive meaning in their daily lives, at the end of a month they scored higher on psychological resilience than those who focused on some neutral task (Fredrickson 2003). Interest and joy in play interacts with affiliation (Izard and Ackerman 2000). *Rituals* such as eating and playing games help people engage their feelings rather than just their cognitive abilities (Maiese 2006). Eating a meal together helps people relax and think of their opponents as people who want to solve problems. Many cultures signal the end of hostilities by having a meal together, giving gifts, and sharing greetings and apologies. *Nonhostile joking* helps people see each other as friendly others rather than enemies (Maiese 2006). Positive feelings (induced by watching positive-emotion films) help boost broadened thinking, and vice versa (Fredrickson and Joiner 2002).

Community conflict resolution and transformation create a "positive spiral" in an important way—people who give help can feel proud of their good deeds, and people who receive help often feel grateful. Even people who simply witness good deeds can feel elevated and more joyful (Fredrickson 2003).

Happiness, Serenity, and Contentment

Happiness, serenity, and contentment contribute greatly to resolving conflicts. When you approach a problem with interest and a positive attitude, you communicate these feelings to others involved, and they, too, are motivated to work with you (Deci 1992; Izard and Ackerman 2000). Serenity might be explained as a kind of balance and equanimity; whatever happens in a conflict, the relationship will be preserved, along with an individual's sense of self. *Positive emotions lead to empathy and sympathy.* Communicating *warmth* indicates that you see the other not as an enemy, but as a partner in conflict (Lindner 2014). Much that is positive is communicated through statements indicating confidence and warmth, serenity and optimism, such as:

"I'm glad to get a chance to work on this issue with you."

"We can come to a good outcome instead of wasting our energy struggling against each other. I feel confident that we can work together."

"What a relief to be facing this issue directly instead of skirting around it."

"I am interested in what you have to say."

(To an intimate): "You are important to me. I will do whatever it takes for us to get past this time of hostility and mistrust. I remember what it feels like to actually like each other."

"That's hilarious. I never thought of myself that way—you may be right. Uh oh!"

"OK, I'll put down my guns if you will. We're scaring each other to death."

"After this meeting, I hope we will set up a meal for our team to look forward to. This much hard work deserves a celebration."

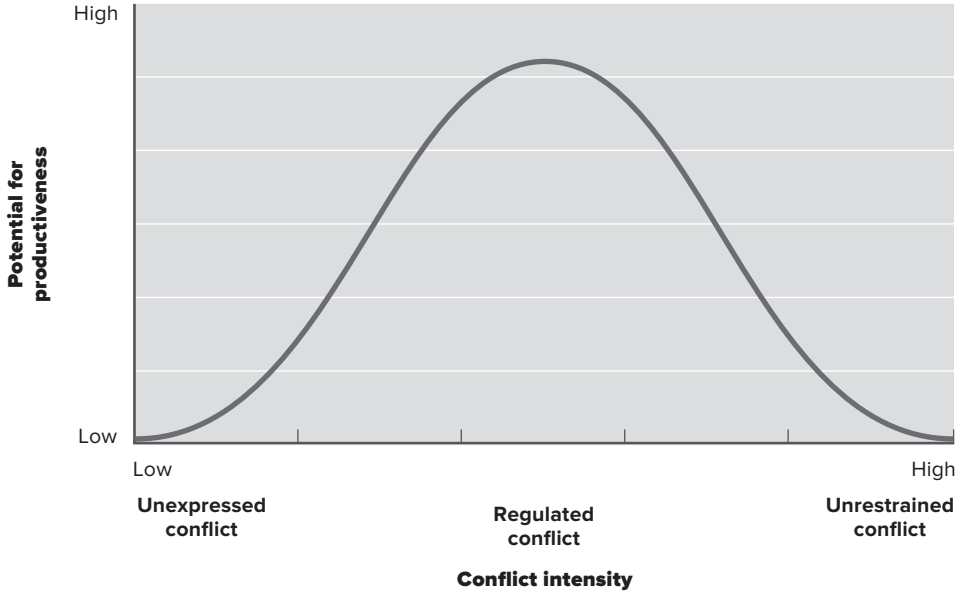
Notice that stating optimistic confidence sets the scene for raising the communication bar to a high level, and expecting the best.

Throughout the first part of this book we emphasized the importance of taking the other's perspective while holding fast to your own thoughts and feelings. When we assume that others want essentially what we want, we can join with them to solve problems instead of seeing the other person as the problem. While incompatible goals certainly exist, people of goodwill want to solve the current problem and enhance the relationship enough to transform a conflict into an opportunity. The meta-goal can help transform competing goals. Effective conflict resolution draws on feelings about and for the other person, and for oneself. Creative solutions transform anger, fear, hostility, and mistrust into confidence, contentment, and trust.

The Mid-Range: Zone of Effectiveness

Conflicts that are worked out in the **mid-range** of the level of emotional intensity resolve more effectively than those that are left unexpressed or are handled with unrestrained emotion. See Figure 6.4 for a graphic depiction of regulated conflict. Aristotle wrote about the Golden Mean and the Buddha preached about the Middle Way. Low productivity occurs when interpersonal conflicts are either not identified (but the emotions leak out anyway) or when people indulge in unrestrained emotion (thus leading others to fight or flee). A lack of regulation in personal conflicts damages the process. For instance, a divorcing couple, attempting to share the custody of their two children, were close to agreement when the

Figure 6.4 Continuum of Conflict Intensity



wife exploded in a mediation session, saying, "He's selfish! He always was and always will be!" Her unregulated outburst ruined the chance for collaboration on their problem. Regardless of the specific content, after an episode has passed, the other person will recall what you said and did during the conflict. *People have long memories for bad treatment.* Even if you feel perfectly justified for blowing up, your "bad behavior" will remain in memory even if the conflict outcome works out reasonably well. You may lose a relationship while trying to solve a problem.

Venting does nothing to help the conflict process. Venting (or avoiding) does not remain your only option for expression. If you feel the need to vent, do it with a safe friend, a counselor, or designated third party—not the conflict partner with whom you are attempting to work. Venting can feel wonderful for a while—but the price is usually too high to warrant the "Yes!" feeling of telling the other person off.

Unthinking avoidance of a conflict—pretending you don't have strong feelings when you do—will ultimately fail. Your feelings will come through, and the problem will remain unresolved. Young couples who avoided emotional expression, especially when men avoided speaking their emotion, were less happy than those who engaged in mid-range emotional expression (Velotti et al. 2016). Avoidance leads to resentment, while unregulated emotional expression leads to broken bonds of trust and affection.

Moderated emotions in conflict bring many advantages. The escalatory spiral will be halted, you will learn more with self-restraint, and you will be able to be more creative in your options when you don't create a bitter enemy. You will not take actions, such as revenge, that you would later regret or have to justify (Yoshimura 2007). Restraint of your emotions, but not suppression, allows trust to build when trust has broken down.

Mindfulness: Thinking About Feelings

How do we learn to manage the raw emotions that make up conflict? As Welwood (1990) writes in his book on love and relationships, we try to manage our lives so we avoid "raw" feelings, but in fact we are human partly because we feel so deeply. He refers to feelings as "raw" because we feel tender and vulnerable, but also because our emotions, at the beginning of a conflict, are "uncooked." They have not been processed. When we approach conflict as a **warrior of the heart,** we draw on some of the metaphors from earlier in the book. Conflict is a dance, or is like martial arts, and is like stepping along an unfamiliar path. Since we cannot avoid conflict, we can learn to move skillfully. No more positive metaphor exists for all that is good in conflict than the *heart.* When in danger, we may remind ourselves not to lose heart. You might be described by your friends as a person having a heart of gold, or being warm-hearted. The heart is viewed as filled with positive emotions and feelings (Reeves 2010). Hearts can also be cold or hard. We have the option to choose to soften and open our hearts to others with compassion, and to ourselves as worthy of good treatment.

Starting out on the difficult path of working with strong emotions, you will find these ideas helpful. **Awareness** is "by far the most essential, powerful resource we have for effecting change and working with life's challenges" (Riskin 2010; Welwood 1990, 23). Awareness draws not on "knowing about something," but on *clarity.* We are clear when we can use all our senses to tell what is actually happening, when we can move with *fluidity,* as though we are a zoom lens that can move in and out to change perspective. When we stay clear and fluid, we can stay stable instead of being blown around or thrown off our

path. We can cultivate mindfulness of others' needs as well as our own; becoming less self-centered builds bridges instead of walls. When a person is mindful or reflective, instead of reactive, that person will become more aware of the ways he filters incoming information. She becomes aware of her biases and distortions, saying, "Hmm, I usually misperceive very talkative, confident men. I'd better listen more carefully." She knows herself and her distorted lens, which enables her to correct her lens, at least some of the time.

Chapman (2012) teaches a mindfulness tool in communication workshops. The metaphor used to notice whether communication is open, closed, or somewhere in-between is the traffic light. Using this image, a *green light* communication pattern means communication is flowing well, a *red light* indicates closed or defensive communication, or a lack of listening, and a *yellow light* indicates something in between red light and green light. Working with the yellow light takes practice in mindfulness (Chapman 2012, 6). Mindful communication means that when you sense uncertainty, confusion, or danger that you slow down (yellow light).

Application 6.6 Traffic Light Mindfulness Practice

You can practice this in your small group.

1. Choose a current, emotion-laden conflict to role-play.
2. Choose people to take the roles of two or three people. As the people discuss how to transform the conflict, others hold up red, green, or yellow cards to indicate the emotional tone in the conflict.
3. Any time a yellow card goes up, everyone in the role-play stops for a count of five to think about what they are feeling, then resumes the conversation. Try this as a tool for learning mindfulness.
4. What did you learn when you stopped at the yellow light, to reflect on what to say next?

Another mindfulness requirement is to *remain compassionate* toward ourselves and others. **Compassion** makes us strong and expanded as conflict managers, since when we are compassionate we make space for our own feelings and the feelings of others. Making space is like stepping out of the flames (of emotion), but rather than running from the fire, we sit "next to it," look into the fire, and reflect on what is hurting. We have freedom to think, feel, move, and choose actions (Welwood 1990, 24). Calm reflection often leads to compassion.

When strong emotions toss us around, we feel so miserable or anxious or furious or scared that we begin to *tell ourselves stories.* These stories become bad mental habits that lead us to take shortcuts to action/reaction instead of thinking and feeling our way along a new path in a conflict. These "stories" become dramas that we believe are true, as was the case for Pamela and Baird as they told themselves stories about each other regarding Pamela's grief and Baird's response. Stories filter what we are able to think and feel. As we listen and tell our conflict narratives with an ear to the underlying emotion, we receive invaluable information about what our own and the other's core concerns really are. When we notice a shift in emotion, we can usually figure out why and how the conflict became intractable or reached impasse.

Practice your awareness of the **triggering event.** When you know what sets you off, you are better able to handle the episode creatively (Shapiro 2016). You can pinpoint that exact moment when a discussion turns into a conflict. Many times you will notice a defensive reaction, a rebuff, a rude comment, an explosion of anger, or your own inner emotion or story that notifies you, "That's enough. I've had it." Or you might notice someone else about to lose it. One of the best transformation tools depends on metacommunication, such as, "We need to tread carefully here," or "I'd like to slow this down." Respond to the triggering even with care and excellent communication, rather than escalation or extreme emotional expression.

Finally, the "warrior of the heart" needs *courage.* Courage is ordinarily depicted as a characteristic of "the lone, separate person who defies vulnerability and fear" (Jordan 2008). Jordan, one of the pioneers of the Relational-Cultural Model of therapy, founds her ideas, as does Welwood, on a different model of courage. Courage derives from the Latin root *cor,* meaning heart, "the seat of feeling, thought" (Jordan 2008). Courage involves bringing even painful truths into a relationship. It often involves courage to come into conflict. We have thoroughly explored the lures of both avoidance and escalation. Courage of the heart and feelings involves finding the truth with awareness, resisting the tried and true stories that propel us to act in habituated ways, and the true bravery required to act in an honest and compassionate manner.

Jordan suggests that we redefine vulnerability as an emotion and position that requires courage. Vulnerability indicates "we are open to the influence of others at the same time that we are open to our need for others" (Jordan 2008, 213). In a dominant, power-over culture, we don't feel safe when vulnerable. In a connected, relational culture, we can be moved by our feelings, express them with care, and continue to resolve our differences.

We will practice some of the "first steps" ideas for dealing with feelings by studying the following case and applying the ideas presented above.

Case 6.2 It's Not Yours to Loan!

Jackie and Tom are a married couple. They both work in real estate, Jackie in mortgage financing and Tom in sales. Tom's grandmother died and left each of her five grown grandchildren $100,000. Jackie and Tom were amazed and pleased. As they talked, they agreed to put the money into a money market account until the real estate market settled down, at which time they would make a down payment on their next home. Both Tom and Jackie like the duplex they bought when they married. They can afford the current mortgage because one side of the duplex is rented. They feel no hurry to buy something larger, although they are quite crowded, especially since the value of their duplex has dropped. In a recent appraisal, they were disappointed at how the duplex had lost value.

Half a year went by. Jackie usually managed the money, paying bills out of a joint checking account to which both contribute. One day Tom was at the bank and as he made a deposit, noticed that the money market account was down by about $50,000. In alarm, he asked the teller to track down the activity on the account. What he found shocked him. Jackie had taken $50,000 out 3 months before, then had made small deposits back into the account since then. He rushed home and confronted her. After a long, escalating fight in which Jackie was first evasive, then defensive,

(continued)

Case 6.2 It's Not Yours to Loan!

and Tom was accusing and unbelieving, Jackie confessed what had happened. Her parents had gotten themselves into trouble with credit card debt. Jackie arranged to loan them $50,000 with their promise and assurance that they would quickly pay her back. But Jackie's mother needed an unexpected operation. Her parents had made no payments back to Jackie. Jackie, panicked, tried to replenish the account but knew she could never do it on her salary. Here is part of their first conflict episode:

Tom: I cannot believe you would deceive me and do something so dangerous, dishonest, and selfish. What about our plans? You had absolutely no right to touch that money without talking to me. *(Notice harsh start-up.)*

Jackie: I feel terrible. But my parents had a good plan for paying us back. It's not their fault that Mom had to have surgery. Have a heart, Tom. *(She is not taking his outrage seriously.)*

Tom: They needed help for their credit card problems and stupid debts. I might have wanted to help, but you didn't ask. Now I can't trust you. You are not the woman I thought you were—you are a sneak and I will never be able to trust you again. *(Now he is using damaging labeling.)*

Jackie: Fine!!! I'll put every cent of my salary in the fund and you can tell my parents that you wouldn't help them. I'll tell them how selfish you are. What daughter wouldn't want to help her parents when they had gotten in trouble because of terrible jobs and a sinking economy? We had the money, and they didn't. They'll pay us back. I had no idea you were so heartless. *(She's threatening and attacking his character.)*

Tom: And I had no idea you were so gullible and deceitful! There's no earthly way your parents could have paid us back, even without your Mom's operation. You care more about them than our plans. *(More labeling and attacking, this time, of her parents.)*

Jackie: And you apparently care more about money than love and helping out. *(Character assassination!)*

Using the ideas of Welwood, Riskin, Chapman, and Jordan from our earlier discussion, let's see what *awareness, flexibility, mindfulness, compassion, and vulnerability* might sound like. A counselor asked each of them to reflect on the storm of emotion they were feeling before they talked with each other about the conflict again. They each wrote in a journal as they reflected.

Jackie: *I can see from the look on Tom's face and hear in his voice that he is shocked and dismayed. It's extremely painful to me to know that I betrayed his trust. I wish I had talked to him and told him about my parents' need. I was afraid that he would say no, and I believed that with a bonus coming in at Dad's business, they would be able to pay us back. Well, I see that I was not thinking. I just wanted to help and I felt guilty having the money and not helping them. I want to let Tom know that our values are different. In my culture, you help people in your family who are in need, period. But I hated feeling scared all the time and I'm actually glad Tom found out. I don't know what to do.*

(continued)

Case 6.2 It's Not Yours to Loan!

Tom: *I feel awful about blowing up at Jackie the way I did. I humiliated her. And yet I felt so shocked and scared that she took my money without telling me. More than that, I realize that I don't like or trust her parents. I am furious that they manipulated her, the way they have done before with kids in the family. Jackie's right, in a way. I do feel ungenerous with them. Her dad's an alcoholic and her mom works way too hard. Her dad expects people to take care of him. I think her mom put all those charges on the credit cards because she feels entitled to whatever she wants. I feel sorry for her mom. I'm still angry at Jackie, but I have seen for years how her parents take advantage of their kids. But I can't talk to Jackie about that—she'd be really hurt. And now we are furious with each other. But under all that, I feel scared and sad. It's not really the money; it's the trust issue. And I can imagine something like this happening in the future.*

Tom and Jackie are on their way to becoming "warriors of the heart." They are telling the truth to themselves, which will enable them to tell the truth to each other, and solve their problems. With help, they can tackle the trust issues, rebuild their bond with each other, make agreements about hearing what the other needs to say, no matter what, and repair the rupture in their relationship.

Before the counselor asked them to reflect in their journals, and then talk with each other again, Tom and Jackie had begun to tell themselves stories, make predictions, and believe these predictions. If they had listed their "stories," or **automatic thoughts,** they would have been following "hot thoughts." Wires that carry electricity are called "hot" wires. Similarly, the automatic thoughts that are most connected to strong feelings are called "hot" thoughts. These thoughts conduct the emotional charge, so these are the thoughts that are important to identify, examine, and sometimes alter to change our feelings (adapted from Greenberger and Padesky 1995).

Case 6.3 Strong Emotions and Automatic Thoughts

Write down a situation that you are experiencing in the present or immediate past about which you have strong emotions, like Tom and Jackie did. Then write down the automatic thoughts (the hot ones) that lead from your emotional situation. Some questions that might help you discover your automatic stories are these:

- What was going through my mind just before I started to feel this way?
- What am I afraid might happen?
- What is the worst thing that could happen if it is true?
- What does this mean about how the other person(s) feels and thinks about me?
- What images or memories do I have in this situation? (from Greenberger and Padesky 1995, 51)

Here is another example of a situation full of feeling.

Case 6.4 You Voted for Who?

You have just discovered that your fiancé has voted the opposite ticket from you in the presidential primary election. You have both argued over this; you cannot believe that he/she feels so differently. Your fiancé reminds you that you share a lot of values in common, but you still feel disbelieving and shocked. *Automatic thoughts:*

> If we are so different on something as important as who is president, what will this mean for our future together?
>
> I am ashamed to tell my family how she/he voted.
>
> I never saw myself as being married to someone so different from me. Is there more about him/her that I don't know? How can I find out?
>
> Is this marriage right for me?

Using awareness to gain clarity, to build in space to reflect, to stop oneself from telling stories, and to remain gentle with oneself and others is a key tool for working with feelings. Feelings are facts, but with attention and care, we can work with our feelings and still be honest and be ourselves.

The following additional techniques will help you work with strong emotion.

Express Anger Responsibly

Anger can be relationally lethal if you express it with contempt, disgust, exaggeration, shaming, and other mixtures of strong negative feelings. Anger can be expressed in a way that is *clear, calm, firm, respectful, honest, and compassionate*. This way of speaking works well as you express any strong emotion.

Mace (1987) suggests the following guidelines for **responsible expression of anger:**

1. Verbally state the anger. Just as one says, "I am hungry," say, "I am angry."
2. Distinguish between venting and acknowledging anger.
3. Agree that you will never attack each other in a state of anger.
4. Work to find the stimulus for the anger. It won't go away just because it is expressed.

Mace (1987) summarizes his approach (for use with intimate partners) as follows: "I find myself getting angry with you. But you know I am pledged not to attack you, which would only make you angry too, and alienate us. What I need is your help to get behind my anger to what really is causing it, so that we can do something about it together." The response to this is, "I don't like your being angry with me, but I don't blame you for it. And since I know you won't attack me, I needn't put up my defenses and get angry with you in turn. I appreciate your invitation to help you get through to the underlying cause of your anger, because I care about our relationship, and it should help both of us to find out what is really happening to us" (97). When you practice this approach to communicating anger, you will find it doesn't seem strange. The rewards for this kind of expression will help you keep using the approach.

Nonviolent communication (NVC) training helps in many situations in addition to intimate relationships. Male parolees, undergoing substance-abuse treatment after their incarceration, were trained with principles of nonviolent communication (very similar to principles in this book). Those parolees who learned NVC principles, and practiced them, developed more empathy, support skills, and ability to cope with heightened emotion than did those who received a different kind of training (Marlow et al. 2012). As scholars of communication, you may be able to integrate conflict transformation training and education in professional roles you will take in your career.

Use the X-Y-Z Formula for Clarity

Often, finding the right words to communicate anger is difficult. The **X-Y-Z formula** will help one express any difficult emotion. Here are its components:

- When you do X
- In situation Y
- I feel Z

An administrative assistant might say, "When you interrupt me (X) when I am on the phone (Y), I feel rattled and belittled (Z)." Her response, taking responsibility for feeling upset yet letting the other person know what produced her feelings, is more likely to result in a constructive solution than if she had said, "I don't get any respect around here!" Another way to use the X-Y-Z format is this:

- When you do X in this specific situation
- I feel Y
- What I want instead is Z

The second format incorporates a request into the sequence. Both are helpful tools to learn.

The X-Y-Z skill has the advantage of clarifying the issue of concern for the recipient of strong emotion and urging the sender to take responsibility for his or her emotional reaction. The first format is helpful when the situation needs exploration. Requests for change will come later. In the second format, the request is lodged in a specific, descriptive form so that the recipient might reduce defensiveness and respond appropriately.

Actively Listen to Emotional Communication

As you listen to someone express a negative emotion, you experience a natural tendency to experience your own fear and then to respond defensively, as in, "I only interrupt you when it is important to the company—get off my case." Remember, however, that when someone is upset with you, he or she needs to express that feeling or the feeling will turn into resentment, despair, sadness, or some other emotion. *You can't "argue" or "reason" someone out of any feeling.* When you say, "You shouldn't feel disappointed/angry/sad," this injunction may increase, not decrease, the emotion. The other person may feel frustrated and misunderstood because you are devaluing the other's real feelings. You don't have to agree with feelings to listen respectfully.

Case 6.5 Roommate to Roommate

Here is an example of respectful listening to someone who is upset. Your roommate has just said:

When you leave your clothes on the floor (X) and I have people in after my night class (Y), I feel embarrassed (Z).

Recipient: So my clothes on the floor really get you mad? (reflection—not perfect, because the roommate said "embarrassed," but it's good enough.)

Then you might ask *one* of these questions and make one of the statements:

1. Does it make you mad all the time or just if people are coming over?
2. Is this a big deal that bothers you a lot, or is it a minor irritation, or somewhere in between?
3. Let's both come up with some ideas. I'll bet we'll figure something out
4. It's important to me that we give and take because I like having you as a roommate.

The X-Y-Z format deescalates conflict.

Protect Yourself from Verbal Abuse

When another's expression of anger, rage, or contempt burns out of control, you have a responsibility to *protect yourself.* Listening to belittling, hostile blame, ridicule, demeaning or untrue accusations, sarcastic name-calling, contempt, or actual physical threats is *not* good conflict management. The other person should be told, firmly and consistently, "I won't listen to this kind of talk. I can't hear anything important you're trying to say when you're demeaning me." Then you can leave or disconnect from the phone, giving the other person a chance to cool off. You can say, "Wait!" or "Stop!" in a firm voice. Never try to argue with a person who is engaged in verbal abuse. (It's like arguing with an alcoholic—nothing healing can happen until the person is not drinking.) But just as you would move to stop the abuse of a child, you have the responsibility to stop verbal abuse in a conflict, if you possibly can.

Verbal abuse leads to escalation or withdrawal, hinders conflict resolution, and lowers the dignity and self-esteem of all parties. Productive reception of someone's anger may not be possible until boundaries are reset and conversation takes a more constructive tone. You can raise your voice (without shouting) and speak in a firm, no-nonsense tone. Of course, as a student of conflict resolution, you possess skills that will make it unnecessary for you to ever use verbal abuse!

Conflict is not always polite, but constructive conflict is never abusive or violent. When you know you are overpowered, or cannot stop the verbal abuse from another, leave. You may need help from friends or professionals to do so. You are never responsible for someone else's verbal abuse, as long as you are using reasonably constructive communication.

Use Fractionation

The essential conflict reduction tactic known as fractionating is an idea developed by Follett (1940) and later called "fractionation" by Fisher (1971). Fractionation reduces the intensity of emotion in conflicts by focusing attention on the *sizing of disputes.* Conflicts can be broken down from one big mass into several smaller, more manageable conflicts. Fractionating

conflict does not make it disappear, of course; it simply makes the components of large conflicts more approachable by parties who are trying to manage their disputes. Conflicts "do not have objective edges established by external events" (158). Rather, conflicts are like a seamless web, with indistinguishable beginnings and endings. Choices are almost always available as to how to size, and therefore manage, conflicts. When you choose to "downsize" a conflict, you probably also downsize the big emotion. This simple idea is one of the most useful conflict management tactics. Almost all conflicts can be made smaller without being trivialized. Smaller conflicts carry less strong emotion. Rather than saying, "I can see we will never solve the problem of where we want to spend our vacations and I feel completely discouraged," you could say, "I propose we work on this Spring break vacation, come to agreement, and then return to what we do in the future after we have a good time."

Use Positive Language to Work with Strong Emotion

Communication students transform conflicts with their use of language. As discussed earlier in this chapter, positive emotions help people broaden their thinking, reflect, and build on integrative ideas. You can adopt the "contribution system" (essentially, each person acknowledges that he or she contributes something to the problem, rather than blaming the other person). Fisher and Shapiro's ideas from *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate* (2005) will change your language from negative language to positive language. Study *Difficult Conversations* for excellent language that leads to moderated emotion (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999). Express appreciation and all the core concerns, use "we" language, involve people in decisions that affect them (which reduces defensiveness), and show respect by asking for opinions and advice from others.

You will benefit from Rosenberg's influential book *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict* (2005), another resource full of the language of peaceful communication.

Personal Responsibility for Emotional Transformation

As we have explored, emotions naturally arising in conflict often "feel bad." Peacemaking is a crucial stress reduction mechanism for people (Aureli and Smucny 2000; Shapiro 2016). In fact, "post-conflict anxiety and reconciliation may function as part of the human homeostatic mechanism, which regulates and stabilizes relationships between former opponents" (Butovskaya 2008, 1557).

As we think about change, we often try to change the other. This "change the other" attempt usually yields little that is constructive. Sometimes we can *change the situation.* Finally, we can deeply influence, from the inside out, only *ourselves.* Change in your interior communication or thoughts changes the entire system. This is especially true as we work with our own emotions, taking responsibility for how we feel. No longer can we accurately say, "I couldn't help it. He pushed all my buttons." With reflection, we know where our buttons are, how to manage our actions, and how to gain enough space to think while feeling. We might call this the watershed principle, based on where water flows along the Continental Divide. On one side, water flows toward the Atlantic, yet just a few feet farther away, it flows toward the Pacific. Very small changes can produce enormous effects. Similarly, in conflict interactions, small personal changes reverberate throughout the entire system and bring results that are much larger than you would ever imagine.

Because self-change in a conflict is difficult, it usually requires prerequisites. If you are going to alter your own emotionally based behavior rather than assert that your feelings and actions are only "natural" or "only in response to what she did," you have to care about the relationship. If the relationship is of no consequence to you, then you feel little impetus to change. The essential point is that you are not waiting for the other to change first—someone has to "step up to the plate."

In conclusion, working with strong emotions by understanding them, reflecting, choosing actions instead of reactions, and learning to express yourself precisely when you are feeling strongly—all this personal growth and responsibility leads to better conflict resolution. Radical self-responsibility means we take seriously our own possibilities for infusing hope and positive change into the world. This is a lifelong work in progress.

Out beyond the ideas of right doing and wrong doing,
There is a field.
I'll meet you there.

Jelaluddin Rumi

Source: From The Essential Rumi, Translated by Coleman Barks. 1995.

Summary

Emotions are states of feeling that arise naturally during conflict. During conflict a natural tension of opposite occurs—to soften or harden. Attachment theory is an emotion-regulating system, focusing on safety and danger; we recommend increasing safety and connection so conflict resolution approaches can actually be used. The circumplex model of emotion presents and organizes a theory of emotions. Feelings and how they fit into the model, are presented, along with a list of emotions typical when one's needs are and are not being met. Enough strong feeling is required to engage and collaborate in conflict—strong feeling can be used for positive purposes. Emotional intensity varies and one should not predict a conflict's trajectory based on the first level of intensity. People experience emotions as good or bad, and relationships are defined by the kind of emotion that is expressed.

Emotions serve a variety of functions, and negative emotions such as anger can serve as a wakeup call. The popular notion that you can get rid of emotions by expressing them (the catharsis view) is not accurate. The anger-fear cycle details what is underneath feelings of anger. Other emotions such as sadness and depression can alert us to trouble in the relationship.

The functions of positive emotions and their role in conflict resolution are described. Core Concerns provide a framework for remembering integrative conflict approaches.

You have a better chance of productive conflict if you neither deny nor blow up—rather, express whatever feelings you have in the mid-range. Mindfulness, awareness, flexibility, compassion, and vulnerability are ways to express strong emotions for a positive result. Learning how to catch your automatic thoughts, express anger responsibly, and take personal responsibility for your own emotional transformation yields big payoffs for managing conflict productively.

Key Terms

emotions 195
circumplex model of affect 201
Core Concerns Framework 202
feeling words 203
anger-fear sequence 208
vulnerability 208

gender differences 212
mid-range 216
warrior of the heart 217
awareness 217
compassion 218
triggering event 219
automatic thoughts 221
responsible expressions of anger 222
X-Y-Z formula 223

Review Questions

1. Define emotions.
2. What is the tension of opposites that occurs with emotions and conflict?
3. Describe the main function of emotions in engaging conflict resolution activities.
4. How are feelings and emotions related?
5. List some common misconceptions about emotions.
6. How do these misconceptions hinder effective conflict resolution?
7. How do negative emotions serve us in conflicts?
8. What is the anger-fear sequence?
9. How do sadness, disgust, and shame, and guilt influence conflict parties?
10. What are "feeling words"? What makes the study of feeling words useful?
11. Explain the adaptive theory of emotions applied to negative and positive emotions.
12. Why would one want to be in the mid-range of emotional expression? What happens when you express more extreme emotions?
13. What does it mean to become a "warrior of the heart"?
14. What are automatic thoughts and how are they connected to emotions?
15. List ways to express anger productively.
16. Why would you want to change yourself rather than others?
17. What are some of the reasons change is difficult?
18. Explain self-responsibility in relation to emotional understanding and regulation.

Part Two

Special Applications

Chapter 7

Analyzing Conflicts

The previous chapter developed ideas on how to understand and work with emotions. You work with emotions in the heat of conflict and after the conflict, when you reflect and plan your future approaches. The present chapter presents methods for analyzing conflicts—thinking about conflicts in a reflective manner. You will learn to analyze from the systems level as well as using micro-level analysis. You will use this level of analysis when you write a paper on a specific conflict, when you intervene in conflicts as an employee or third party, or when you decide to think through intimate and family conflicts to gain insight about how to change the structure of the conflict. In this chapter, you will focus more on thinking and analysis than on in the moment communication behavior.

Have you ever been in a conflict in which you were so perplexed you asked, either silently or aloud, "What is going on here?" Conflict can create confusion; we can't clearly see the underlying system dynamics as they unfold. As you learned in the last chapter, when emotions are aroused, "thinking while feeling" becomes even more difficult. When you can analyze your conflicts on both (1) macro and (2) micro levels, you will be empowered to make more productive choices both in the midst of the chaos and after the chaos subsides, as you learn, reflect, and plan for the future.

Most people cannot accurately describe the **system dynamics (macro level)** impacting them. People embroiled in an emotionally involving conflict are very likely to see the problems as coming from the behavior, personality, and morality of the other players (Mayer 2009). One of your first tasks as a manager, parent, or third party is to figure out the *system* rather than taking the easy out of pinning a personality label on the *problem person.* Steve, for example, when asked, "Why do your workgroup meetings always end in people shouting?" says, "I just don't know—we have a lot of personality issues that make us not get along." Steve feels trapped in a system. As with Steve, all of us are always embedded in a wider system impacting us. In this chapter, we will give you an orientation to system dynamics and some tools for understanding how systems work.

At the **micro level,** which involves the familiar territory of communication behavior, most of us are notoriously inaccurate in describing our own behavior in a conflict. We develop blind spots about our own behavior, and rigid ways of seeing the other. The person who believes the world is a win/lose place often doesn't see that this view sets competitive communication behaviors in motion. **Self-fulfilling prophecies** are enacted over and over as we provoke the very behavior we accuse the other in the conflict of perpetuating. Then we each make ourselves out to be the other's victim. This chapter will help you describe conflicts, as an insider and an outsider.

Macro-Level Analysis

Systems Theory

Full analysis of a conflict can best be accomplished by (1) describing the workings of the overall system and how those connect to (2) recurring communication patterns inside the system. One of the most helpful approaches to **macro-level analysis** is general systems theory, which tells us about the workings of entire systems and subsystems in organizations, small groups, and families.

Systems theory helps us answer the question, "*How* does this work?" Conflicts are seldom managed productively by attention to blame or causality. Parties notoriously punctuate conflicts differently, saying, for instance, "It started when Shannon dropped out of the leadership team," which may be countered by, "No, it started when Karen moved the project deadline up by two months."

Extensive discussions of systems theory applied to various contexts can be found in Gregory Bateson's two major works *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972) and *Mind and Nature* (1980), cornerstones of systems theory writing and research.[1] More recently, Coleman (2014) summarizes and critiques the promises and limits of systems theory in intractable, difficult, conflicts.

Systems theory provides a lens through which to analyze what happens—that conflicts are interlocking sequences, like a play production in which everyone plays a part. Key concepts of systems thinking follow:

- **Wholeness.** We must look at the entire system, not just a collection of individual behaviors (Christakis and Fowler 2009). Every individual is embedded within a relational system. The interpersonal system, in turn, is embedded in a larger network of relationships.
- **Organization.** It is true that the unit is made up of individuals, but it nevertheless functions as a unit. Each unit has its own patterns of organization—what is the overall picture?
- **Patterning.** We are interested in what patterns seem connected. What patterns are predictable, and what functions do these patterns serve? Many times people cling to patterns of behavior that seem to make no sense, but from the whole system perspective, they do make sense (Papp, Silverstein, and Carter 1973).

Systems Theory Principles and Practices

1. **Selected principles derived from systems theory will help you understand the holistic, or systemic, nature of any conflict.** The following suggestions, adapted from an historical article by Papp and colleagues (1973) and supplemented by Coleman (2014) break down the complicated ideas of systems theory in a clear way.

[1] The systems approach to describing normal family processes is discussed thoroughly by Galvin and Brommel (1986) and Walsh (1984). Overviews of systems theory and the change process are provided by Minuchin (1974), Neill and Kniskern (1982), Hoffman (1981), Napier and Whitaker (1978), Johnson (1977), and Papp, Silverstein, and Carter (1973). These classic approaches provide an insightful perspective for viewing conflict.

Conflict in systems occurs in chain reactions. Rather than pinpointing one person as the cause of the conflict (Kellett 2007), look instead for predictable "chain reactions," because what every person does affects every other person. Study the chain reactions—see who picks up what cues and identify the part each plays in the runaway spiral. Satir (1972) uses an image of a family as a mobile in which members respond to changes in each other. If one member responds to a situation, the other members must consciously or unconsciously respond to the movement in the system. The same kind of interdependence exists in organizations and small groups. One cannot *not* affect other members of a system. This idea can help empower people who think, "I can't make any difference," "I am just an entry-level employee," or who are dependent on parents financially. People who feel low power are often not able to see that the other is dependent on them.

Systems operate with **circular causality,** a concept that suggests that assigning a beginning is less important than looking at the sequence of patterns in the conflict process. Analysts must understand how complex, nonlinear systems function, and change (Coleman 2014). Almost always, conflict participants identify the other as the cause while portraying the self as innocent. One group member accused, "I do not feel safe in this group because you have refused to recognize my existence when we see each other outside of this meeting." The surprised recipient of the accusing statement responded, "I have never ignored you. You look down when you see me." No one cause explains the spiral of mistrust between the two group members. All systems are characterized by circular causality—each person affects the other. We might take e-mail messages as an example. When people start sending negative e-mail or text messages they often feel justified and do not see the negative effect that inflammatory messages create. The person who "fires off" a nasty e-mail or text feels better, but the person who receives it (or hears about it) feels worse, fires off another message, and so forth.

Descriptive language is the basic tool for assessing the system from a "no blame" perspective. By describing, you will avoid nominating others as the villains, heroes, healthy/unhealthy person, or victim. As you have previously learned, even in analysis, labeling serves no good purpose. Describing does. Note the difference in the following vignettes:

Wife: He's too needy. I don't know how he expects me to come home from a pressured day at work, wade through the three kids, all of whom want my attention, and ask him calmly, "How was your day?" while kissing him sweetly on the cheek. He should grow up. (Evaluative language.) And now he's calling me *cold!*

The same vignette using descriptive language.

Wife: Scott wants to be greeted by me when I first get home. What happens, though, is that by the time I hit the front door, all three children clamor for my attention. Scott's usually in the back of the house in his study, so by the time I physically get to him, I'm involved with one of the children. Then he doesn't get my full attention. He's right that I am distracted. And frankly, I don't want to try to split myself in four pieces at that particular time.

In the second scenario, ideas for change already present themselves, whereas in the first scenario, Scott's wife labels Scott as the problem. The couple is not likely to find solutions to the conflict while the wife views Scott as the villain (the childish partner) who is causing the problem by being too needy.

When you are in a conflict you will need to stretch to move out of blaming the other, and into describing how your behavior and the other's behavior trigger one another. David, a vice president in a marketing company, was in charge of hiring a video producer for a client's product. When the video production supervisor didn't solve a problem but said, "Maybe *you* can find a solution," he responded by writing in an e-mail to the whole video team, "What is the matter with you people? What don't you understand about 'You are responsible'? Do I have to do all your work for you? Is everyone in your organization a slacker?" Yet, in conversation David was able to say, "Well, I did raise my voice with them in the initial phone call. Maybe that did keep them from taking the initiative."

Beginnings matter greatly, in organization, intimate relationships, and groups. Positive initial communication, no matter how seemingly insignificant, can trigger more positive behavior in the conflict scenario (Coleman 2014).

2. **Each member develops a label and a specific role in the system.** Labeling serves an explanatory function for the entire group (Kellett 2007). Labels may keep people from changing; however, the labeling process itself can be changed. For instance, the "watchdog" in an organization may be carrying too much of the quality control. A person labeled as the watchdog may also be excluded, or seen as ready to pounce on any wrongdoing. Conflicts arise because if the watchdog stops performing the function reinforced by the group, others will try to pull her back into the role. The role may, however, limit her and others.

   When certain individuals in the system specialize in specific functions, others may not develop those capabilities. For instance, in one sorority house, Jan was known as the "peacemaker" of the group. She could be counted on to help people solve their problems. In one ongoing conflict, however, Theresa and Pat disagreed vehemently with each other over how literally to enforce some house rules. They blew up at each other, knowing they could count on Jan to help patch things up. Theresa and Pat were not forced to make their own peace because Jan always rushed in. In this situation, some training in conflict skills for the whole group would help; Jan can also say, "I think you two can work this out."

   Another limiting label is "the devil's advocate," someone who takes the opposite side of almost any dispute, for the sake of arguing. This role often helps open up a discussion, but it may keep system members arguing instead of looking for solutions.

3. **Cooperation among system members maintains on conflicts.** One person cannot sustain an interaction. Therefore, the conflict cycle can be interrupted (but not controlled) by any one person who changes his or her behavior. Healthy systems are characterized by **morphogenesis,** or "constructive system-enhancing behaviors that enable the system to grow, innovate and change" (Olson, Sprenkle, and Russell 1979). Conflict can be changed by one person initiating change or by members deciding together to initiate a change in their structure. A system that maintains conflicts by avoiding genuine change is called a "morphostatic" system, one characterized by moves designed to sustain the status quo, or no change.

   If you are stuck in a system that does not change, one choice you always have is to change your own behavior, even if you cannot get others to change. In the Shepherd family, for instance, one of the five members usually felt left out. The family expectation was that four people together were enough but five people together were trouble,

since each parent wanted to "take care of" one child. The family was able to change and make more room on the merry-go-round when Dad began sharing his time with all three children instead of paying attention to one child at a time.

A system may benefit (in the short term) from keeping a conflict going rather than resolving it. A work group that bickers might be keeping the manager involved in their ongoing work. In this way they will not have to take responsibility for possible failures. An intimate couple may fight over the same old things so they do not have to confront a more basic dissatisfaction. One couple argued unproductively over the man's ongoing comments about traffic hassles. When the woman finally sat down with him to confront the deeper issues, she said, "I don't like listening to who cut in front of you, or bad traffic behavior that happened in the days before. I find myself avoiding riding with you. This is affecting my enjoyment of being with you." The man was able to hear this description, rather than participating in continuing comments about who did what to whom, or not, in traffic.

4. **Triangles form in systems when relationships are close and intense (positive or negative).** When one person feels low power, that person tends to bring in another person to bolster the low-power position (Parks 2007). Since the person brought in to build up the position of the low-power person maintains multiple relationships in the system, interlocking triangles begin functioning over and over in predictable ways. If these triangles lead to destructive behavior, they are termed *toxic triangles* (Satir 1972; Hoffman 1981; Minuchin 1974). Triangles will receive deeper coverage later in this chapter.
5. **Systems develop rules for conflict that are followed even if they work poorly.** A family might, for example, say, "If we are a happy family, we do not have conflict," or "We have polite conflict." At work there may be a rule that "If you have conflict with the manager, you will be fired." Some departments only enact conflict in writing. Others require conflicts to happen only in meetings, whereas some postpone or "table" most potential conflicts.

   Such system rules often block collaborative conflict. At one time they may have served the system well. Parents may have decided, for instance, never to fight in front of the children. When the children were infants, the rule protected them from angry faces and loud voices. But with children 12 and 16 years old, the rule doesn't work well because the children can always tell when Mom and Dad are in a conflict. The teens do not learn how to manage conflict collaboratively in families.
6. **The conflict serves the system in some way.** The conflict may be substituting for intimacy and connection, or may serve as a launching pad for problem solving. Never assume that members of a system want the conflict to be resolved. They may fear a vacuum in their interaction if the conflict is no longer serving its particular function.

   Although almost everyone in a conflict will say, "Of course we want this over and done with," the fact that people keep conflicts going, sometimes for years at a time, indicates that some system function is served by the conflict. One church congregation carried on a repetitive conflict at board meetings about the propriety of using the church buildings for partisan and special interest group meetings. A third party helped them discover that the debate was a substitute for a subgroup's voicing dissatisfaction with the minister's involvement in social action projects. The board had been reluctant to confront the minister with their disapproval, so they

always centered the discussion on "use of the building." The conflict allowed them to express their disapproval in an indirect way.

The following section presents techniques for identifying exactly how the conflicts occur inside the system.

Application 7.1 A Brief Systems Analysis

Write a brief paragraph about a group (system) you know inside and out. This may be a family, social group, work group, blended family, or any other group. Based on the principles just discussed, answer the following questions:

- What seems to "set off" conflicts? What are predictable trigger events?
- Does anyone have a label that people joke about? How does the label work for that person and the group?
- Who is the most likely person to change—to not do things the same old way?
- Are there any secret coalitions?
- Are there any expectations that now seem irrational to you, but that people more or less follow?
- What if there were no conflicts? Would anything be lost? What?

You can make use of this system analysis for a larger paper, or for understanding the principles by discussing them with others in your class.

Complex Conflict Patterns

All recurring conflicts follow patterns—predictable actions of communication and response. Even when you can't determine when a pattern "starts," system regularities pervade. Often the structure of the conflict is only expressed indirectly or implicitly so you can't just ask, "What is the structure of your conflict?" Rather, the structure has to be derived from inductive approaches such as (1) identifying specific system patterns, (2) charting conflict triangles, and (3) drawing coalitions. Social complexity theory helps guide us in this level of analysis. Complexity refers to "a high degree of system interdependence, which . . . leads to nonlinearity, emergent order creation, other surprising dynamics" (Hazy, Goldstein, and Lichtenstein 2007). Social complexity analyzes networks that *connect* individual people. Systems change in surprising and unpredictable ways. Small changes, such as a morning "huddle" in an organization or initiating a new family ritual, may create big changes in the overall system (Aula and Siira 2010). As we continue with ways to analyze conflicts, we will present changes that rely on system changes as well as individual changes in a system.

Systemwide Patterns

Conflicts never occur in a vacuum. As Parks says, "Relationships never exist apart from other relationships" (2007, p. 38). If Mary and Marty, just married, are carrying on an ongoing dispute about finances, it is likely that Mary's sister and Marty's buddy, Samuel, are also involved in the conflict. We are all embedded within wider systems, so whether a conflict rages out of control or just simmers on the back burner, there are systemwide forces at work. Everyone affects everyone else.

Just as individuals develop characteristic styles, so do entire systems. Papp, Silverstein, and Carter (1973) note that in systems theory analyses the following occurs:

- Attention is focused on connections and relationships rather than on individual characteristics.
- The whole is considered to be greater than the sum of its parts.
- Each part can only be understood in the context of the whole.
- A change in any one part will affect every other part.

An example of system change involving sexual harassment in an organization demonstrates a changing organizational style. In the first description, no change occurs:

1. When sexually harassing behavior occurs, managers ask victims to "just handle it," or tease about it. They expect victims of harassment to confront it along without upsetting the system. In this case, no change occurs because the victim is not supported. A harassing culture will then be tolerated.
2. *Or,* the culture of the organization might be influenced by people at the top. The managers communicate that they themselves do not want this kind of organization, and they ask that all concerned become involved in remedying the situation. Conversations take place about what is acceptable and what is not. The system changes by examining harassing behavior as a whole, rather than asking victims or perpetrators to "handle" it (Marsick, Weaver, and Yorks 2014, 573).

Since everyone is related to everyone else in a system, a manager, parent, or third party can initiate change by asking *What in this system is working?* Rather than waiting for a conflict to emerge, you can observe what is working already, and augment and support what is already effective (Coleman 2014). In a hospital system, a vice president tried to influence policies about medical waste, asking everyone to limit waste in order to build a sustainable system. She knew that medical waste in most hospitals was a big problem, since staff had developed the practice of throwing things away rather than cleaning and recycling, which takes more time. The vice president was not noticing the change she wanted to see. She decided to find the department in the hospital producing the least waste. She and her team spent time in that department, which happened to be the pediatric medical ward, to find out what they were doing. Then she asked members of the pediatric department to lead discussions at other departmental meetings, answering questions, and encouraging others to adopt different policies. The overall system changed when people who had already changed their practices engaged colleagues in discussion.

Each communication system has an identity that is more than the sum of the individual players. If Sally is aggressive, Tom is obliging, and Linda avoids, simply combining their individual preferences for conflict will not tell us how they will manage conflict as a system. The following comments reflect systemwide observations:

> The research and development department ducks for cover whenever the bottom line is mentioned.
>
> They fight like cats and dogs, but they always make up.
>
> That whole group is plastic. They look so sweet, but I wouldn't trust them farther than I could throw them.

Unlike individual styles, systemwide styles have not been as widely researched, but many useful system descriptions have emerged from researchers of family interaction. Lederer and Jackson's seminal book *Mirages of Marriage* (1968) focused attention on how marital partners act as a unit rather than as individuals. In that book, such phrases as the "gruesome twosome" and the "heavenly twins" were used to describe marriages rather than individuals. Family schemata (underlying patterns of behavior) also give some information about satisfaction in a family. Families that are oriented toward *conversation* rather than *conformity* produce young adults who experience higher levels of satisfaction (Fowler, Pearson, and Beck 2010; Punyanunt-Carter 2008). *Rituals* can be considered a "genre of communication events" (Baxter and Braithwaite 2006, 260); families and couples that enact satisfying rituals are more likely to maintain good relationships over time (Fowler et al. 2010).

One marital systems description comes from Cuber and Haroff (1955), who described marriages as:

1. *Conflict-habituated* relationships, in which conflict recurs constantly but has little productive effect; the fighters "don't get anywhere."
2. *Devitalized* marriages, in which the relationship is a hollow shell of what originally was vibrant and living.
3. *Passive-congenial* relationships, in which both partners accept a conventional, calm, ordered marriage that maintains little conflict.
4. *Vital* relationships, which involve intense mutual sharing of important life events.
5. *Total* marriages, characterized by the sharing of virtually every aspect of life, fulfilling each other almost completely. (This may be more of an ideal than an observation of real marriages!)

These descriptions of marital systems help us analyze how conflict is typically approached in these marriages. What different kinds of marriages have you observed or participated in?

The impact of conflict itself, as well as the way it is enacted, differs depending on the relational type. In a conflict-habituated couple, for example, conflict is so common that it may go almost unnoticed, but it slowly drains the energy that the couple needs for important growth or conflict. Devitalized partners might experience conflict as being so devastating that it tears apart the fragile fabric of their shared life. Conflict, after all, is energy producing and energy draining, and it therefore may destroy a devitalized couple. Likewise, avoidance in a total relationship would be a distress signal, whereas anything but avoidance in a passive-congenial relationship might break its implicit rules.

Another system-level description comes from Rands, Levinger, and Mellinger (1981), who provided a view of conflict resolution types. They found that couples could be seen as belonging to one of four types:

Type I: Nonintimate-aggressive relationships foster escalation without any corresponding intimacy. Couples are aggressive toward each other without enjoying the benefit of emotional closeness. Conflict for couples who maintain this pattern is usually not satisfying, since more energy is drained than is gained.

Type II: Nonintimate-nonaggressive couples lack vitality, intimacy, and escalation. Thus, they are more satisfied than Type I people, since they do not have to contend with escalating conflict.

Type III: Intimate-aggressive couples combine intimate behavior with aggressive acts. Their conflict usually results in intimacy, even though they use aggressive conflict modes. Their satisfaction depends on whether their conflicts lead to intimacy or someone derails the predictable outcome by aggression that is too vicious or comments that are "below the belt."

Type IV: Intimate-nonaggressive partners use small amounts of attacking or blaming behavior, retaining their intimacy in other ways. These couples are satisfied, whether they are "congenial" (i.e., they avoid full discussion of issues) or "expressive" (i.e., they confront important issues).

Application 7.2 My Family Patterns

Describe families, a couple relationship, or a living situation you are part of, or have been a part of, using some of the preceding system pattern descriptions.

- Identify the system itself (family of origin, partnership, marriage, stepfamily, current family, former family, extended family).
- Who are the members?
- What patterns best describe each family system?
- What are some advantages of each pattern? Disadvantages?
- Choose two or three constructive changes *you yourself* could put into motion.
- What is the emotional effect on you based on your role in each family system?

In a simpler scheme, Mace (1987), one of the originators of marital enrichment programs, described conflict patterns in marital systems. He found that couples react to conflict in one of four ways. They may avoid it, tolerate it, attempt to fight fairly, or process it, which involves active listening and telling the emotional as well as factual truth. In your own conflicts, as an overall pattern do you use avoidance, tolerance, fighting, or processing? These become *system styles* when they are repeated.

Whatever your systemwide patterns, conflicts in the system can be classified according to the following conflict stages (Guerin, Fay, Burden, and Kautto 1987):

Stage I: Members experience a minimal amount of conflict, openly communicate, and share power. The level of conflict causes no distress for the system.

Stage II: Members experience significant conflict that they see as causing a problem. Criticism increases, but still there is little power polarization or overt struggle for control. Usually, one person is pursuing and the other is distancing, and as a system, they have some difficulty agreeing on how much separateness they should have.

Stage III: Members are in turbulence, experience high intensity, and are moving toward polarization. They are unable to exchange information accurately, and frequently criticize each other. Their power struggle is now serious and there is a life-or-death quality to much of their communication.

Stage IV: Members have lost the ability to work through their conflicts and have engaged the services of a third party or are dissolving the relationship. They see the relationship as adversarial and work to enhance their individual bargaining positions. At this stage, a couple is headed toward disengagement and divorce (Guerin et al. 1987) or ongoing enmity.

Just as with individual approaches to styles, systemwide descriptions have limitations. First, conflict can be occurring in the system because the participants disagree about the type of system they want. One partner may want to be enmeshed, involving the other in all decisions, whereas the other may want more disengagement. In such cases, individual behaviors indicate a struggle with the definition of the system as a whole. Rather than being "nonintimate-aggressive," the system may reflect a struggle in process.

When people work toward defining who they will be together, the rules that shape their interaction may be in flux. Some of the typologies discussed in the previous section may have given you the impression that conflict patterns are fixed. As Christakis and Fowler note, "The networks we create have lives of their own. They grow, change, reproduce and die" (2009, p. 289).

Sharon and Don, for example, are the parents of three children who are entering their teens. In the past, the family could be described as "nonintimate-nonaggressive." Now that the children are growing up, the parents are rediscovering their intimacy with each other, which results in confusion in the family interactions, since the children are used to being the center of attention. No system description adequately reflects the complexity the family experiences during transition.

Just as with individual styles, various system patterns can be functional or not, depending on the needs of the situation. Not all groups are automatically better off with a highly processed, or "intimate-nonaggressive," style all the time. Relationships go through cycles of change on various dimensions. Mutual avoidance of conflict may be appropriate, for instance, if a remarried couple is determined to avoid the tense escalatory behavior of their first marriages. Avoidance may not continue to work for this couple for 10 years, but it may serve their goals well at first, as they are building trust and affection for each other.

Micro-level Analysis of Conflict Systems

When you go on a car trip to visit a friend, you need two levels of maps—one showing the two states you are motoring across and another showing the streets in Pittsburgh, where your friend lives. The same kind of information is needed in your conflicts—overall systemwide views and also maps or descriptions of the smaller details. Several approaches to the micro-level analysis of your conflicts will be useful: describing triangles, coalitions, interaction rules, and microevents.

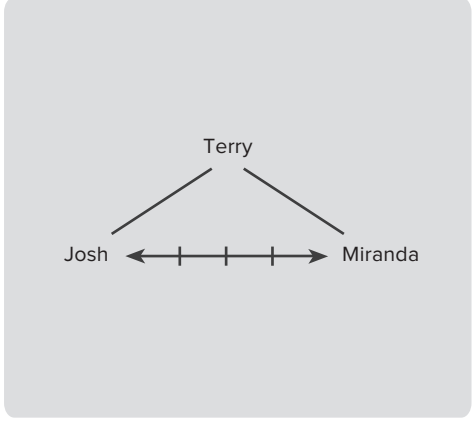
Conflict Triangles

If you experience a conflict with John and you talk to Julia about it, you are participating in a **conflict triangle.** Conflict triangles occur frequently (Dallos and Vetere 2011). Why triangles?[2] When people perceive that they are the low-power person in a conflict, their

[2] Several researchers and practitioners have noted that the triangle is the basic unit of analysis for conflict communication (Hoffman 1981; Minuchin 1974; Satir 1972; Wilmot 1987).

typical response is to try to form a coalition with another person. That person may indeed bolster their power, but the addition of the third person forms a triangle. "Three's a crowd" is a cultural saying based on sound communication theory. Three people find it difficult to maintain balance in a conflicted relationship. Usually they become structured as a "dyad plus one" (Wilmot 1987). Communication triangles prove unstable—the power will flow to two of the people, leaving one person out.

Let's take a typical workplace situation. Terry is the manager; Josh and Miranda both report to him. Josh criticizes Miranda in front of other colleagues, resorting to Terry frequently to complain about the "quality of her work." Miranda, on the other hand, criticizes how Marty treats her—interrupting her in meetings and always second-guessing her work. She also hears from Terry that Josh "is not pleased with the quality of your work." Everyone is trapped—Terry says, "Why can't they just get along?" Josh says, "Her quality of work is subpar," and Miranda says, "He doesn't treat me professionally." When Josh and Miranda are together (without Terry) they both say, "He is so hands off he doesn't solve any problems—he just keeps pushing the issue back to us." The following triangle illustrates the recurring conflicts. The line with dashes indicates strain or conflict.



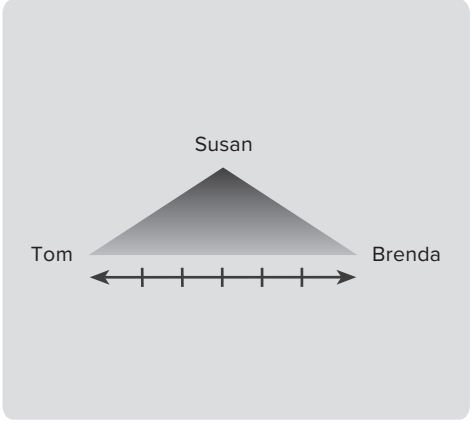
Since there is ongoing conflict, the triangle is inherently unstable—Terry might move closer to Josh, or spend lunch hours with Miranda, thus bringing instability to the system. In any triangle, a shift in any degree of closeness affects the other participant.

Triangles can also be stable. In a relationship with very little conflict, three may be just fine, and even fun. For instance, Helen is a university senior. She is an honors student who enjoys living off campus with her closest friend, Jean. Jean and Helen have known each other since high school, and have discovered that their eating habits, how they like to keep up their two-bedroom apartment, their study times and habits, and their sense of fun and frivolity are very similar. Both enjoy solitary time as well as time with each other and friends. Recently Jean began spending a lot of time with her boyfriend, Jeff. For a while, Jeff stayed at Helen and Jean's apartment often, hanging out, studying, and just "living." Helen talked to Jean about this, saying that she felt slightly intruded upon and wished for more time alone or just with Jean in the apartment. Since Helen and Jean had already agreed to this basic principle, "the apartment is for us," Jean was not

upset. She began to spend more time at Jeff's. Now Helen feels lonely some of the time, but she understands Jean's choices.

Are Jean, Helen, and Jeff in a **toxic triangle?** The word *toxic* (Satir 1972) was first applied to relationships that are poisonous, dangerous, and potentially devastating to the relationship. Clearly Helen and Jean are *not* in a toxic triangle—they have developed direct, straightforward communication that keeps them out of a toxic situation. Helen may be lonely, but she doesn't blame Jean for spending time with Jeff and she knows they are still friends. This is an example of a normal, healthy communication style that does not result in a toxic triangle.

Of course, people aren't always so skilled or fortunate: When conflict erupts, the system tends to cluster into triangles. For example, Tom and Mary are a couple in their second marriages. Tom has a daughter, Susan, age 7, and Mary has a son, Brian, age 6. Tom's first wife, Brenda, lives in the same town. Mary's first husband, Sam, lives in another state. The current conflict can be described like this:



Application 7.3 A Conflict Triangle

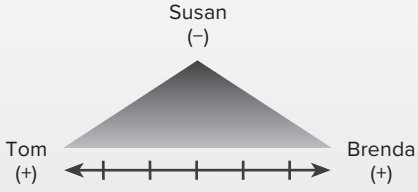
Tom and Mary have a close and usually constructive relationship. They learned from their unhappy first marriages to talk problems out and to be direct and honest (as well as respectful, kind, and clear). But they have some problems. Tom and his former wife, Brenda, do not agree with the parenting plan they agreed to, with a court-appointed mediator's help, 2 years before. Since they remained at an impasse, the mediator sent the parenting plan to a court-appointed "special master," or arbitrator, who recommended a plan to the judge. Tom and Brenda argue via phone and e-mail about exceptions to the "one week with each one" plan. They argue about timing of vacations and holiday visits. Unfortunately, they draw Susan into their conflict, sending messages through her and notes back and forth through Susan. An example would be a note Brenda sent Tom through Susan that said, "Susan will be spending Thanksgiving at my house because she told

(continued)

Application 7.3 A Conflict Triangle

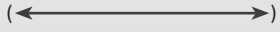
me that is what she wants to do. Therefore, I will pick her up Wednesday at 4:00." You can draw the toxic triangle of these three people like this:

High- and low-power people are marked with a plus (+) or minus (–). Susan, of course, is the child caught in the middle and has little power in the current toxic triangle.

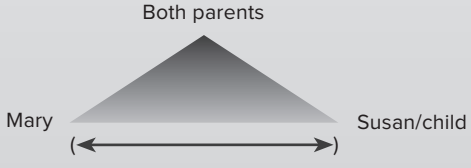


One time Mary, Susan's stepmother, found Susan crying at home. Susan and Mary have a good, warm relationship. Susan said, "I hate this. Mom and Dad fight all the time and I can't do anything about it. I just want to do what the judge said because somebody is always mad at me." Whether she was aware of it or not, Susan needed a friend, an ally—Mary.

Allies can be drawn this way:



Mary knows she cannot talk directly with Brenda, having tried that communication strategy before. But Mary is tired of being ineffective and watching the ongoing conflict. She has been an **isolate.** A diagram of the conflict so far might look like this. Allies are drawn with parentheses around the arrow connecting their communication bond:

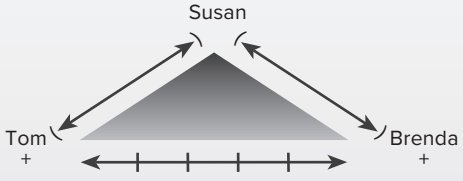


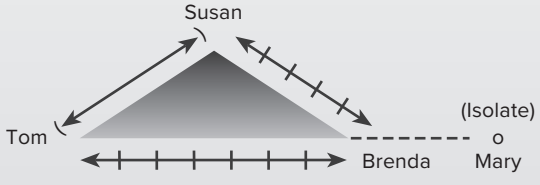
(continued)

Application 7.3 A Conflict Triangle

You pick up the conflict from here. In a small group, draw potential new triangles, involving Mary, Susan, Tom, and Brenda. Remember also that Brian, Mary's son, might have some input here. Propose some conflict resolution strategies, drawing the new triangles. One example might be that Mary decides to talk with Tom about Susan's distress, proposing that Tom talk directly to Brenda, leaving Susan out of any communication. Susan is in the room. How would that triangle look?

The reason to analyze toxic triangles is to discover where the ongoing conflict lies. The goal of triangle analysis is to make toxic triangles into direct, collaborative communication interactions. These new dyads would be drawn like this:





Examples of Constructive Dyads

Diagramming toxic triangles allows you to understand the "stuck places" of the conflict patterns. The goal of triangle analysis is to remove the toxic triangles and make them into *direct dyadic communication.* This strategy may not resolve all conflicts, but you will take steps toward removing intractable conflicts if you pay attention to toxic triangles.

In organizations, a leader can openly diagram triangles of "failed communication" on a whiteboard at a staff meeting. Managers and team leaders use this technique effectively. Even without outside intervention, leaders in the organization can say, "We have some failed communication strategies going on. Let's draw them, and brainstorm ways to get ourselves out of the stuck tangle of triangles." When this communication strategy is used without blame, lights go on and people begin to realize why they are in conflict and what they might do about it. Direct communication is usually the constructive strategy of choice. People form triangles when they feel low power. People feel more empowered when communication is direct.

Drawing Coalitions—Who Is In, Who Is Out?

While analysis of triangles can be part of the systemwide picture, other network patterns also emerge. A **coalition** forms when some are closer to each other than they are to others. A private bond emerges. For example, in a family, you may be the "outsider," the last to hear of important family events. At work, there may be two groups, those who like the supervisor and those who do not. In a large organization, some departments join together every time there is a decision; they exclude other departments. When someone is in a coalition, they include select people in the information flow and not others. That communication is often hidden in some way. Figure 7.1 is a simple diagram showing one possible set of coalitions.

When two people are "coalesced," they orient to one another, share more information, and feel closer than to others. When people feel excluded, they call the other people's coalitions "cliques." As you can see from the Williams family diagram, mom and son Seth are close, as are dad and daughter, Rachel. And son #2, Tom, is the "isolate"—the one who is out of the loop with others.

Coalitions also form in workplaces. Here are two examples to illustrate some of the diverse patterns that develop. In Figure 7.2, the executive director has a close relationship with four of her staff, and the other four form a coalition "against" the original group.

Figure 7.1 Coalitions in the Williams Family

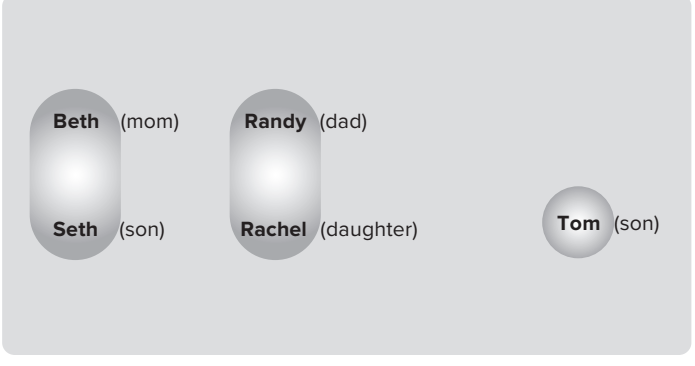
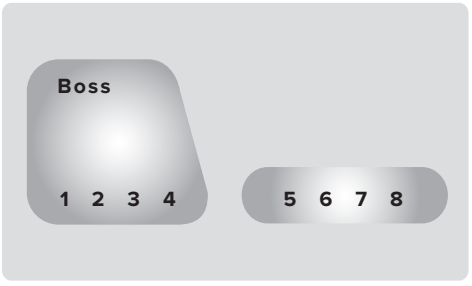


Figure 7.2 Coalitions With/Against the Boss



Even without knowing any of the people involved, you can predict the system dynamics. In this case, the executive director shared a close bond with one person, and also with about one-half of the staff. The remainder of the professional staff, feeling excluded by the director, formed their own countercoalition. Whatever one group wanted, the other resisted, and vice versa. Over time, the coalitions became so rigid that outside help was requested.

Drawing coalitions gives an overall view of the system—who is in, who is out, who is closest to whom, and who has the most power. In all organizations and families with more than three members, coalitions exist. As the members go about their relating, they tend to "cluster" their communication within the overall network (Parks 2007):

- A parent talks more to one child than to the other.
- One group of elementary schoolteachers in an elementary school forms into two groups—smokers and nonsmokers.
- Half a group of community college faculty give allegiance to the academic vice president while the other half allies itself with the president.

People form coalitions in order to (1) share topic information, (2) get support and understanding, (3) have a sense of belonging, and (4) gain power. Thus, coalition formation is a natural process in all families and organizations—people tend to cluster together (and apart). In all the workplaces and families where we have worked as change agents, without exception, members are in coalitions.

Recall from Chapter 2 the explanation of the differing perspectives that people use in conflicts. In an ongoing dispute, people disagree with almost everything the other expresses. Yet, surprisingly, when asked to draw coalitions, they reproduce almost the same diagram. Coalitions are so powerful that all the system members know about them and respond to them. We all know at each point in time who's in and who's out, who is close, and who feels far apart.

Once we are in a coalition (or sometimes left out of one), we tend to feel justified in being "in the group" or "not in the group." If we are central we feel important. If we are isolated, we see ourselves as special or different from the others. One administrative assistant in an office of psychologists felt (and was) excluded by the other two assistants.

She began to talk to the psychologists in the office about the assistants, saying polite but negative things about them. Soon, she was going to lunch with several of the

psychologists. The two other assistants then began to give her more of the tedious billing work, saying, "If she has so much time on her hands, she can help out more."

Once coalitions form, they become self-justifying. In a family, as a parent and child form a close bond talking about the errant parent, for example, the bond becomes self-reinforcing. As we communicate with a coalition partner, we tend to justify the exclusion of others by stressing how similar we are to our coalition partners. We extend the in-group/out-group phenomenon. As the coalition strengthens, the members (1) stress their similarities to one another, (2) highlight their dissimilarities to those not in the coalition, and (3) accelerate these differences throughout time. Each coalition forms its own reward structure, perceptually driving the members farther and farther from the "others." Similarly, **system isolates** justify their exclusion. The teenage child or estranged parent isolated from the family and the lonely employee adopt the stance of, "I didn't want to be part of your group anyway." Isolates, after a certain point in time, resist joining and take pleasure in being "different." Whether the isolate is the loner who likes to work the night shift, the estranged teenager, or the only female employee, they provide for their own internal support system and decline offers to merge with the others. In the workplace, isolates leave at twice the rate and perform worse than those centrally located (Feeley, Moon, Koxey, and Slowe 2010).

Coalitions become toxic when they become so tight that the groups get locked into destructive conflict with one another. In the eyes of coalition participants, they are "friends" while the people in the other group are "forming cliques." The coalitions, because of their rigidity and heavy boundaries, begin causing problems for the system. The mother–daughter dyad excludes father so that he gives up on having influence in the family and acts out even more isolating behavior. The organization divides into voting blocks and power plays, with each group vying to outdo the other group on policy issues. Each expression of communication rigidity reinforces the boundaries already existing and produces more and more perceptual distortion—accelerating the negative behavior and inaccurate meta-perceptions of the other group. Rather than talking to others, each group spins off and takes action based on their guesses about the others' intentions—which they usually see as being negative.

Communication patterns both reflect and create the difficulties. People withhold information, make overt power plays, act in competitive ways, or avoid the others altogether. They stop solving problems. Communication exchanges become more toxic and damaging, with each discussion producing more distrust, hostility, and discord. In this sense, coalitions serve to scapegoat other individuals or coalitions. Inclusion and exclusion remain two of the most powerful human forces in social life.

A good way to "get a picture of a conflict" is to draw the coalesced, partly private, pairings. In one romantic situation, Jane has separated from her husband, Alan. She has met a man at work and is flirting with him and considering a relationship with him. Jane and Noah (the new man) talk about the problems Jane has with Alan. Alan, however, is isolated. He talks with Jane, but much of the truth of her emotional life is hidden from him. As Alan and Jane enter couples counseling, the counselor challenges Jane, in a private session, to stop telling Noah her complaints about Alan and, instead, to tell Alan. If she does that, she will soften the coalition that further estranges her from Alan. If she does not, she will almost certainly lose her relationship with Alan. Jane still has the choice not to return to Alan; keeping the coalition with Noah ensures that she will stay separated. Her closeness with Noah is self-reinforcing; her distance with Alan is self-reinforcing.

You can also see self-reinforcing patterns by looking at **heavy communicators**—those who are central to passing and receiving messages from network members. Heavy communicators typically (1) resist being moved out of that central role and (2) at the same time complain about the "overwork" involved in keeping the system happy. Students in a typical college classroom report that about 85% of the time mother is a heavy communicator in the family. In an organization, if someone is in a central role, he or she will complain about others' apathy and lack of involvement—while maintaining the central role at all cost.

Organizational and family isolates also engage in self-reinforcing patterns. If there is an isolate, one member who is "out" compared to the others, the isolate (1) complains about the decisions or personalities of central people yet (2) resists coming closer to the center of communication flow. Both the isolate and the central members cooperate to keep him or her out. In the community college we mentioned earlier, the academic vice president was accused by half of the faculty of being "weak."

Meanwhile, every time this group disagreed with one of his decisions, they went "over his head" to the president, undercutting him and reinforcing his "weakness." Similarly, in a family, a grandparent might be concerned that a son is not a "good parent" to the grandchildren, yet the grandparent criticizes the son as a parent, and undermines the son's confidence in being a parent.

Softening coalitions lessen their destructive impact. In a women's group formed to read fiction and discuss contemporary books, several members have begun attending erratically. Marcy and Tina talk with each other about how disgusted they are with the overly specialized and obscure fiction some of the natural leaders choose. Ruth and Jane talk with each other, and sometimes with Marcy and Tina, about how the group is becoming just a showcase for the most talkative leaders. By coalescing and isolating themselves, they lose influence in the group, lessening their interdependence on the group, and creating uncertainty in the other members. The solution? Each woman would say to the whole group (and those she usually doesn't talk to!) that her preferences aren't getting much regard, or each woman would make suggestions about what she'd like to see the group read. One could offer to lead a book discussion. More involvement in the group and less involvement in the coalitions will probably solve the immediate problem.

Application 7.4 Draw Two Systems

For two systems you know well (your family, your workplace, your living situation, any outside group such as church, sports, or reading group), draw the coalitions, isolates, and lines of communication for these two systems. Label the coalitions with a title, including the initials of each person in the coalition. Remember that some people may be in more than one coalition. Draw lines that indicate whether communication is interrupted or flows easily between the coalitions. Now, show your drawing to someone else, without telling him or her the specific content. Ask the other to (1) find similarities and differences in your role in the two systems, (2) specify the actions of all the players keeping the system going, and (3) list what communication problems are created by these patterns. Then, tell your partner how accurate or inaccurate he or she is.

Interaction Rules

You have undoubtedly experienced conflicts in which you wanted to say, "Here we go again. Same song, 14th verse." Sometimes no matter what content is being discussed, the outcome is the same. The same people collude together, the same people are left out, and the same indirect strategies are used (e.g., "forgetting," avoiding the issue, and putting off a decision until something must be done). As we have seen, repetitive, unsatisfactory conflicts often operate from a set of unstated but very powerful rules that limit genuine change.

"Rules" *describe* the *underlying communication structure* of the interaction. Underlying rules are like the structure of a language. Usually, no one person dictates the rules. Instead, the rules guide behavior in more subtle ways. They are "the way things are done" in a family, a business, a department, or a group of friends. A more precise definition of a rule is that it is "a followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts" (Shimanoff 1980, 57). In popular language, people learn the "rules of engagement."

Usually the rules of communication remain implicit. If you begin to describe the rules, however, you bring them to the surface, and then they can be changed. The following are some examples of rules that conform to the above definition. Keep in mind that people can sometimes tell you the underlying rules if you interview them, but the rules are never printed and posted. Those are different kinds of rules.

- Rules are prescriptions for behavior stated in the following form:

  "When in context X, Y must/must not occur."

  "When Father shows sadness or anger, Mother must soothe him."

  "When the program director decides to assign a case to a counselor, the counselor must accept the case or convince the program director to reassign it."

- Rules are stated in prescriptive, not evaluative, language. They focus on communication behavior:

  "When brother and sister fight, Dad must intervene to stop it," not "Dad feels responsible for stopping brother and sister's fights even though they can handle them without interference" (this is interpretive and evaluative).

  (In an abusive system) "When Andy bullies and hits his sister, Jen, Jen must handle it herself and not bother Mom with tattling."

Rules against knowing the rules abound. People must follow the rules but can't say what they are. For that reason, listing rules for interaction may not be easy. But you can elicit **system rules** from conflict parties by following these steps:

1. List explicit and implicit rules that prescribe your own and others' behavior in conflicts.
2. If you have trouble thinking of rules for your system, think of times when the rule was broken. How did you know the rule was broken? How was the violation communicated? Write about the prescription that became obvious upon breaking the rule.
3. Make sure you generate rules for both behavior that must and behavior that must not be performed.

4. Go back over your list. Make each rule simple and prescriptive. Write rules even for "obvious" communication patterns. They may prove to be important possibilities for change.
   Example:
   When new staff members attend the staff meeting, they must not express opinions unless they have a sponsor who is an older staff member.
5. Code each rule as to the following:
   a. Whose rule is it?
   b. What keeps the rule going?
   c. Who enforces the rule?
   d. Who breaks the rule?
   e. What function does the rule serve?
6. Discuss how the rules help or harm the productive management of conflict. Make decisions for change.
   Example:
   Old rule—When Dad is angry at younger brother, older brother must protect younger brother from Dad's disapproval.
   Result—Older brother and Dad engage in conflict often, reducing effect of the protection (a toxic triangle).
   New rule—When Dad and younger brother get into a conflict, they must talk about their conflicts without older brother (a new affiliation).

Application 7.5 Discover Your Rules of Interaction

Choose any of the above steps for your practice. Take 10 minutes or so, and see if you can follow the suggestions. Focus on one particular relationship. Think about and write some of the rules that define that relationship. Check with others to see if you understand the way rules are written.

Microevents

Microevents are "repetitive loops of observable interpersonal behaviors . . . with a redundant outcome" (Metcoff and Whitaker 1982, 253). Although similar to rules, microevents are descriptive, not prescriptive, of behavior. They are clusters of behaviors organized into structurally repetitive episodes. In simpler, nontechnical terms, microevents are those small pictures that give a lot of clues about the bigger picture. An outsider could speculate about ongoing relationships based on what she or he sees in a 5- or 10-minute interaction. As you read in Chapter 2, some couples researchers can predict who will divorce based on very brief interactions.

Not every short interaction is a microevent. *Microevents are interactions that give information about other interactions.* For instance, your new boyfriend/girlfriend might visit your parents' home with you. After one dinner, the new partner might ask you, "Does your dad always add to whatever you say, and try to kind of improve it? It seems like he's always teaching you. And your mom seems like she's the one who asks questions. Is that the way it usually is?"

Perhaps the clearest keys to the nature of an underlying structure are the "substitutable communication events that reveal the structure" (Metcoff and Whitaker 1982, 258). Metcoff and Whitaker provide the following example of such repeatability:

Every time the husband { scratched his ear / rubbed his nose / tapped his right foot } during

an argument with his wife, one of the children

would { ask to go to the bathroom / slap a sibling / begin to cry } so that the

husband-wife dispute was never resolved. (258–259)

The implicit, unstated structure underlying these repetitive conflicts can be summarized as follows: "When the husband and wife initiate a conflict, one of the children makes a move to gain their attention, and the husband-wife conflict is not resolved" (259). Each system will display a different structure underlying the observable conflict. The microevent serves to define the conflict because it "embodies themes of stability and change within the family system" (263).

Once the underlying structure is decoded, one can begin to predict where, when, or how conflict will erupt. Emily and Gordon are a married couple in their 60s whose children are all grown and living elsewhere. Before each vacation, Gordon decides where they should go, then tries to persuade Emily of the wisdom of his choice. Emily won't agree to go, but neither will she say no. Then, the night before the trip, Gordon stays up most of the night packing, and the next day, Emily reluctantly goes with him. Their repetitive conflicts are structured in the following manner:

1. He always initiates.
2. She is always convinced to go (reluctantly).
3. There is no discussion of their relationship; all issues are handled through content.
4. Neither receives positive results from their respective stances.
5. Neither one can solve or escape the conflict.

Their next conflict, over whether, when, and where to go for Christmas, will be based on a similar structure. One can begin decoding the structure underlying a microevent by focusing on these questions:

Application 7.6 Understanding Your Microevent

1. Who initiates and in what way?
2. Who responds and in what way?
3. Who else is present but is not identified as a party to the conflict?

(continued)

Application 7.6 Understanding Your Microevent

4. Does anyone "speak for" someone else? If so, does this keep the participants embroiled in the conflict?
5. If there were no conflict, what would be missing?
   a. Who would not be connecting with whom?
   b. How would the parties structure their time?
   c. Would conflicts continue with new parties entering into the fray?
6. Is the conflict serving to fill emotional space so other parties cannot fight?

The communication patterns created in a conflict often cycle back and imprison the players. For example, Beverly went through a divorce 2 months ago; now her son Randy is having difficulty at school. At least twice a week, Beverly and Randy struggle over his poor work in the fifth grade. He has been labeled a "troublemaker" at school and has been sent home from school three times in the last month. This is embarrassing for Beverly; she also gets very angry at Randy for his "stupid behavior." The repetitive microevent that Beverly and Randy enact has the following features:

1. Beverly initiates each conflict by being distressed about Randy's school performance or disruptive behavior at school.
2. Randy responds by being sullen, pretending he is deaf and can't hear requests, and withdrawing.
3. The unemployed older brother is present in the house but serves as a bystander.
4. Randy and Beverly are both isolated parties—neither has anyone to come to his or her aid during the conflict.
5. Aside from the conflict, mother and son have few common interests. Beverly can't think of things that might be interesting for the two of them to do together. This recurring conflict both illustrates and crystallizes the family structure.

The following are some ways you can discover and describe microevents:

1. Act as a qualitative researcher who uses observation and interviewing to determine patterns.
2. Obtain a professional third party (consultant, mediator, or therapist) description of common conflicts.
3. Keep a journal of conflict episodes that seem repetitive—those that have a "here we go again" theme.
4. Ask newcomers to a system, such as new employees, new family members, or new committee members, to describe what they have experienced so far.

Comprehensive Guides

You can systematically analyze your conflicts by using these two comprehensive assessment guides. This will be helpful if your instructor asks you to write a comprehensive conflict analysis. You will also find the guides helpful if you work or volunteer as a third party intervention agent. Third party conflict resolution will be presented in the next two chapters. Analysis must precede intervention.

Conflict Assessment Guide

The **Conflict Assessment Guide** will help you map all of the central elements of your conflict.

I. Nature of the Conflict

- **A.** What are the "triggering events" that brought this conflict into mutual awareness?
- **B.** What is the historical context of this conflict in terms of (1) the ongoing relationship between the parties and (2) other, external events within which this conflict is embedded?
- **C.** Do the parties have assumptions about conflict that are discernable by their choices of conflict metaphors, patterns of behavior, or clear expressions of their attitudes about conflict?
- **D.** Conflict elements:
  1. How is the struggle expressed by each party?
  2. What are the perceived incompatible goals?
  3. What are the perceived scarce resources?
  4. In what ways are the parties interdependent? How are they interfering with one another? How are they cooperating to keep the conflict in motion?
- **E.** Has the conflict vacillated between productive and destructive phases? If so, which elements were transformed during the productive cycles? Which elements might be transformed by creative solutions to the conflict?

II. Orientation to the Conflict

- **A.** What attitudes toward conflict do participants seem to hold?
- **B.** Do they perceive conflict as positive, negative, or neutral? How can you tell?
- **C.** What metaphoric images do conflict participants use? What metaphors might you use to describe the conflict?
- **D.** What is the cultural background of the participants? What is the cultural context in which the conflict takes place?
- **E.** How might gender roles, limitations, and expectations be operating in this conflict?

III. Interests and Goals

- **A.** How do the parties clarify their goals? Do they phrase them in individualistic or systemic terms?
- **B.** What does each party think the other's goals are? Are they similar or dissimilar to the perceptions of self-goals?
- **C.** How have the goals been altered from the beginning of the conflict to the present? In what ways are the prospective, transactive, and retrospective goals similar or dissimilar?

D. What are the topic, relational, identity, and process goals?
E. How do the TRIP goals overlap with one another?
F. Which goals seem to be primary at different stages of the dispute?
G. Are the conflict parties "specializing" in one type or the other?
H. Are the identity and relational issues the "drivers" of this dispute?
I. Are any of the goals emerging in different forms?
J. How do the goals shift during the prospective, transactive, and retrospective phases?

IV. Power

A. What attitudes about their own and the other's power does each party have? Do they talk openly about power, or is it not discussed?
B. What do the parties see as their own and the other's dependencies on one another? As an external observer, can you classify some dependencies that they do not list?
C. What power currencies do the parties see themselves and the other possessing?
D. From an external perspective, what power currencies of which the participants are not aware seem to be operating?
E. In what ways do the parties disagree on the balance of power between them? Do they underestimate their own or the other's influence?
F. What impact does each party's assessment of power have on subsequent choices in the conflict?
G. What evidence of destructive "power balancing" occurs?
H. In what ways do observers of the conflict agree and disagree with the parties' assessments of their power?
I. What are some unused sources of power that are present?

V. Styles

A. What individual styles did each party use? Use the five-style, dual-concern description of styles.
B. How did the individual styles change during the course of the conflict?
C. How did the parties perceive the other's style?
D. In what way did a party's style reinforce the choices the other party made as the conflict progressed?
E. Were the style choices primarily symmetrical or complementary?
F. From an external perspective, what were the advantages and disadvantages of each style within this particular conflict?
G. Can the overall system be characterized as having a predominant style? What do the participants say about the relationship as a whole?
H. Do the participants appear to strategize about their conflict choices or remain spontaneous?
I. How does each party view the other's strategizing?
J. What are the tactical options used by both parties?
K. Do the tactical options classify primarily into avoidance, dominating, or collaboration?
L. How are the participants' tactics mutually impacting on the others' choices?

VI. Conflict and Emotions

- **A.** In your situation, what approaches to change have you utilized or are you contemplating? How effective are these approaches?
- **B.** Choose several emotions that the parties have expressed in this conflict. What are the functions of these emotions? How are they mitigated or moderated? Use the circumplex model to describe the emotions.
- **C.** What can you learn about emotions in this particular conflict? Do the feelings cluster around "needs being met" or "needs not being met"?
- **D.** What emotions are seldom expressed? What is the result?
- **E.** Discuss how parties might use positive emotions to help in this particular conflict.
- **F.** In this conflict, has anyone strayed out of the "zone of effectiveness"? How? What have you or might you do about this?
- **G.** How is mindfulness being used/not used in this conflict?

VII. Analyzing Interactions and Overall Patterns

- **A.** What system dynamics characterize this conflict?
- **B.** What rules of repetitive patterns characterize this conflict?
- **C.** What triangles, coalition, and microevents best characterize the conflict?
- **D.** How destructive is the tone of this conflict?

VIII. Attempted Solutions

- **A.** What options have been explored for managing the conflict?
- **B.** Have attempted solutions become part of the problem?
- **C.** Have third parties been brought into the conflict? If so, what roles did they play and what was the impact of their involvement?
- **D.** Is this conflict a repetitive one, with attempted solutions providing temporary change but with the overall pattern remaining unchanged? If so, what is that overall pattern?
- **E.** Can you identify categories of solutions that have not been tried?

IX. Negotiation

- **A.** Are the parties able to negotiate with one another? Why or why not?
- **B.** What is done to equalize power?
- **C.** Do the parties use primarily dominating tactics, collaborative tactics, or some combination?
- **D.** Were the parties able to reach agreements that are durable?

X. Forgiveness and Reconciliation

- **A.** In this conflict, are parties working toward forgiveness or reconciliation? Clearly state which in terms of the chapter's information on the difference between the two.
- **B.** In this conflict, what power imbalances should be addressed? How are parties doing/not doing that?
- **C.** For you, is forgiveness a decision or a process? Use information in the chapter to discuss your position.
- **D.** In what way is your situation calling for intrapersonal or interpersonal forgiveness, or both?

E. Discuss the problems of apology in this conflict.
F. What lessons from other cultures might inform your study of your own conflict?

You can use the *Conflict Assessment Guide* for your own conflicts and also use it when asking others about their conflicts. One other overall approach is the **Difficult Conversations Guide.** This second assessment guide brings forth the narratives (stories) that conflict parties tell themselves and others. It is especially useful for focusing on the emotional component.

Difficult Conversations Guide

Colleagues associated with the Harvard Negotiation Project (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999) wrote an excellent book, *Difficult Conversations,* that explores what they call *the three conversations.* These "conversations" help clarify the structure of a conflict by focusing on the stories people tell themselves and others, the difference between intention and impact, and the way one's identity needs to be restored after an important conflict. The authors of the book make it very clear that you should ask yourself important questions before undertaking a difficult conversation with another person. You prepare for the conversation by assessing the following "stories." If you decide to use this approach for an analysis paper, read *Difficult Conversations* as an additional resource to this text.

I. What Happened? What Is My Story?
A. What were my intentions?
B. What do I think the other's intentions were?
C. What did I contribute to the problem? (Specifically describe your behavior as well as your feelings and attributions.)

II. What Happened? What Is the Other's Story?
A. What was the impact on me?
B. What impact did I have on the other?
C. What did the other person contribute to the problem?

III. The Feelings Conversation: My Story
A. What feelings underlie my attributions and judgments (e.g., angry, frustrated, disappointed, hurt, guilty, embarrassed, ashamed, grateful, sad)?
B. What do I need or want in order to feel differently in the future?

IV. The Feelings Conversations: The Other's Story
A. What feelings underlie the other's attributions and judgments about me?
B. What information can I get or do I have about this question?
C. What does the other person need to feel differently in the future?

V. The Identity Conversation
A. How has what happened affected my identity?
B. How has what happened affected my sense of influence over the situation?
C. What do I need to do to restore my sense of identity?
D. How has what happened affected the other's identity?
E. How has what happened affected the other's sense of influence over the situation?
F. What does the other need to restore his/her sense of identity?

Summary

Conflicts are often perplexing to all participants. Usually, however, an interpersonal conflict is operating as a system of relations, complete with repetitive behavior, rules, and other identifiable dynamics. Systems theory helps make sense of confusing conflicts. Many possible ways to analyze conflict patterns are discussed in this chapter. In addition, several schemas are presented to help you describe a system. Charting triangles and drawing coalitions provide graphic, visual information about system dynamics. One also can focus on system rules—the prescriptions for what one ought to do in a given situation. Microevents are observable, recurring patterns of behavior that can be analyzed for underlying conflict structure. Finally, the *Conflict Assessment Guide* and the *Difficult Conversations Guide* are two overall assessment tools to uncover the dynamics of specific conflicts.

Key Terms

system dynamics (macro level) 230
micro level 230
self-fulfilling prophecies 230
macro-level analysis 231
wholeness 231
organization 231
patterning 231
circular causality 232
descriptive language 232
morphogenesis 233
conflict triangle 239
toxic triangle 241
isolate 242
coalition 244
system isolates 246
heavy communicator 247
system rules 248
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Review Questions

1. Why would you want to map a conflict?
2. Describe systems theory.
3. What are the principles of system theory?
4. What are the advantages of identifying conflict patterns?
5. What are five types of system patterns that occur in marriages?
6. What are the four stages of conflict?
7. Define coalitions, giving an example from your personal life and school.
8. Why do people form coalitions?
9. How can you use a coalition diagram to predict future conflicts?
10. Describe the roles of the heavy communicator and the isolate.
11. What are the characteristics of a healthy system?
12. Define system rules, including personal examples.
13. What are the questions to ask about system rules?
14. Define microevents and give a specific example of one from your life.

Chapter 8

Interpersonal Negotiation

Negotiation in Everyday Life

You may not think of yourself as a "negotiator." The word **negotiation** may bring to mind labor and management representatives negotiating a work contract, or diplomats meeting with great formality to resolve national disputes.

Negotiation simply means *to settle a dispute by discussion and mutual agreement.* Negotiation covers two approaches: (l) "All efforts by individual disputants to resolve conflicts for themselves, without any third-party interventions" (Bendersky 2003, 645), and (2) the process by which a third party assists primary parties in the conflict to settle their disputes. What is new is that in negotiation, the focus shifts to argument, persuasion, and specific conflict strategies involving bargaining. Negotiation provides a process for conflict resolution when the topic, relationship, identity, and process issues rise in importance in a conflict. The outcome of negotiation can be (a) problem resolution, (b) partial resolution, or (b) impasse. Additionally, an outcome of negotiation can be an improved relationship as long as the decisions reached are satisfactory.

Survey reports show that managing conflict on one's own is preferable to most parties than asking for third-party assistance (Jameson et al. 2009). Asking for or being required to seek third-party help may stigmatize the parties. One engineer we worked with said coming to a communication coach's office (and this was only for an interview!) felt like "being called to the principal's office." People report greater satisfaction with the decision outcomes when they negotiate on their own, but less emotional resolution. "Surface settlements often lead to silence, anger, and sullen acceptance" (Jameson et al. 2009). This outcome suggests that negotiation should also deal with emotional realities for permanent change (transformation) to occur. Topic-only negotiations may be short-term, satisfactory solutions for much more complex issues that will arise later. For this reason, negotiation is no different than any other form of conflict resolution we have presented in this book. *All the layers of conflict issues (TRIP concerns) matter,* no matter what the form of conflict resolution is that is used. Negotiation is just as embedded in emotional realities as any other form—but emotion may be excluded from the table. Excluding feelings seldom works for long.

Because conflicts arise in every facet of life, negotiation can be employed far beyond purchasing a car or settling the terms of a new job. Negotiation fundamentally rests on interpersonal skills (Lewicki and Tomlinson 2014). Negotiation can be either competitive ("I want my goals met and I don't care about yours") or integrative ("We have to reach a mutually satisfying conclusion"). Many negotiations are neither formally

structured, repeated, nor contain financial or material outcomes. Instead, they take an informal approach and range back and forth among negotiation, ordinary problem solving, attempts at listening, identifying core concerns, and every other conflict skill you have learned so far.

Although some writers distinguish between bargaining and negotiation most people treat them as virtually synonymous terms. For the remainder of this chapter, the two terms will be used equally to represent the same activity. Negotiation presumes the following:

- Participants engage in the conflict rather than avoiding.
- Parties resist using domination, or power-over tactics (if they are using integrative bargaining).
- Parties use persuasive communication tactics in a variety of styles.
- Parties have reached an active, problem-solving phase in which specific proposals are traded.

In the active negotiation process, all the parties depend on their assessment of the power and the structure of the situation to regulate their own behavior, to maximize their own gains, and search for acceptable proposals so resolution can be achieved. Parties must be able to provide resources and to influence goal achievement, and they must be willing to do so through cooperation (Donohue and Kolt 1992). No purpose is served by negotiating with someone who has nothing to offer you. Parties have to be motivated to struggle together to achieve common and individual goals. Parties in conflict agree tacitly to a framework of ground rules to manage conflict (Putnam 2010).

We negotiate for *specific agreements.* Negotiation occurs every day in both private and public contexts. Even young children negotiate (Joshi 2008; Tuval-Mashiach and Shulman 2006). The following situations call on your everyday negotiating skills: Notice the overlapping nature of TRIP concerns in each of the situations. As you read the following examples, fill in the TRIP concerns for each:

- Your friend wants to have you over for dinner at 8:00 p.m., and you want to come earlier. (This may be a struggle over power relationships and the process of how the decision is made, in addition to "when the dinner is going to happen.")
- You have a computer problem and want to persuade your professor to give you more time for completion of a paper. (You are negotiating for a topic agreement, and are attempting to equalize power relationships with your professor. Additionally, you may feel identity concerns—"I am not a person who lies or puts off my work.")
- Your elderly mother, who has lived alone for decades, has fallen and broken her hip; you and your siblings need to talk about possible assisted living care. Everyone has a different opinion. The topic outcome matters, but so do all the other concerns such as *how* the family makes the decision process, who has more power (*relationship*) and *identity* (whether the sibling closest to mom is seen as having done a good job caring for her). In addition, mom's concerns interact with the siblings' concerns.

Application 8.1 Analyzing TRIP Concerns

For the following, analyze the TRIP concerns:

- Your father has agreed to pay for 4 years of college for you, but you now need one extra semester beyond 4 years to complete school.
- You and your roommate, who was your best friend, bought many household items together. Recently, because you now are dating her ex-boyfriend, you have had a serious falling out with each other. You agree to stop rooming together but now have to decide who gets what items in the apartment.
- You are in charge of scheduling co-workers. A disagreement arises over who has to take over holiday and late-night shifts.
- You are an hourly employee. Your supervisor says, "I don't care what hours you guys work just so the store is covered, so the four of you decide what hours you want to work." The co-workers have trouble agreeing.
- You buy carpet from a store and clearly tell the salesperson that you want the old carpet saved so that you can give it to your friend. You come home at the end of the day, and the new carpet looks nice, but the old carpet is gone. A quick phone call reveals that it was taken to the landfill and cannot be retrieved.
- Your daughter, age 15, wants to go on an overnight trip with friends. You want her to be able to go, but she's been slacking off on household agreements. She's in an independent phase. How would you negotiate with her?

Application 8.2 Role-Play and Analysis

With your small group, choose several of the above situations to enact in a role-play. As observers, your task is to *draw the overlapping goals* as the role-play continues, then make suggestions for turning points that would help the negotiators not only reach agreement, but reach an emotionally satisfying agreement. Discuss your separate observations with each other. Ask what the people taking the parts in the role-play were attempting, and how they think they succeeded.

In both our personal and work lives, we negotiate to make decisions that are acceptable to everyone concerned. One survey found that human services administrators spend 26% of their time negotiating (Files 1981). Further, with the advent of "self-directed work teams," the ability to negotiate both within the team and from the team to the wider organization takes on added importance. Think of negotiation as an interactive, intense conversation, which includes all the accompanying feelings that any conflict resolution presents. Negotiation is no more "objective" than any other approach. The TRIP concerns are always present; personal history plays a role; gender matters; power matters; and the history of the friendship, group, marriage, or work team matters.

Application 8.3 Negotiation Opportunities

List as many situations as you can think of that involve negotiation possibilities:

- Situations when you could have negotiated, but did not.
- Situations when you did not negotiate well.
- Situations when you were overpowered and could not negotiate at all.
- Situations when you used power as "power over" rather than taking time to negotiate.
- Situations when you avoided negotiating and later regretted your avoiding strategy.
- Situations you are involved in right now that might benefit from negotiating.

Negotiation and Culture

In Western cultures, we receive contradictory messages about negotiation. On the one hand, you might be encouraged by your friends to "get a good deal," but on the other, you are expected to walk into commercial establishments and pay the listed prices. In intimate relationships, often people don't know how to negotiate with love and respect. Marriage vows should contain the phrase, "to love, honor, and negotiate"! Typical organizations in the United States are currently working to change their organizational culture to support negotiation among teams instead of top-down decision making as the preferred style. Many organizations talk about the value of teams but allow conflicts to evolve into litigation or near litigation and only then begin to manage conflict (Lipsky and Seeber 2006). Managers send confusing messages about who is supposed to make the decisions; on the one hand they communicate "I'm in charge," on the other they indicate they want their teams to make decisions. In the decision-making vacuum, sometimes people suffer in silence until they are prepared for a formal grievance. An organization culture supportive of negotiation would eliminate most of these escalatory moves. Employees and private citizens escalate toward litigation when the culture does not present meaningful negotiation opportunities. Examine the following situations and decide in which ones you would go along with others, decide by yourself, and in which ones you would negotiate:

Negotiable?

- The price of a new house
- The part(s) of the apartment/house/dorm room you and your roommates will use
- The price of a used or new car
- The price of an item on sale at a chain store (CD, book, portable radio, etc.)
- The price of pens and paper at the college bookstore
- The salary offered at McDonald's or Burger King
- The amount of time you work at your job
- The final paper assignment in your class
- The final grade you receive in your conflict class
- The price of a used microwave at a garage sale

- The person(s) who will care for your aging parents
- Where you and your fiancé spend your holidays
- Whether you can move home and work while temporarily dropping out of school
- What will be the guidelines for "house rules" while four friends share a house during college

As you can determine, some items are negotiable and others are not. How do we know? Each culture designates areas that are off limits to negotiation and areas in which negotiation is acceptable. If you have traveled in different countries, you may have experienced cultural differences relating to negotiating over prices. Several studies show that Latino negotiators sometimes are at a disadvantage negotiating with North American negotiators. Latino norms urge negotiators to be most concerned about fairness for the other party. A negotiation is seen as a failure if one party wins and the other loses, a value that may not be shared by North American negotiators. This pattern of concern for others fits collectivist culture expectations, while "hard bargaining" is more likely to fit Anglo male bargainers. Latino male disputants often offered to split the difference, fifty–fifty, right from the beginning. Anglo male negotiators were likely to see this as a weak start to bargaining, and took advantage of this perceived weakness. Thus, Latino negotiators ended up with less than 50% except when they bargained with other Latino men (Rack 2000).

The lines of difference separating those in conflict can run just as deep within countries. In many Native American cultures, the differences between traditional Native people and "business people" are just as great as the differences between Native and non-Native cultures (Goldberg 2009).

Intercultural theorists point out other differences important to negotiators. One crucial concern is the approach to time and order. In monochromic cultures, approaches to time are linear and orderly. Negotiators focus on one item at a time. Western European–influenced cultures tend toward monochromic views of time, with the exception of some differences, such as in some Native American cultures. Polychronic orientations involve simultaneous discussions of many items, with the involvement of many people. Time spent on negotiation is more elastic; specific schedules and agendas tend not to matter. This orientation occurs in Mediterranean and Latin cultures, as well as some Asian and African cultures (see LeBaron, 2014, for further descriptions of cultural differences).

Negotiation itself is viewed differently in different cultures. For instance, one would not negotiate over price in Switzerland, but would in Greece and Turkey (but not in restaurants). Many cultures see North Americans as rude and aggressive in our insistence on trying to get what we want. Others see North Americans as naïve for not bargaining. What do you know from experience about bargaining in various cultures? What is the approved procedure for bargaining in commercial transactions in various cultures?

We differ considerably from one another in our comfort with negotiating and our willingness to negotiate in different situations. For some of us negotiation in private relationships is fine, whereas for others of us it is off limits or very uncomfortable. Similarly, many people take along a friend to negotiate for them when they buy a large item like a car because they are not comfortable "haggling over price." How do you respond to various negotiation situations? How does your negotiation preference relate to your conflict style (see Chapter 5)?

Constructive Argumentation: Test Ideas, Not People

Effective negotiation depends on skilled argumentation. Rhetorical traditions support contemporary negotiation theory and practice. Negotiation does not use formal, debate-style argumentation, but the same principles of adapting the argument to the situation apply in a negotiation, as in a speech. The "rules of evidence" are different, because negotiation, like all conflict resolution, uses personal, emotional, and factual evidence to make an argument. What comes to your mind when someone says, "Oh, he is just arguing again?" For many people argument implies both disagreeing on content and using a disagreeable tone. The following excerpt from a student paper exemplifies this common stance:

> When I get into an argument with a person over something I stand for, then I really like to get involved and have a good battle. If my competitor has a good stand on his issues, then I like to "rip" at him until he breaks or, if things go wrong, I break. The excitement of confrontation when I'm battling it out with another person has a tremendous thrill for me if I come out as the victor. I love it when we are at each other's throats.

Clearly this student prefers a competitive stance!

Negotiation relies on persuasion, rather than threats and coercion. Discussion during negotiation depends on all parties remaining open to new information. They must persuade and be open to persuasion, while searching for accurate information to discuss (Ledgerwood, Callahan, and Chaiken 2014). In the persuasive process, topic disagreements do not have to take over the other TRIP elements. You can disagree on content and be respectful and courteous—maintaining the relationship component of conflict. You can offer forceful opinions about an issue, yet protect the face/identity of the other people involved. In negotiation situations the following phrases allow participants to disagree on content without being "disagreeable":

- I don't agree with your position about the election.
- At our last group meeting, you and Natalie agreed to do the research on the town's decision to buy the water company. We all have plans to go to the council meeting. Now you are saying you want to do the interviews, which Troy and Samantha have begun. Since we are duplicating efforts, we're going to have to negotiate who does what. (The speaker identifies the problem and does not attack the people who changed their focus.)
- I'm pretty firm about not agreeing with you, but tell me more about how you came to this idea.
- We still disagree about the role of government in our private lives, but let's listen to one another one at a time.
- John, that sure isn't my memory about what I agreed to about the deposit.
- We agreed to negotiate on vacation benefits. Our benefits package was circulated without any input from the paralegal staff. As their supervisor, I'm asking you as the human resources director to intervene with the managers and set up a meeting so we can negotiate, as they said they would. (This is both a topic and a process disagreement.)

As you can see from these examples, one doesn't have to destroy the relational or identity dimensions in an argument in order to advance a strong topic argument. In fact, the whole tradition of debate (such as college debates and debates during campaign years) rests on agreeing on process rules to protect identity, procedural, and relationship dimensions so that the arguments can focus on the topic (even though debaters routinely sneak in personal attacks, unfortunately). In well-done argumentation you state what you are claiming and present evidence for your claim. Arguers:

(1) use the principles of argumentation with compassion
(2) reaffirm your opponent's sense of competence
(3) allow opponents to finish what they are saying
(4) emphasize equality
(5) emphasize shared attitudes
(6) show opponents you are interested in their views
(7) use a somewhat subdued, calm delivery
(8) control the pace of the argument
(9) allow your opponent to save face (Infante 1988).

This description of argumentation corresponds remarkably well to integrative interpersonal negotiation.

You can observe violations of constructive arguing daily. Television shows make money showing people attacking each other, glorifying nonconstructive argumentation. In contrast to this, in professional debate circles, it is considered a logical fallacy to attack the other debater personally. It is called *argumentum ad hominem,* which means "argument against the man." If you are a professional advocate in a courtroom, there are strict rules about not attacking the other side personally, and the rules are interpreted and enforced by the judge—ensuring that argument will occur on the topic level. The judge won't let you, for example, make the following statement: "The other attorney is just a jerk, and I can't believe the defendant is wasting his money employing him." *Ad hominem* arguments don't work well in negotiation, either. In informal negotiation, you might commit this fallacy when you call the other person a name or label them negatively.

Interpersonal argument, done properly, may in fact be the heart and soul of modern-day interpersonal problem solving and conflict management. Recent research on negotiation emphasizes communication and psychology. This is a significant departure from earlier, rationally based approaches (Bazerman, Curhan, and Moore 2000; Malhotra and Bazerman 2007; Thompson 2001). Researchers are converging on the idea, in all contexts of conflict resolution from interpersonal to international, that the "facts only" approach, resting on the assumption that the other parties will make decisions in a rational way, based on their perceived best interests, is not the way people really make decisions. Effective negotiators do not destroy relationships with others, personally attack them, destroy their face, or violate standards of procedure. When one person says something sarcastic such as, "I wouldn't expect you to understand. You're sitting on a trust fund and couldn't be expected to know the value of money to ordinary people," the relationship and identity levels become the field of argument, with destructive effects. Research about face threat and negotiation shows that threatening face of the other derails the negotiations (White,

Tynan, Galinsky, and Thompson 2004). Furthermore, we respond differently in negotiating (1) a public issue or (2) a personal issue in a relationship. When arguing about public issues, parties tend to enjoy it more and not be so ego-involved as when arguing about their personal relationship (Johnson 2002).

In constructive conflicts, arguments focus on levels of discourse that will move the conflict toward resolution. When argument focuses on relationship or identity issues, the conflict may generate much heat but little light. As in classical debate, the honorable approach is to engage on those issues that are real and will help the dialogue. Anything else blocks progress. In ancient Rome, Quintilian, one of the earliest rhetoricians, wrote of the characteristics of an effective orator: intelligence, character, and goodwill. These attributes describe the effective negotiator as well.

Application 8.4 Watching an Argument

Watch a televised argument, live exchange, or debate. (Try your city council, tribal council, state legislature, or national election.)

- What types of argumentation do the opponents use?
- Do the arguers give evidence for their claims?
- Do the arguers show support for relationship, identity, and procedural issues while vigorously disagreeing on topics?
- If there is a moderator, does she or he work to keep the disputants in the "constructive" zone or allow them to get away with attacking one another personally?
- If these two were to actually sit down together and negotiate, what might they do to ensure equal negotiation strength and a productive process?

Approaches to Negotiation

Most views of negotiation outside of the academic area present a limited perspective. Since negotiation is such a pervasive conflict management process, it is little wonder that scores of books have been written about it. Unfortunately, some of the popular advice reinforces a **win/lose perspective.** Many popular authors see bargaining as a "game of managing impressions and manipulating information. Bargaining is a struggle for advantage, for with the advantage come beneficial outcomes" (Walker 1988, 219). Amateur negotiators often adopt a win/lose view of negotiation (Bazerman and Neale 1983).

Another limited view of the negotiation process is to conceptualize it as a *series of compromises.* From this perspective, negotiation is simply a trade-off in which each gives up something to reach a middle ground; the development of creative options is ignored. This is more accurately called *negotiated compromise* (virtually all negotiation involves compromise). One final limitation of most literature on negotiation is that it centers on *(1) formal negotiations, between (2) negotiating representatives, in which (3) the beginnings and endings of the negotiations are clearly delineated.* We will discuss some aspects of such negotiations; however, most of us will never be professional negotiators. Therefore, this chapter emphasizes everyday situations.

Competitive Negotiation

Assumptions

Competitive, or *distributive,* **negotiations** rest on the assumption that what one person wins, the other person loses. Typically, *the distributive bargainer* is not concerned about a future relationship with the other party and is trying to maximize gain and minimize loss. Unfortunately, some people in ongoing relationships act as if they do not have this relationship, using distributive assumptions. The basic assumptions of distributive, or competitive, negotiation are as follows:

- The negotiating world is controlled by egocentric self-interest.
- The underlying motivation is competitive/antagonistic.
- Limited resources prevail.
- One can make independent choices: Tomorrow's decision remains unaffected by today's decision.
- The resource distribution system is distributive in nature (either/or).
- The goal is to win as much as you can. (Murray 1986)

For example, you and your sister both want to use your dad's car for an overnight trip. Competitive negotiators assume that the conflict is win/lose (or "zero-sum" in game theory terms). The rewards in such a conflict are seen as a "fixed pie" to be distributed between the parties. Therefore, if you get to use the car, your sister is out of luck. No one tries joint problem solving, such as dropping your sister off at her destination. In competitive negotiations, each party usually maintains a *resistance point* or a *bargaining range* beyond which he or she will not go (Popple 1984). For example, from a competitive approach, the relevant information for buying a house is this:

Buyer's range: $265,000–$390,000

Seller's range: $375,000–$400,000

Each person's range determines his or her offers and counteroffers. The seller lists the house for $400,000. The buyer makes a first offer of $365,000. After negotiations, through a Realtor the buyer offers $378,000. The seller says that she will not part with the house for less than $390,000. But, in her heart of hearts, she knows that she can buy a new place she wants with $376,500. Buyer and seller slowly move toward their "settlement range" (between $376,500 and $378,000). In this example, the settlement range is already apparent, based on the list price and the first offer, so when the buyer says, "$378,000 is my final offer," the seller takes the offer.

Organizations often set up or inherit a *conflict management system that suppresses the difficult, but common, reality of everyday organizational conflict.* Managers hope team leaders and members will work well together, but systems for informal problem solving and negotiation are seldom in place. Many managers and CEOs are remarkably conflict avoidant. They will put up with ongoing undercutting, disrespect, marginalizing of certain people, coalition formation, and avoidance of problems for a long time. Not every leader is like this, of course, but many are. Their gifts may be in their area of expertise, not in interpersonal communication. Conflict management structures sometimes are confined to

formal grievance procedures, union involvement, or firing the "problem person." Often, it is not possible or desirable to fire someone, so the problems simmer along until they blow up. While conflicts are layered and complex, conflict management systems are too often inadequate (Aula and Siira 2010).

This is a good time for the senior author of this text to make a *personal suggestion.* Take every course you can on conflict management, in whatever department. When you graduate, you might want to take the 40-hour mediation trainings offered around the country. Other continuing education courses are often offered in conflict resolution. You might seek an internship in a location that will give you experience in informal conflict management. You could volunteer with organizations that can use your conflict skills. Keep reading about and practicing your conflict skills. When you are looking for jobs or asking for a promotion, you can spotlight your special skills in conflict management. Write the senior author to check in about how you are continuing your work. I'd love to hear from you!

In the following case, a couple must negotiate an important life decision. See how well or poorly they do:

Application 8.5 Mistaken Assumptions

Randy and Jennifer have been married for 6 years. They have moved back to the city where they met and went to college so Randy could finish his degree in resource management. They now have two children, ages 4 and 2. Jennifer has a job she loves at the university, in her former social work department, where she organizes internships for undergraduate students. She feels fortunate to have landed this job without an advanced degree; her experience gained her the position. After a miserable time of working for one of his professors doing field research, Randy decided he had no future in the academic research world. His interests lay in working with different constituent groups to manage natural resources. He has a strong communication background to go along with his resource management degree. When a planning and consulting firm offered him a job 4 hours away, Jennifer and Randy decided he should take it. They have 6 months to decide whether to move to Denver from Laramie. After several months of 4-day weeks, then driving back to Laramie for the weekend, Randy told Jennifer he really wanted the family to move to Denver so they could be together. Here's how their first negotiation sounded:

Randy: Jen, I miss you and the kids, and I hate being a weekend dad. It only makes sense for us all to move to Denver. I'm making enough money now that you can go back to school after a year or so. I think we should put the house on the market.

Jennifer: I won't even consider it. I have a wonderful job; the kids have their friends. I know I said I'd consider moving, but I can't bear the idea of leaving this place we love. So, my answer is "no."

Randy: I make enough money now that your continuing in your job and our paying travel costs and for my apartment is just stupid. We need to consolidate our resources in Denver. You'll love it when you get used to it. We can live in a smaller town outside the city.

Jennifer: I'll think about it right when Olivia starts school (2 years from this conversation).

(continued)

Application 8.5 Mistaken Assumptions

Randy: Maybe I won't care by then. You can just stay in Laramie and we can start working out a parenting plan, since this plan of yours leads to divorce.

Jennifer: I'll never split the kids' time with you. You got yourself into this great job; you can deal with the travel.

(And so on. . . .) If this negotiation stops here, it would be a sad, failed competitive negotiation. Many negotiations do stop at this point.

Clearly Randy and Jennifer don't know how to negotiate when the relationship is important, ongoing, and there is mutual love and affection. As we discussed in the emotions chapter, we can assume that Randy and Jennifer's core feelings might be fear, fear of loss and change, and surprise/shock. We will revisit Randy and Jennifer after we present some ideas for collaborative negotiation.

Communication Patterns in Competitive Negotiation

Since competitive bargaining assumes that the goals of the parties are in direct conflict and that what you gain, the other loses, you gain a competitive advantage by starting with a high or extreme offer (Fisher 1985). For instance, if you sue someone, you will ask for large amounts of money—for what the other loses, you gain. Similarly, if you are a competitive negotiator negotiating for a new job and employers ask you, "What salary do you want?" you will say "$65,000," knowing you would be happy with $50,000. Competitive bargainers withhold data from each other and try to throw off each other's ability to predict responses, meanwhile learning as much as possible about each other's position (Putnam and Poole 1987). The competitive bargainer:

- Makes high opening demands and concedes slowly
- Tries to maximize tangible resource gains, within the limits of the current dispute
- Exaggerates the value of concessions that are offered
- Uses threats, confrontations, argumentation, and forceful speaking
- Conceals information
- Manipulates people and the process by distorting intentions, resources, and goals
- Tries to resist persuasion on issues
- Is oriented to quantitative and material competitive goals rather than relational goals (Adapted from Murray 1986; Lax and Sebenius 1986)

The competitive bargainer times concessions (giving in and moving toward the other's position) carefully and moves in a stepwise fashion—giving a little bit at a time until a settlement range can be reached with the other. Since both people are probably in a competitive mode, each is trying to get the other to make concessions. However, you are more likely to receive concessions from someone else when you can convince them you cannot make a concession (Schelling 1960). Thus, each negotiator is trying to convince the other

that he or she cannot "give" any more and that the only way the negotiations can reach settlement is if the other gives in (Edwards and White 1977). Former president Jimmy Carter wrote about his role as mediator in the Camp David accords, in which Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel spent 13 days in isolation negotiating peace in their region. To convince Sadat of his seriousness, Begin had taken a religious oath that he would strike off his right hand if he gave up land in the Sinai desert. Carter came up with the idea that the Israeli parliament, not Begin personally, could enact the moves that would give land back to Egypt. Begin saved face and was able to go ahead with a plan he personally endorsed, after days of negotiating.

Power Interacts with Gender

In situations of competitive negotiation, power interacts with gender. Women and men view competition differently. Women are as oriented toward achievement as men are. But as we have seen in previously cited research, women often value self-in-relationship so much that competing with a partner is not worth it. Men tend to orient more toward status, especially with other men. Women and men, therefore, experience different disadvantages and advantages when competitive negotiation is the norm (Kohn 1992).

Men generally enjoy more favorable outcomes in competitive negotiation settings. A sense of power brings forth the communication behaviors of assertiveness and dominance, more closely allied with men's social roles than women's (even at this date in history). What would happen if women felt more powerful going into a distributive negotiation setting? Researchers posed this question in an experiment. Women wrote about a situation in which they remembered being powerful enough to control another's behavior. A standardized checklist assessing the extent to which the women or men saw themselves as powerful was administered. Sure enough, the women who were given a chance to reflect on their history of experiencing power made better first offers, in a house-sale experiment, and reached a negotiated sale to the same extent as did men. (See Hong and van der Wijst 2013; Nelson et al. 2015 for a summary of this experiment and other power and gender research.)

A group of researchers followed this bargaining study with a complex analysis of power and gender, using the Rahim dual concern model presented in Chapter 5. Their study focused on negotiating salary and benefits, with all possible gender and power dyads represented in the study. Researchers found that collaborating, compromising, and obliging enhanced agreement, while dominating decreased agreement. They did not find a gender difference in negotiations when power and gender were accounted for in their study. Their results call for a "sensible mixture of feminine and masculine behaviors," pointing out that negotiations were impaired by extreme competitiveness. Extreme obliging was exploited by the opponent. Men tend to maintain their advantage over women in distributive negotiations, while women seem to maintain an advantage in collaborating toward an agreement (Nelson et al. 2015).

What might these gender and power conclusions mean for students of conflict management? In single-situation negotiations, such as buying houses or cars, or playing competitive games, men maintain an advantage over women when looking at the outcomes—cost and winning. Male social roles give men an advantage in these arenas. However, when the negotiation situation is partly competitive and partly communal, such as negotiating with a person who may become your employer, a mix of masculine and feminine behaviors works

well. Certainly, a mix of behaviors is called for in even more interdependent negotiations, which will be considered in the next section. Women might consider asking for coaching from their male friends when they are entering into a highly competitive, single-session negotiation. Men might consider asking for coaching from their female friends when they enter a highly interdependent, long-term set of negotiations.

Many well-known competitive strategies can be used to advance one's own goals. You only behave cooperatively if it helps you attain a larger share of the pie. You see the game of negotiation as one of picking the right maneuvers, much like a military strategy; you must present a strong defense and try to stay on the offensive. If you show elements of weakness—showing your hand or offering concessions too large or too early—these weaknesses will work against you. Competitive negotiators go to great lengths to convince the opponent that they will not be swayed. When you say, "This is my bottom line!" you are trying to convince the other that you will not make concessions, so the other party had better make some.

If Randy and Jennifer continue to bargain competitively, they might say something like this:

Jennifer: I will consider moving in a year. Olivia will just be starting kindergarten. I can't believe you would uproot us all when we've chosen, you and I together, Laramie as the place we really want to live.

Randy: But you don't want *me* to live there. You don't care about me, just yourself and your friend circle. You supported my taking this job. So now support our family.

Jennifer: I do it my way, you do it yours.

They still don't get it. . . .

Disadvantages of Competitive Negotiation

As Follett (1940) observed many years ago, working out a position without first consulting others blocks conflict management. The following list summarizes what Kohn (1992) refers to as *the case against competition.*

- Has a strong bias toward confrontation, encouraging the use of coercion and emotional pressure as persuasive means; is hard on relationships, breeding mistrust, feelings of separateness, frustration, and anger, resulting in more frequent breakdowns in negotiations; and distorts communication, producing misinformation and misjudgment.
- *Works against responsiveness and openness to opponent,* thereby restricting access to joint gains.
- *Encourages brinkmanship* by creating many opportunities for impasse.
- Increases difficulty in predicting responses of opponent because *reliance is on manipulation and confrontation* to control process.
- Contributes to an *overestimation of the payoffs of competitive actions such as litigation* because the focus is not on a relatively objective analysis of substantive merits (Murray 1986, 184).

A common disadvantage experienced in competitive negotiation may be that during group negotiations (such as community, tribal, or political groups), resolvable disputes may be suddenly transformed into intractable conflicts. Why does this happen? Groups may reinforce members of their groups into a *tribes effect,* in which members act as if everything is *me versus you, and us versus them* (Shapiro 2016, 23). You can tell when you are under the influence of a tribes effect when you feel *adversarial and self-righteous* (Shapiro 2016, 24). Self-righteous, adversarial, competitive, and hostile attitudes never lead to peaceful solutions. Integrating in conflicts when high emotion pervades the atmosphere depends on listening to learn, postponing and avoiding blaming, polarizing, and withdrawing. The metaphor from the American West of circling the wagons against an enemy applies here. Inside the circle, one can only shoot outside the perimeter, counting on people inside the circle to support you. Circling the wagons, or shouting down everyone not in your metaphorical tribe, ultimately fails because the action is not sustainable.

Competition is popularly viewed as a practice that stimulates productivity, but in fact collaboration increases productive ideas. Competition only builds healthy self-esteem in the winners; *losers suffer lack of self-esteem.* Winning assumes there are losers.

The situations most appropriate for a competitive approach to negotiations are those that are truly win/lose, where one party stands to lose and the other stands to gain. For example, most lawsuits for malpractice can be seen as win/lose. When no ongoing relationship with the conflict partner is predicted, a competitive approach can make sense—take what you can get and leave. Such an approach, obviously, is only acceptable in a culture in which individual gain is valued and relationships are given secondary consideration. If someone is truly Machiavellian, planning each move in life strategically to obtain a payoff, competitiveness is at the center of his or her worldview. Someone with an extreme "dog-eat-dog" worldview may say "I have to treat him well because someday I'll need him." A truly competitive person keeps his or her eyes on the prize at all times. Yet, seldom is competitive negotiation the best choice in an ongoing relationship.

Integrative Negotiation

In integrative negotiation, the negotiators attempt to settle a dispute in a way that maximizes all of their interests, as opposed to creating a winner and a loser (Lewicki and Tomlinson 2014). Integrative negotiation requires ongoing back-and-forth use of reflective listening and assertion skills by one or both parties. Management of conflict through effective negotiation requires listening to the other party; indicating that you understand his or her concerns; expressing your feelings; stating your points in a firm but friendly manner; linking your points to points expressed by the other party; and working toward a joint resolution that builds on the ideas of both parties and addresses all concerns (Umbreit 1995). You will recognize the principles and practices of integrative negotiation as completely overlapping with the verbal style and assumptions of integrating or collaborating. Integrative negotiation brings into practice these style preferences.

Integrative negotiation assumes that the parties have *both (1) diverse interests and (2) common interests* and that the negotiation process can result in both parties gaining something. Mixed motives, separate needs, and interdependent needs characterize

integrative negotiation. Integrative negotiation assumes that creativity can transcend the win/lose aspect of competitive negotiations.

One classic example, often repeated in a variety of forms, comes from Mary Parker Follett (1940), who coined the term *integrative*. She illustrates an integrative solution to a conflict that at first appears to be competitive.

> In the Harvard Library one day, in one of the smaller rooms, someone wanted the window open; I wanted it shut. We opened the window in the next room, where no one was sitting. This was not a compromise because there was no curtailing of desire; we both got what we really wanted. For I did not want a closed room, I simply did not want the north wind to blow directly on me; likewise the other occupant did not want that particular window open, he merely wanted more air in the room. (32)

Although she doesn't detail her bargaining process, the result was clearly integrative—it integrated the needs of both parties. One of the assumptions of integrative negotiation is that people holding opposite positions are not necessarily in conflict. For example, if two people are negotiating, sometimes they can reach a satisfactory solution precisely because they want different things. Some of the polar opposites that can be reconciled in integrative negotiation are as follows:

One party cares more about	**Other party cares more about**
form, appearance economic	substance
considerations	political
internal	considerations
considerations	external
symbolic	considerations
considerations	practical
immediate future	considerations
ad hoc results	more distant future
hardware	the relationship
progress	ideology
precedent	respect for
prestige, reputation	tradition this case
political points	results
	group welfare

(Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991, 74)

Recall that in Chapter 3, we suggested that conflict parties often specialize in certain kinds of goals. If you are most concerned about "getting things done" (results) and your work associate is more concerned about "looking good" (prestige, reputation), your needs are not necessarily incompatible. For instance, you may want to make sure the work is done for your campus committee and the other may want to make sure there is newspaper coverage of the event you are sponsoring. He can help you get the job done, and you can put him in touch with a reporter you know. Collaborative approaches treat assumed opposites as connected and not incompatible.

Assumptions

Just as the competitive model of negotiation carries basic assumptions, so does the integrative model of negotiation. The process rests on the following:

- The negotiating world is controlled by *enlightened self-interest.*
- *Common interests* are valued and sought.
- *Interdependence* is recognized and enhanced.
- Limited resources do exist, but they can usually be *expanded through cooperation.*
- The resource distribution system is integrative (joint) in nature.
- The goal is a *mutually agreeable solution* that is fair to all parties and efficient for the community. (Murray 1986)

Seven Elements of Principled Negotiation

In previous editions of this book, we have relied upon Fisher and Ury's *Getting to Yes* (1981) work for their practical approach to collaborative negotiation that has become very popular, for good reason. Fisher and Ury term the process "negotiation on merits" or **principled negotiation.** Principled negotiation and integrative negotiation describe the same approach. Researchers at the Harvard Negotiation Project now present an expansion of that model, which incorporates their widely used previous model (Fisher and Shapiro 2005). They continue to work with the *Core Concerns* presented earlier. Core Concerns are the principles underlying the following steps. The seven elements of principled negotiation remain exceptionally useful as a guide. They follow, in a slightly revised form.

1. Attend to the relationship.

How does each party think and feel about the other? Build a good relationship, working together side by side. *Separate the people from the problem.* Negotiators work to resolve the problem. The people are not the problem. Attack and research the problem, not the people involved. This takes self-discipline, since it's so easy to try to tear the other person down. Destruction of the other person never works in the long run.

2. Attend to all elements of communication.

Work to build positive, two-way communication, and avoid telling others what to do. Take into account all the discussion of strong emotions explored in Chapter 6. Show you are a person worthy of trust by expressing appreciation, forming affiliations (turn adversaries into colleagues), respecting autonomy (yours and theirs), acknowledging status, and staying within a fulfilling role. In other words, try not to allow the negotiating process to change your positive, chosen role as a good communicator. (Read further on these ideas in *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate,* Fisher and Shapiro 2005, and *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts,* Shapiro 2016.)

3. Focus on interests, not positions.

Disclose your actual concerns and interests, not "bottom-line positions." *Positions* come from *interests***.** When people discuss their actual interests in a transparent way, they are much more likely to come to a mutual agreement. Interestingly, the integrative bargainer

can be just as "tough" as the competitive bargainer. However, you get tough about different aspects. You remain firm about your goals but flexible regarding how to accomplish them—what Pruitt (1983a) calls **firm flexibility.** You work with the other party, but you don't capitulate; your goals are always firm in your mind, but the means you use are flexible and adapted to the other person's needs as well. As Follett (1940) noted, "Mushy people are no more good at this than stubborn people" (40).

As explained earlier, when we are in a dispute, we usually believe we know what the other wants. But this guess is usually inaccurate. When we don't ask the other about his or her interests, we simply project ours onto him or her. A teenager, negotiating with parents over chores and grades, when asked what his parent's interests are, is likely to say (with great confidence), "Oh, they are control freaks." The parents might believe that their 15-year-old son wants to do only what he wants and not take family responsibilities. The truth might be that the parents are interested in bargaining (freedom for chores) and the teen is, as well. We don't know what the other wants if we don't ask genuine, open-ended questions, such as "What is your goal here? What are you most interested in? What would make you feel you have ended up with what you most want?" This kind of questioning and listening builds effective conversation about real interests.

Joan placed her house on the market for $425,000. If you are a buyer, negotiating with her on the price of the house, and a friend asks you, "Why is she asking so much?" you may well answer, "Because she wants to make as much as she can." You conclude that, based on what your interests would be in her situation. In fact, she asks $425,000 as proof of the value of the improvements she has added to the house during the 10 years she owned it. So, unless the other tells you what he or she wants, you are playing a guessing game. Joan's topic goal is a specific price, while her identity goals involve getting credit for the substantial improvements she made. An integrative negotiator would compliment Joan on the quality of the improvements, while continuing to bargain for a selling cost in his own area of settlement.

In disputes, relational and identity interests often remain hidden, under the surface of the negotiations. Go back to Joan, the house seller, for a moment. She was raised in a small town; how people treat one another is very important to her. She puts her house on the market for $425,000. You, as a prospective buyer, try to bargain hard. Your Realtor tends to be tough in negotiations—pushing hard, making "low-ball" offers, and using competitive tactics to try to reduce the price. In making your first offer to Joan, the Realtor, says, in a nasty tone of voice, "Well, my client will only come up to $318,000 because he feels you have overpriced the house." After many back-and-forth offers and counteroffers, you and Joan agree to $375,000. Then, just before signing the buy–sell agreement, Joan takes the house off the market. After her Realtor contract expired, she puts it back on the market and sells it for $350,000 to another buyer going through a Realtor who is a friend of Joan's. Joan's relationship and identity issues were more important than the topic (the price).

Application 8.6 Multiple Interests

In small groups of four or five people, take the following *position* statements and brainstorm possible *interests* that might underlie them. Find a minimum of five possible interests for each position, all different from one another.

(continued)

Application 8.6 Multiple Interests

"I have to take 19 credits next term."

"I want $250 for those skis."

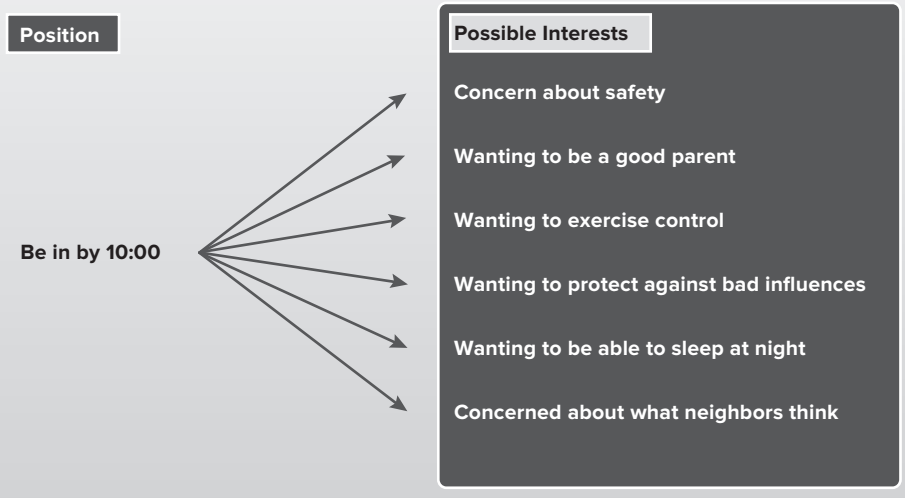
"You have to do the dishes every other night."

"I want the kids to take my name, not their biological father's."

"Quit throwing your clothes on the floor of our apartment."

"Pick me up at 8:00 sharp on Mondays to go to school."

"You have to produce the first draft of our project."



4. Generate many options.

When the negotiation begins to look like a win–lose, zero-sum game, explore many options by brainstorming and using creativity. Each possible option should include the genuine interests of the other. Generating frivolous options wastes time and harms the relationship. A good decision is one that springs from many options generated by concerned conflict parties. A good decision should bring not only a sense of relief ("Well, we got through that") but also a sense of excitement and hope ("Good for us").

5. Find legitimate criteria.

Try to discern whether the outcome is *fair, just, reasonable, and respects the interests of each party.* When you discover that someone (even yourself) is only interested in winning or "getting it done," give your attention to how the result will be judged. One can develop objective criteria by using fair procedures (balancing power in the process) and by seeking fair standards. Menzel (1991) suggests six external standards for fairness: simple success at reaching an agreement, compliance with the agreement, cost of the agreement, efficiency through which the agreement is reached, access to justice presented to disputants, and stability of the

agreement over time. These standards might be important to a court, to a branch of the government such as the department of family services, to family members, or to managers overseeing an agreement in their department. Other fair standards can be based on the following:

market value	moral standards
costs	professional standards
precedent	equal treatment
what a court would decide	efficiency
scientific judgment	reciprocity

(Fisher and Ury 1981, 89)

6. Analyze the "Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement" (BATNA).

Consider your "walk-away" alternative as well as theirs. Recognize that any agreement must be better for everyone involved than simply walking away. Sometimes people say, "I do not need this." If that statement is true, then negotiations will fail. When threats are used by the other party, you can say, "We really need to come to agreement. If we don't, the consequences are extremely negative." Then you can review the BATNA to see if it is acceptable. When a person applying for a job in one place already has received an acceptable offer at a previous organization, if satisfactory terms are not reached at the second place, the BATNA to the job seeker is clear. She can take the previous job. Knowing ahead of time what an acceptable alternative is helps the negotiation process (Lewicki and Tomlinson 2014). Remember not to issue a threat unless you want to follow through. The alternative must be an attractive one for the BATNA principle to make sense.

7. Work with fair and realistic commitments.

Decide whether what you and the other party are asking is *reasonable, doable, face-saving, practical, and will enhance the working relationship.* If someone is forced into an unrealistic commitment, possibly just to get the problem temporarily solved, the conflict will go underground and have to be revisited. So you gain nothing by winning with unrealistic and unfair commitments.

What Makes Implementing the Core Concerns So Difficult?

Many communication students want to implement both the Core Concerns system and the principled negotiation that grows out of shared concerns. The concerns (*appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and a satisfactory role*) sometimes become very difficult to put into practice, even when we want to. Why is this? Riskin (2010), one of the Harvard Project on Negotiation researcher/teachers, gives some ideas as to why this is so. The following obstacles are adapted from Riskin's work:

- People sometimes have *excessively self-centered perspectives,* which causes them to focus primarily on themselves and not on others. They cannot get beyond this self-perspective to gain curiosity, much less empathy, for the other.
- *Strong negative emotions* may wipe out one's cognitive ability to take an integrative focus. Fear and fury, for instance, may freeze one's desire and ability to integrate.

- *Automatic ways of thinking* (the brain's habituated response, which creates ingrained neural circuits) impede one's ability to use integrative thinking (Cozolino 2010; Siegel 1999).
- *Insensitivity to emotions.* A person may lack the natural ability or skill to recognize and respond to emotions. Awareness may be lacking, for whatever reason.
- *Insufficient social skills and lack of mental focus* (distraction) may inhibit a person's ability to use the Core Concern system.

Many writers discuss the values of mindfulness, calming down, self-soothing, taking one's own emotional temperature, and being in control of our emotions rather than letting them control us. This is a lifelong project, difficult to learn, and deserves all the attention we can give to it. Our conflict resolution skills and ability to live peacefully depend on these most difficult intrapersonal skills.

Balancing Power

In integrative negotiations, the most basic task is to actively attempt to structure an **even playing field,** a "level table," or balanced power. Since this difficult task of equalizing power is not always possible, sometimes you must decide whether to leave the table. For example, if you know that you do not have the skills, the support, the power, and the opportunity to negotiate equally, you may decide to disengage, avoid, or get help from someone who can balance the power. That help might come from an attorney, mediator, supervisor, parent, friend, or co-worker. Sometimes, you can't stay at the table and keep your sanity and dignity. Remember that to negotiate effectively, you must be able to give resources that are valued by the other, and to influence the other's goals. You must be a player. Integrative negotiation depends on at least temporarily balanced power.

If you are in a high-power situation and feel justified in exercising dominance, you may become insensitive to the effects of that dominance on others. After all, you are right and feel justified! When we have the power, we all too often use it to take shortcuts to get what we want. We exercise such control not only to help or protect others, or out of genuine need, but out of "fear, insecurity, vengeance, vanity, habit, self-will, boredom, and laziness" (Kritek 1994, 90). Dominance from one party promotes manipulation and avoidance tactics from those lower in power. The cycle becomes an escalating cycle; seldom do people exercising dominance see that they caused the cycle in the first place. The low-power people feel victimized and begin to act like victims. Some of the most common manipulative tactics are insincere praise, lying and deception, tricks and secret deals, attacks and threats, deliberate stupidity or resistance, flirtatiousness and cuteness, harping on things, withholding something important, and deference (Kritek 1994, 108).

Dominators often escalate the cycle by not listening to the needs of others, numbing themselves to injustice, focusing only on their own needs and tasks, making light of others' needs, trivializing and minimizing the needs of others, and blaming the victim. People who use the classic destructive low-power tactics such as deceit and manipulation, and cannot ask for what they want, contribute to an unhealthy dynamic.

Concern for the Relationship: Self and Other

In the dual concern model of conflict styles, the concern for self and concern for the other describes and analyzes conflict behavior. We have seen that *concern for the relationship*

also plays an important role as people negotiate. Women and men employ strategies partly influenced by the importance of a current or future relationship. When women in heterosexual relationships use competitive negotiation strategies regarding career decision and home tasks, the tactics backfire. Men become less involved in the emotional work of the relationship. When women use cooperative tactics in intimate relationships, men are more likely to invest emotionally in the relationship (Livingston 2014).

Concern for any relationship you are invested in, whether in a group, at work, or family/intimate relationship, calls for a careful balancing of concern for self and other, resulting in concern for the relationship. Relationships improve with assertive behavior plus cooperative (integrative, compromising, and obliging) conflict choices. Too much obliging keeps power unbalanced, which results in less satisfaction, in most relationships. Too much assertive/dominating or competitive behavior also lessens emotional involvement in any relationship. You will be more successful and satisfied when you balance concern for self, other, and relationship.

Coaching for Integrative Negotiators: Putting It into Practice

At this point, you have learned quite a few skills and concepts that will help in your practice of integrative negotiation. When you are experienced, some of these approaches come naturally. At the beginning, it's helpful to think through your approach in a step-by-step fashion. Becoming an artist in integrative negotiation is like becoming a fine musician—you have to practice the scales, the basics, until playing becomes fluid. In the middle of negotiation, most people don't think of the steps of excellent negotiation—the communication comes naturally. However, that natural ease and fluidity rests on practice. The following practices will help you develop your art.

Define Interests Before Negotiation

Think about what will satisfy you before you negotiate. You may not know yet how to negotiate this particular concern, but you need to know what the concerns are. Consider a dispute between a manager and employee. The manager would like to promote the employee to a higher position, so the employee might take over some management roles. While pleased with the vote of confidence, the employee does not want to be promoted without a salary raise. This might be a dispute over how much money can be paid, or the dispute may actually be emerging because the employee does not want to take over tasks she would be assigned with a promotion. Only with open conversation can the actual interests be determined. Questions that help determine interests are, "What do I want from this conversation?" followed with, "What makes me want that?" and "What will achieving that help me do?" (Lewicki and Tomlinson 2014). Once all the parties gain clarity about what they really want and why, they are better able to collaborate.

Label the Conflict Differently

The art of reframing weaves through all conflict resolution practices. Negotiators can search for new and authentic labels for their conflict. Labels are closely tied to naming, and blaming (Putnam 2010). In a large nonprofit organization, a manager told his team that they were "responsible to me" above all. When the CEO heard about this, he told the manager that he saw that they had a problem over "chain of command." The manager replied, "No, it's a matter of loyalty." The CEO was able to expand the concept of loyalty to the

larger organization, drop the chain of command idea (which was offensive since the organization prided itself on team development), and both were able to reframe this conflict as one of "confusing team members about how and with whom they should communicate." Reframing is similar to relabeling. Language used gives conflict parties a chance to view, or see, the conflict differently. Reframing and labeling differently are key tools for any integrative negotiator.

Another way to *reframe* a conflict is to *shift the level of abstraction* that is used (Putnam 2010). In one university department, two senior peer advisers began a conflict over their advising practices. Kevin liked to take the files home to study them, marking which courses the student advisees still needed to take to complete their majors. Kyle accused Kevin of acting as though he were the only peer adviser, and said he showed no respect for Kyle's advising. The department chair urged them to talk it through (they were, after all, communication majors!). They came up with what they determined to be a "problem with files," rather than the relationship-level conflict with which they started. This was both fractionation (making the conflict smaller) and a shift in the level of analysis.

Work Skillfully with Emotion

Negotiation research has expanded to include how emotion functions during negotiation sessions (Shapiro 2016; Olekalns and Druckman 2014). Some evidence indicates that negotiators who express anger experience better outcomes in future negotiations. Trust grows when emotional expression is perceived as genuine and not simply strategic. Given the importance of concern for the relationship, skillful negotiators do well to consider the centrality of any relationship in which they experience conflict. As we have explained, venting backfires, and strategic use of anger will usually create mistrust. You will need to decide the overall outcomes you are wanting in a negotiation. In ongoing relationships, conflict resolution depends on solving a problem and enhancing the relationship for further work or intimacy. Wise negotiators avoid destroying or damaging a relationship to gain short-term goals.

Employ Narrative Questions

Negotiators should use **narrative (story) questions** rather than "yes/no" questions (Putnam 2010). This shows a level of helpful curiosity so that the other party may be encouraged to ask open-ended questions as well. Some examples of story questions are:

> "When did you begin to sense a problem in our relationship? What was happening before that stopped happening or started happening?"
>
> "Please help me understand what made you lose interest in helping me with the video portion of my research project. I thought we were on the same page, but some- thing happened. Tell me anything you can tell me."
>
> "I'd like to know what changed for you when you thought about our decision to go to Cancun for Spring break."
>
> "I've made several suggestions for our big-ticket recreation, but none of my suggestions appeal to you. I'd like to hear what you are interested in doing. It seems we need to update with each other."

When asking narrative or story questions, it is essential to listen and reflect back what you are hearing. If a question is a setup for defensive argument, your conflict partner will never again want to answer your questions.

Suggest New Rituals to Do Together

A good technique that comes from couples counseling is to ask couples who are in conflict to go for a walk. One person talks for 5 minutes, by the clock, then the other person talks for 5 minutes. This is not an active listening ritual, but respectful listening. Go back and forth, employing respectful listening until you both are ready to enter into negotiation. This "walk/talk" ritual is especially helpful when one person talks too much and the other holds back, or when the people are so hurt or angry that they are in a chain of back-and-forth accusations. Some couples have internalized the ritual to the point that one will say, "We'd better go on one of our walks."

Expand the Pie

Expanding the pie encourages new integrative outcomes because most conflicts are based on the perception of scarce resources; expanding the resources alters the structure of the conflict. For example, if Jane wants to go to the mountains and Sandy wants to go to the seashore, they might collaborate to find a mountainous seashore, like the Oregon or Maine coast. Although it won't be the perfect mountain and the shore may have some limitations, they will get to spend their vacation together—they have expanded the pie. Often, children squabble with one another because of the perception that there is not enough parental care and consideration to go around. They fight, say mean things to one another, and struggle over the available love. As the parent, you can expand the pie. Avoid handing out love and attention in a way that leaves out a child. A wise father can say, "Owen, I'm coaching Emelia in soccer right now. At 3:00 we'll take a break and you and I will practice with your bow." Expanding the pie means creating more resources. Resources are not infinite—the Dad will get tired and need to do other things on his weekend—but often they can be expanded.

Application 8.7 You've Got to Do It!

Caitlin was an entry-level employee who had just received her BA. She worked for a veterans program. The program was underfunded, with many demands being placed on the staff members. The program director of the family services division asked Caitlin to design and teach a family communication program to families with preschool children. Caitlin felt unprepared, pushed too far and too fast, and unsupported for this high-visibility program (it would be filmed and put on public-access TV). Although Caitlin was newly hired, she had been given a lot of responsibility and did have legitimate power in the organization. She also wanted to work for the organization so didn't want to resign under the pressure of three times too much work. Two possible scenarios follow:

Competitive Mode

Program manager: Caitlin, you've got to do this program, and it has to be good. Our grant funding for next year depends on delivering this service, which we said we'd provide.

Caitlin: I'd need a master's degree, at least, to be able to design and teach this course. I can't do it and keep track of the after-school program, too. I have too little admin support and too many projects that need my attention right now. I'm so stressed out I don't know whether I can keep on.

(continued)

Application 8.7 You've Got to Do It!

Program manager: I hired you to run this entire program. If you didn't think you could do it, you shouldn't have applied. Drop something less important and do this.

Integrative Mode

Program manager: Caitlin, I really need to get this program on family communication done. Our grant funding for next year depends on delivering this service, which we said we'd provide. Could you take it on?

Caitlin: That would be a great new program. I don't see how I can take it on. I have to keep track of the after-school program, and there are a lot of other things that are half-done, too. And I'm stressed out and have almost no admin support. Besides, I don't have the training to put this course together. I'd need a master's degree, at least.

Program Manager: What if I get you some staff help from social work? There's a graduate student over there that said he'd like to do an internship with us. Maybe he could do the program development with you.

Caitlin: That sounds great, but I still need some admin help. Could you loan my program someone from your office?

Program Manager: I can't do that permanently, but you can bring work over and I'll delegate it.

Caitlin: OK, I'll see what I can do. (She continues planning with the manager.)

Use Nonspecific Compensation

Nonspecific compensation is a process in which one of the parties is "paid off" with some creative form of compensation. For instance, the manager in the previous example could have offered extra time off after the project was finished or offered to move up Caitlin's evaluation, which would result in the possibility of an early promotion. If two roommates are bargaining over use of a car, one may say, "OK, you can have my car, but I get to have the apartment for an all-night party after graduation." Another example is related to buying house. The buyer discovers that the owner is more interested in moving rapidly than in receiving the stated purchase price. The buyer's cousin owns a moving company, so he arranges to have the house owner moved at no cost to her (he works out an arrangement with his cousin, who will charge less than the going rate). The buyer purchases the house for less money than was originally asked. The buyer created a form of nonspecific compensation. He found some dimension that is valued by the other and made an offer that offset some of the seller's financial losses. Nonspecific compensation depends on listening for the actual interests and concerns of the other party.

Trade-offs occur when one offers to trade off issues that are the top priority for the other. The parties have to find multiple issues in the conflict (for example, time is of the essence to you, money to him). Then, you arrange agreements so that each of you gets the top-priority item while compromising or obliging on the lower-priority item. In one organization the

supervisor wanted an employee to spend more hours at work. The employee wanted a fairer (to her) evaluation at the end of the year. With the help of an outside negotiator, they negotiated that (1) the evaluation process would involve discussion before memos were sent and a paper trail created, and (2) the employee would take on some extra work hours. Each received acknowledgment of her main concern and gave on the item that was vitally important to the other. Trade-offs are not exactly the same thing as compromising, although they are similar. You trade one goal important to you for another that is important to the other party. A couple might decide that they will use trade-offs when Rick says, "I want $2,000 in savings before we spend one more dime on nonessentials." Christie might say, "I want to be able to plan for my sister's wedding. I'm her maid of honor, and I'm going to have extra expenses, starting next month." They might agree to save toward the goal of $2,000 by a specific point in time (Christie gives on this) and also make plans for the wedding (Rick gives on this). What makes this possible? They work out a budget that they both agree to keep, something they have not done before. They give the other what each most wants, while at the same time they bind themselves to a budget that might feel restrictive, but worth it.

Cost cutting minimizes the other's costs for going along with you. For example, you want to go skiing with your friend. She is overloaded with work, so you offer to ski only half a day and not let her incur the "cost" of missing all her work time. You might be negotiating with your romantic partner about going on vacation. He is tied up and feels he can't take off so many days, yet you both want to vacation together. So you offer to drive your car to the resort you wish to visit, giving you the "decompression time" that you value, and suggest he fly to join you 2 days later. You shorten his total vacation time; yet make it possible for the two of you to vacation together at the resort you want to visit.

Bridging invents new options to meet the other side's needs. You want to rent an apartment, but it is too expensive. You discover that the landlord is concerned about the appearance of the property. So you offer her a rent amount somewhat below what she wants but agree to do 10 hours of "fix-it work" each month. She receives property improvements, and you receive reduced rent. Everyone gains.

Let's see how Randy and Jennifer might practice integrative bargaining instead of the "relationship suicide" competitive approach they used first.

Application 8.8 Jennifer and Randy Try Again

After thinking over their angry and unproductive first conversations about whether to move or keep the family where it is, they decided to take a more cooperative, integrative approach.

Jennifer: I didn't like the way we talked with each other last weekend about the possibility of our all moving to Denver, or whether we should stay here. I've been thinking. I'm not ready to move yet, and I can't stand the idea of giving up our connection to our friends here. After all, we chose Laramie because of our friend group. I wish we could do both. You know, I do miss you.

Randy: Well, that's a relief. I love my job, but it's not the way I want to live. I've been thinking that I could explore the idea of my working out of Laramie after I have a full year or so with the company.

(continued)

Application 8.8 Jennifer and Randy Try Again

Jennifer:	That's a great idea. I wonder if we could afford some land here so we could build a small vacation place. Then if we do need to move to Denver, we'd have a toehold here.
Randy:	I don't think we can afford two places, for sure.
Jennifer:	No, I don't either, but I could check out land prices. We could put the money we'd save living in one place toward buying some land. And if you could work more often here in the meantime, that would give us some time to look. I need to get used to the idea, and I don't want to sell our house at a fire-sale price.
Randy:	OK, I'll talk to my boss, and you can check out some land deals. I can stand it for a few more months as is. It's a relief to me for us to be thinking together again. I've missed that.

What integrative techniques did Randy and Jennifer use?

In integrative negotiations, parties brainstorm to invent new and creative options to meet everyone's needs. For example, Sally is negotiating with her work partner. She is frustrated about the job not being done, to her standards, while Chuck thinks that work intrudes too much on his personal time. So, she offers to do more of the work on the spreadsheet if he will bring her coffee and sandwiches for lunch. Chuck gains more free time since he does not have to take the spreadsheet project home or stay late. Sally sees the project moving ahead, and both of them contribute to the task while maintaining their working relationship.

Bargainers who employ collaborative/integrative approaches view negotiation as complex; thus, they find creative ways to "package" agreements and invent new options (Raiffa 1982). The collaborator moves from "fighting" to "conferring" (Follett 1940), assuming that working with the other will bring joint benefits. Information serves as fact-finding material for the bargainers rather than as a wedge that drives between the two parties. With information, one problem solves, explores causes, and generates alternative solutions (Lewicki and Litterer 1985).

Disadvantages of Integrative Bargaining

As with competitive tactics, integrative approaches have some disadvantages. Probably the biggest overall difficulty is that they require "a high order of intelligence, keen perception and discrimination, and, more than all, a brilliant inventiveness" (Follett 1940, 45). If it hasn't been modeled in the home or on the job, integrative negotiation may require specific training. Unless the beginning bargainer (whether an attorney, spouse, friend, or co-worker) has some level of training, the usual approach is to equate effective bargaining with competitive tactics. Integrative bargaining requires the same amount of emotional intelligence as all conflict resolution. One must commit to very high standards. One disadvantage is that this can all seem like a lot of hard work. That is true.

According to Murray (1986), possible disadvantages of collaborative negotiation can be described as follows:

- Is strongly biased toward cooperation, creating internal pressures to compromise and accommodate that may not be in one's best interests.

- Avoids confrontational strategies because they carry the risk of impasse, which is viewed as failure. Confrontation sometimes works out well.
- Focuses on being sensitive to others' perceived interests; increases vulnerability to deception and manipulation by a competitive opponent; and increases the possibility that the settlement may be more favorable to the other side than fairness would warrant.
- Increases the difficulty of establishing definite aspiration levels and bottom lines because of the reliance on qualitative (value-laden) goals.
- Requires substantial skill and knowledge of the process to do well.
- Requires strong confidence in one's own assessment powers (perception) regarding the interests and needs of the other side and the other's payoff schedule (184).

Integrative negotiations are not easily used in every conflict. They require considerable skill on the part of the negotiators, the process takes longer, and everyone needs to strive to keep the negotiations from disintegrating into a win/lose approach.

The Language of Integration

As has been true of other conflict resolution processes throughout this book, no specific set of techniques will assure integrative bargaining. Collaboration is both a mindset and a set of techniques. If one does not believe that energetic cooperation will provide better solutions than competitive techniques, all the **language of integration** that could be memorized will not ultimately produce a collaborative outcome. Sometimes, however, you may get stuck looking for the right phrase to help a negotiation move toward an integrative outcome. If so, consider some of the following phrases. Beside each phrase, put the number of the principled negotiation idea and the key word for the Core Concern that the phrase addresses. There may be several.

Application 8.9 The Language and the Principles of Negotiation

This is a problem you and I haven't had to face before. I'm sure we can work it out. What is it that you are most hoping for?

Let's figure out where we agree, and that will give us a base to work from.

I'd like to postpone making a decision about filing a grievance until our next meeting. Today I want to explore all the options that are available to us in addition to filing a grievance. How does that sound to you?

I can't be satisfied with getting my way if you're disgruntled. Let's get an example of market value from an objective source. I know this is difficult, but we can work it out.

I can understand why you want to "split the difference," but let's try for some creative alternatives.

I certainly appreciate your stance. Let's also talk about what I need to be satisfied.

(continued)

Application 8.9 The Language and the Principles of Negotiation

Your threat tells me how important this issue is to you, but it will work better with me not to threaten. Let's back this up and come at it another way.

I don't see any conflict in both of us getting more of what we want, but we have been acting as if what we each get, the other loses.

I really do want a fair and durable settlement for both of us. That requires, of course, more direct information about what we each want. Let's explore that awhile.

I will discuss with you as long as it takes to reach a settlement that will work for both of us.

Yes, I see that you think that is the best solution. Remember, however, that there are two of us here. Let's see if both of us can be satisfied with an outcome.

Many people approach negotiations, at least at the beginning, from a competitive frame of mind—assuming both sides have to lose part of the pie. The competitive or integrative approaches are more a function of the bargainers than of any other factors. In fact, you can be in a negotiation in which one person takes an integrative and the other a competitive stance (Walker 1988). If you take a competitive approach, whether you are negotiating about how to spend the evening with a friend or how much to offer on a house, the negotiation process will probably be a competitive, win/lose experience. On the other hand, if you stick firmly to an integrative approach, you will find creative options that someone with a competitive approach simply would not find. Creative options are often available but unless the negotiators believe them possible and work to jointly produce those options, the negotiations will begin and end on a win/lose footing. Having had experience negotiating and serving as third-party interveners, we (the authors) are always gratified by how many creative, jointly satisfying options are available and constantly are reminded of how difficult they are for the parties to initially see.

Integrative language strategies are generally not perceived as genuinely integrative if the intent is still, as in a competitive system, to promote self-interest at the expense of the other (Kolb and Putnam 1997; Putnam 1996). Kolb and Putnam rightly point out the difference between a pseudo-relational approach used for personal gain, which is manipulative, and true collaboration. As long as predetermined goals benefiting only the self are pursued, the underlying assumptions of both competitive and collaborative modes remain self-interest and winning.

The following case gives you an opportunity to apply ideas about competitive and integrative negotiation.

Application 8.10 The Rainbow Development Water Problem

A group of summer homeowners in the high mountains of Colorado faces an ongoing problem with their water well, which keeps testing as polluted, thus making it necessary for the residents to boil

(continued)

Application 8.10 The Rainbow Development Water Problem

or buy their water. Recently, some of the elected officials of the volunteer board authorized a road to be built so heavy equipment could reach the wellhead and the well could be dug out and rebuilt. The road was built through wetlands, which raised some federal legal problems, and through a pristine meadow cherished by some of the residents as a quiet, beautiful spot at the end of the property. The road goes through commonly owned property, skirting the edge of privately owned lots. Three factions formed, and full-scale conflict has erupted, with letters, private conversations, procedural challenges, content arguments, relationship destruction, and face-saving struggles going on at a high level of intensity. Thirty-five or so families are involved. The homeowners are a long-standing group of friends and acquaintances who have considerable monetary and emotional investment in the property along with dramatically different ecological, political, financial, and community values.

1. The *"water first" group:* This group consists primarily of engineers, scientists, builders, and practical people who are sick and tired of dealing with a half-solution to the water problem year after year. They want to get a new well, install purification systems if they are needed, and assess the membership for what is required. They rely on scientific studies of the water quality as a database. In their view, the road was simply a means to an important end. They are convinced that their mandate was clear: to provide potable water for the group. They can't understand the outrage of the second group. Many members of this group have volunteered countless hours through the years for the practical maintenance of the roads, water system, fences, and governing system. This group is concerned with content goals and face-saving. They argue that the content goals are the most important and that they did what they had to do (face-saving).
2. The *"road has to go" group:* This group consists of a few older homeowners and their adult children. The view of this group is that environmental concerns are primary. They will not tolerate compromise about the sensitive wetlands along the stream and feel outraged at what they perceive as the destruction of the most beautiful area of common property. They think the board acted without proper authorization by the membership and feel strongly that not only should the road never have been built but that it must be taken out and the area reclaimed. They prefer any solution, including boiling water for drinking, to the degradation of the environment. Many of this group will be second-generation homeowners when they inherit the property from their parents. However, these group members have no vote in the association, since only property owners can vote. This group as a whole is concerned about appropriate process and has strongly held content goals.
3. The *"we simply have to live with it" group:* This group sees itself as the middle group between two extremes. Many of these people feel disappointed or angry about the gravel road and the fact that the water problem still is not solved. They want to support the elected board but don't like all the conflict and alienation in what used to be a very close and friendly group, which had potlucks, birthday celebrations, and outings together. Now that the road is in, they think it should be accepted and used to solve the water problem. This group is concerned with relationships and face-saving for the board. They keep their private opinions, whatever they might be, to themselves. They look to the future.

(continued)

Application 8.10 The Rainbow Development Water Problem

Now that you have read "The Rainbow Development Water Problem," answer these questions:

- Specify (1) *competitive* and (2) *integrative* approaches to the problem, from each of the three groups.
- How can concerns be addressed, relationships be enhanced, and solutions be found?
- What communicative moves from each of the three groups would enhance rather than destroy the ongoing relationships?
- If you were a negotiator for the homeowners association, how might you approach the problem?
- Role-play an integrative approach to the problem, with representatives of the three groups discussing (without a negotiator).

Competitive and Integrative Phases

Negotiations are characteristically complex. Early in negotiations, it is common for the participants to have a fixed-sum assumption. Bargainers can, regardless of their initial positions and approaches, move to integrative, or collaborative, outcomes (Gulliver 1979; Lewicki and Litterer 1985; Tutzauer and Roloff 1988). Many negotiations range between cooperative and competitive **phases of negotiation,** often returning to collaborative phases when someone stresses the gains to be had by both sides (Holmes 1992; Popple 1984). Sometimes dyads will reach an impasse, return to earlier phases of negotiations, and seem to regress (Holmes 1992). An example of "impasse dyads" is often found when couples are negotiating details of their divorce. The couple will stay stuck on one issue, such as how to work out holiday access to the children, then get so angry they will try to redo all the earlier negotiation, even agreements that had been problem free, such as division of furniture or where each partner would live. Skillful third-party help can often enable the couple to move out of the impasse.

No matter how far down the wrong road you go, you can always turn back.

The central finding from phase research is that successful negotiations eventually move toward collaborative, or integrative, processes (Holmes 1992; Gulliver 1979). Integrative and competitive processes can be seen as intertwined—as the participants utilize more competitive approaches, a natural tension builds to move toward collaboration as long as the parties stay invested in the dispute (Putnam 1986, 1988). The bargainers can be seen as moving from differentiation—stressing their differences with each other, attacking each other's positions, and venting emotions—to integration, or collaboration, in which the negotiators adopt a problem-solving orientation. These processes would look, sequentially, like this:

1. Extreme statements of positions
2. Clashes about positions
3. Deemphasis of differences and decreased use of antagonistic tactics (Jones 1988, 472)

An almost identical set of stages also has been specified:

1. Lengthy public orations characterized by a high degree of "spirited" conflict
2. Tactical maneuvers and arguments for and against proposals
3. Reducing alternatives to formal agreements (Putnam and Jones 1982a)

Note that these phases have been used in negotiations that resulted in agreements. Also, they are more characteristic of explicit bargaining situations, such as negotiations over contracts. There simply has not been enough research on implicit, informal bargaining processes to specify the phases they involve. Clearly, however, successful negotiations typically arrive at workable agreements by going through collaborative phases.

One's choice of negotiation strategies sets forces in motion that may be difficult to alter. For example, using pressure tactics increases competitiveness (Tutzauer and Roloff 1988); spirals of competitiveness tend to bring impasse (Putnam 1988); competitive strategies lessen satisfaction with the process (Putnam and Folger 1988); and a competitive orientation coupled with time pressure secures poorer agreements (Carnevale and Lawler 1986). Basically, cooperative and competitive climates are self-reinforcing—competition encourages more competition and collaboration brings collaboration in return (Folger, Poole, and Stutman 2004, 2008; Carnevale and Lawler 1986; Pace 1988).

How, then, can one move toward integrative approaches during the negotiation process? Stick to principled negotiation, rely on the Core Concerns, stay with your chosen role, and maintain optimism that a positive solution can be found. Once you begin succeeding while bargaining in an integrative way, your hope and confidence will grow. In negotiation, as in all of conflict resolution, *we have to learn to do what comes unnaturally.*

Summary

Negotiation is one mechanism for solving ongoing conflicts with others and allows us to resolve everyday conflicts peacefully. The negotiation path to conflict management recognizes the stake that all parties have in their joint dispute. Negotiation occurs in everyday life, as well as in structured public arenas such as labor–management bargaining. Each culture utilizes negotiation in diverse ways. Several different examples of negotiation in different cultures were presented.

At the heart of all negotiations are considerations of power. We can equalize power through destructive means or by effective argumentation. The two major types of negotiations are (1) competitive and (2) integrative. There are assumptions, communication patterns, and downsides associated with each type of negotiation.

Principled negotiation is an integrative approach that stresses seven principles for successful negotiation. These principles rest upon five Core Concerns. We present reasons why using the preceding approaches are so difficult. We discuss both the mindset and specific words for being integrative because often people have difficulty speaking in an integrative way. We conclude the chapter showing that negotiations often pass between phases—beginning with a competitive tone and concluding with an integrative one. Successful negotiators in everyday life eventually cooperate/integrate with the other party, manifesting a relational orientation.

Key Terms

negotiation 257
win/lose perspective 264
competitive negotiation 265
integrative negotiation 271
principled negotiation 272
firm flexibility 273
even playing field 276
narrative (story) questions 278
expanding the pie 279
nonspecific compensation 280
trade-offs 280
cost cutting 281
bridging 281
language of integration 283
phases of negotiation 286

Review Questions

1. What is the place of negotiation in everyday life?
2. Explain how negotiation is part of conflict resolution.
3. Define negotiation.
4. How does negotiation fit between avoidance and domination?
5. What impacts do our cultures have on negotiation?
6. List destructive ways to equalize power.
7. List constructive ways to equalize power.
8. How are arguments used as part of constructive negotiation?
9. List the assumptions and communication elements of competitive negotiation.
10. Describe the assumptions and communication elements of integrative negotiation.
11. List some integrative communication moves.
12. What are the seven elements to principled negotiation?
13. What are some techniques used in integrative bargaining? Be able to identify and apply these techniques.
14. What are the Core Concerns, and why are they so difficult to put in place?
15. Why are interests so important?
16. What is the difference between positions and interests?
17. What is a BATNA and what makes it important in negotiation?
18. List some questions you can use to find interests.
19. What might be some multiple interests you have in a current conflict?
20. Give some examples of collaborative language.
21. How do conflicts move through competitive and collaborative phases?

Chapter 9

Third-Party Intervention

The Need for Third Parties

Conflicts present so many challenges that we turn to others for help. When you and your romantic partner are not talking, or at the other extreme, are yelling at one another, outside help may be needed. If your roommate and you have been arguing about rent payments for weeks on end, it may be time for outside help. If you are enmeshed in a family dispute that drags on for years, you will benefit from intervention. If you endure a situation at work where you continually struggle with your supervisor over your job assignments, it is time to ask for help. When talk is sarcastic, indirect, or defensive, special coaching may be needed. When you and your partner love each other but keep getting caught in the same destructive spirals, you should consider third-party intervention. Acquiring competent third-party help can stop destructive spirals.

When we experience conflict, we can turn to friends, advisors, pastors, parents, co-workers, human resource personnel, coaches, counselors, mediators, or lawyers. Third-party assistance may also be provided by fact finders, process consultants, go-betweens, ombudspersons, managers, conciliators, group facilitators, friends of the court, arbitrators, or diplomats—anyone who can help (Folger, Scott, and Poole 2013, 253). Communication students, social workers, psychologists, attorneys, managers, and people in all human studies majors can train themselves to become agents of intervention. Third-party help for you or others may be appropriate in situations such as these:

- Your roommate stops paying her share of the rent.
- A friend keeps using your clothes without permission.
- Your sister won't pick up or return calls or texts. She made bitter comments the last time you were together and you can't get to her to try to make things right.
- You and your romantic partner are separating but neither of you say you want to.
- You are a teacher and see your elementary students fighting during recess.
- Your workgroup stops meeting and team members do not reply to e-mails.
- An employee is injured on the job and wants health benefits.
- Violence is beginning to erupt between two young men (Funk, Elliott, Bechtoldt, Pasold, and Tsavoussis 2003).
- Students are being harassed and sexually bullied (Berry 2016; Newman 2004).
- Two ranchers have an ongoing dispute over water rights, affecting the entire community.

- A customer tries to return a defective product, but the retailer refuses to accept it.
- Only one worker, a relative of the supervisor, gets a raise. The rest of the employees protest by filing a grievance.
- An employee is fired and seeks redress.
- A couple is divorcing but wants to cooperate for the sake of the children.

These situations call for a variety of third-party interventions, ranging from informal to formal intervention. You might become involved in making a decision about third-party intervention by (1) asking for third-party assistance for yourself or (2) helping a friend or co-worker find appropriate third parties (Brandimonte, Ferrante, and Bianco 2010) or (3) acting as a third party, after appropriate training.

Third-party activity is a normal part of everyday life. You may have a friend like Angela, for example, who often helps other friends to "talk it out" when there is a communication problem. The third party may be a trained professional such as a counselor or mediator. Teachers separate students on the playground, ministers and counselors help families through crises, dormitory resident advisors help students, and mediators help married couples separate and divorce. Lawyers, judges, probation officers, hearings officers, union representatives, professional meeting facilitators, and coaches all help people work through their conflicts. In this chapter, we will provide an overview of (1) **informal** and (2) **formal intervention** into disputes. For informal interventions (like helping friends, work associates, or family members), we will supply cautions about entering others' disputes and some guidelines for success. For formal interventions (using coaches, mediators, counselors, arbitrators, and the courts, for example), we will acquaint you with the various approaches so you can be an informed consumer of such services, or include this work in your career path.

Advantages of Using Skilled Third Parties

A skilled third party is someone who is trained in intervention and does not have a vested interest in a specific outcome. Whether informal or formal, the goal of all intervention is to transform the conflict elements. The transformation may take many forms. It may

- Change the style of *expression* in the conflict.
- Alter the degree of *interdependence* between the parties.
- Change their *perceptions* or their *goals* so they are not seen as incompatible.
- Balance the power.
- Modify the actual or perceived *scarcity of resources.*
- Adjust the *actual* or *perceived interference* by the opposing parties.
- Arrive at solutions to problems that caused the conflict.

Skillful intervention transforms the conflict so that issues can be put to rest and people can move on. After third-party intervention, co-workers may be able to speak to the boss directly instead of forming coalitions, and the boss may agree to give feedback in person instead of in writing. Parents may agree to help their 18-year-old daughter go to college in a different state, or a conflict over scarce parking space may be accurately understood as a relational conflict rather than a content conflict (parking space). Former spouses may

solve disputes over child support without filing another court action. A judge in a small claims court or court dispute may refer parties to a mediator before deciding on an action (Kressel 2014). Conflicts may be prevented in addition to specific conflicts being resolved. Emotional and financial costs reduce with skillful intervention.

Informal Help

Most everyday conflicts are settled out of court and without the aid of a professional helper but with the assistance of friends, neighbors, supervisors, peers, and other natural helpers (Johnson and Keedy 2010). These informal interventions serve "to interrupt a self-maintaining or escalating-malevolent cycle in one way or another and to initiate a de-escalating-benevolent cycle" (Walton 1969).

Informal third parties enter conflicts through diverse routes. A staff person may say, "What would you think about coming to the meeting Tuesday with Julie and Chris? I think we could use your level head." Parties may ask for help indirectly. A friend may call to discuss a potential romantic breakup and you guess he wants you to help out. Children, for instance, sense that parents (responsive parents, that is) will step into the role of third party when they are bullied on the playground, when "Jill won't give me back my teddy bear," or when big brother picks on them behind their parents' backs. The complaint, accompanied by anger or tears, serves as a request for help. The following are indirect cues indicating that your help may be needed:

Indirectly Asking for Help

1. A person seeks you out, and begins to cry or curse while describing a situation.
2. A person shares private information with you.
3. A person indicates that a crucial decision is impending.
4. A person makes you understand that his or her life is not smooth, that distress is present, or that things seem out of control.
5. A person says, "No one knows just how bad my supervisor is." (Johnson and Keedy 2010)

A teacher may notice a student, usually happy and in love with life, talks with a very negative tone. The student may say, in a dejected tone, "They won't hire me. They don't think I have any useful experience." She may be indirectly asking for the teacher's help—hoping a phone call or letter of recommendation would help her get hired.

Conditions for Helping

If you want to help people resolve their conflicts, you must choose when to intervene, what your role will be, what your intervention style will be, and what skills you will bring to the conflict (Noer 2010). Before you make a commitment to help, answer the following questions:

1. Are they ready for a third party? What evidence do you have to indicate readiness?
2. How do you know that they want *you* to help?

3. What skills prepare you to help them (Hill et al. 2008)? Can you best help by referring them to someone else?
4. Are you biased, committed to one of the parties, grinding your own ax, or unable to help because of time, position, or other matters?
5. Can you say no? If not, then you are probably too involved in the conflict to be an effective helper.

Once you have answered these questions, take the time to think about the consequences of your intervention. Remember, someone else's problem is not necessarily your problem—you have a choice. If you think you have no choice, you cannot be useful as an informal intervener. For example, many people get involved in conflicts between their parents only to discover the futility of trying to solve marital problems not of their making. If you do not want to get involved but think that you should, your lack of enthusiasm will result in lessened energy, frustration with how hard it is for them to change, and ineffective intervention. If you don't want to help, avoid becoming involved.

If you do choose to enter the conflict, however informal or nonspecific that role may be, take special care to retain your neutrality. Informal third parties often take sides (Van de Vliert 1981, 1985). If one of the parties succeeds in allying with you, the resulting alliance lessens the other side's power in the conflict and creates a new issue in the conflict—that of **unfair bonding.** Consultants to organizations are trained to avoid such biased behavior, but friends and relatives may slip into taking sides only to find that their "help" makes the conflict worse. **Siding** with one party has these effects:

- Siding implies that the outsider adopts the win/lose thinking of the principal parties, which reinforces the destructive effects of such thinking.
- Siding creates a winner (the chosen party) and a loser (the rejected party), causing escalation by the rejected party.
- Siding increases the number of conflict participants.
- By adding additional unbalanced perceptions, siding complicates the conflict issues.
- The siding outsider increases the stake of the parties in the conflict outcome. (Adapted from Van de Vliert 1981, 497–498)

Siding with one conflict party, although not wise for an intervener, does have its place. If your close friend is breaking off a relationship with her fiancé, you may choose to side with her to give her support. Anything else would be unrealistic. However, you should be aware that siding with one of the conflict parties precludes you from being an effective neutral helper; you will become an additional party to the conflict. There is only one exception to this—when you are formally coaching someone behind the scenes, which we will discuss later.

When you refuse to take sides you can be an effective change agent. For example, a new hospital employee was approached by people on opposite sides of a conflict about nursing shift assignments. One side wanted nursing shifts decided by seniority and the other side by experience. The new nurse found himself being pushed toward the middle—both sides wanted him to persuade the other side of the rightness of their position. He wisely told all parties, "I am too new to have an informed opinion. Besides, I value my

relationships with all of you. I prefer not to be involved with this problem." On a university campus, a faculty member's neutrality set the stage for an effective intervention. The faculty member heard from a student who wanted to graduate early, but another faculty member refused to consider her petition to waive or substitute a required course. The neutral faculty member offered to intervene by privately asking the resistant faculty member to discuss the issue in a meeting. The intervening professor did not take sides; she provided a forum for handling the matter creatively, and the student was able to graduate at the preferred time (Harrison 2007).

If you are going to intervene, clarify your new role and how it differs from your usual role with the conflict parties. If you have been a buddy, supervisor, romantic partner, coworker, or casual acquaintance, any role change needs to be negotiated. For example, a 14-year-old girl, Toni, lived with her foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Black, a couple in their mid-50s. The state children's service worker, Anne, found placements for Toni, certified potential foster homes for her, and provided her with ongoing counseling. Mr. and Mrs. Black began to quarrel about providing continuing care for Toni, since their own children were out of the home and they were beginning to want time without children. Mrs. Black wanted to wait until Toni graduated from high school to request another placement, whereas Mr. Black wanted Toni to move during the summer. Anne was able to act as a third party to their conflict, after making clear that her first loyalty was to Toni's best interests. Since all three people agreed on the interests, they were able, with Anne's help, to find a solution to the conflict. If Anne had not clarified her role, which involved not taking sides with either parent but keeping Toni's interests prominent, both parents would have tried to form a coalition with Anne.

Cautions about Informal Intervention

Several cautions are in order about helping others in conflict:

1. *Be certain the parties want help* in managing their conflict. Did they agree for you to help them, or did you get involved because you felt uncomfortable?
2. *Avoid becoming "the enemy."* The parties might temporarily bond with each other and attack you. Remember, you are entering an already existing system. Your focus, even if you are taking an informal role, is the relationship. If you become a common enemy by pushing the parties too hard, they will "gang up" on you.
3. You must constantly *remain aware of coalitions.* Any time a third party enters into an existing relationship, the relationship changes. Once you coalesce with one person, you lose your helpful role and change the relationship between the two parties. Because you cannot predict ahead of time exactly what will happen with your involvement, you must monitor the interactions to watch for shifts in coalitions. If you begin thinking, "No wonder he is struggling with her; she is completely unreasonable," you have formed a coalition and lost your effectiveness.
4. *Once the work is completed, the third party exits from the system.* The goal is to train the parties to manage their own relations. A helper who does not work himself or herself out of a job is not doing the job properly; the parties must become independent of the third party. A helper who improves the parties' relationship and helps them solve the topic issues gives the conflicting parties a real gift.

Application 9.1 My Informal Role

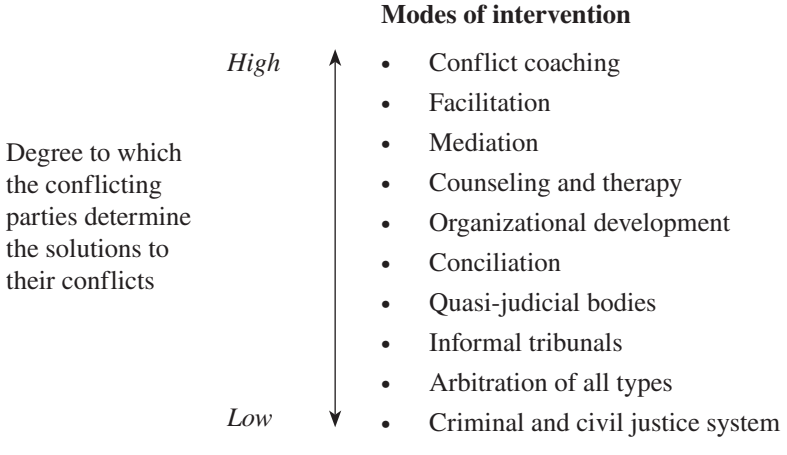
1. List skills you have developed that are useful for helping others. What skills do you lack at this point?
2. Discuss when you have effectively helped others.
3. List the times you have tried to help others and your efforts backfired.
   a. How did the parties ask, directly or indirectly, for help?
   b. What role did you negotiate ahead of time?
   c. To whom were you closest? Whom did you know the best?
   d. What process did they agree to before you intervened?
   e. How could you tell that your "help" was actually making things worse?
4. What did you learn from those experiences about being an informal third party?

Formal Intervention

The Intervention Continuum

Formal intervention requires specific training or education (Smaby and Maddux 2010; Hill et al. 2008). Usually, in Western culture, the formal third party is paid, such as in counseling, mediation, legal interventions, or organizational consultation. However, in some cultures and subcultures of the United States, formal intervention is not compensated. Native American, Cambodian, Hawaiian, Malaysian, and many other cultures use formal intervention to restore peace and justice in the culture. Some religious organizations use a form of unpaid intervention, such as convening a group to decide or advise on an issue. In mainstream Western culture we no longer have access to such traditional councils. Thus, we turn to paid, formal interventions.

Formal intervention modes differ according to the degree to which conflict parties determine the final outcome. In some forms of third-party intervention, the conciliator serves as a facilitator to parties who make their own decisions, whereas other forms impose a resolution to the conflict upon the parties.



In many interventions, combinations of these approaches are used. For instance, both mediation and arbitration can be used by the third party. Similarly, contracts between labor and management often specify a sequence of steps such as (1) negotiation, (2) mediation, and, if necessary, (3) arbitration. Divorce mediation sometimes uses arbitration mandated by a judge.

When the Parties Decide

Coaching

Conflict coaching is a dispute resolution option involving one disputant and one conflict professional. A general definition of conflict coaching describes the *process in which a coach and client communicate one-on-one for the purpose of developing the client's conflict-related understanding, interaction strategies, and interaction skills* (Jones and Brinkert 2008, 5). Coaching is now an established ADR field, growing in its use, because it is flexible, tailored to the needs of organizations, and prepares clients to manage their own conflicts in the future without needing the help of outside experts (Brinkert 2016). Coaching helps those who are unable or unwilling to engage in mediation (Wildflower and Brenna 2011), or for those who will be involved in conflict resolution in an organization but do not yet have the skills to practice conflict resolution at a high level. Coaching requires a systems level of thinking and is designed to empower clients to handle conflict. Further, it can be integrated with other approaches. For example, many parties cannot go directly into mediation—they need coaching behind the scenes before entering into mediation or other forms of resolution. Often, an organizational manager will ask a coach to work directly with disputing employees, hoping to avoid firing one or the other, or dealing with a formal grievance.

Requests for communication workshops often come to communication, organizational development, and legal professionals. Managers often ask for training when they would be better off requesting coaching. When you asked to provide training, consider the following questions before you decide at what level of intervention to respond:

- Are you concerned about one or more people in conflict rather than the whole system?
- Has the person requesting a workshop already decided to terminate someone's employment?
- Is a grievance or legal action in process?
- Would the person requesting training consider interviews with key people before deciding how to intervene?

A relational coaching model, consistent with the principles we have outlined in this book, is thoroughly described by Jones and Brinkert (2008). In their model, the coach helps people with identity, emotion, and power. The conflict coach *hears the stories* (usually one on one), *suggests possible conflict resolution approaches,* and works with each client *to tailor approaches* to their style and personal preference. Conflict coaching fits the skills you are developing as you study communication and conflict.

A second approach to conflict coaching, the CINERGY model, is described by Noble (2011). The International Coaching Federation serves to set standards for conflict coaches

as well as certify members. Both models emphasize the connection between conflict coaching and *integrated conflict management systems* (see Brinkert 2016 for an overview of the conflict coaching field). The trend in conflict coaching is that the coach serves as an organizational consultant, although working with one or two people at a time. Coaching is one part of many systems of conflict management, from training, to prevention, facilitation, informal mediation, and formal mediation in teams.

Listening deeply and well to the story of the conflict, asking open-ended questions, and making nonevaluative comments forms the crucial first step in coaching. Often, the process of listening and being heard de-escalates conflict. We suggest interviewing each party to the conflict separately, with a confidentiality contract (you do not report back to the manager, maintaining privacy for the individuals). Then write themes that you analyze from the interviews. Present these themes to the parties as a basis for tailoring communication skills and approaches to the parties.

In our own work as mediator, conflict coach, conciliation professional, and therapist, we are often asked to coach people through a conflict situation. For example, a good friend, Peter, has two sons who are entering their teen years. Peter's wife died a year ago; one of his wife's sisters, Julianne, explodes at him, blames him for his wife's death (she had cancer from unknown causes), and sends him vitriolic e-mails. Peter asked for coaching on how to respond to Julianne. He is not interested in any joint meetings with her or mediation or counseling—he just wants to know how to deal with her anger in the most productive way. Such is the province of coaching—to help Peter deal with the ongoing dispute in the extended family.

The coach helps parties deal with strong emotions (their own and others' feelings), and assists the person with a midlevel responses to emotion, whether he or she meets with the other party or not. Take the case of the new CEO of a large company. When James gave his "all hands" speech (a presentation to the entire company) at the beginning of his term, people all politely applauded and went on their way. Then, a day later, a long-term and competent employee sent him an e-mail saying, "Ah, what a bunch of B.S.—you will be just like all the other CEOs we have had here." As James later said, "He acted like there wasn't a human being on the other end of the e-mail." James asked for coaching help. After getting all the details, the coach suggested that James make sure he was in a reflective, open emotional mood, then walk to the other building, and knock on the employee's door. When the employee saw James at his door, he almost had a heart attack—and jumped back. James then said, "I could tell from your e-mail that you are concerned about this company. I would like to hear more about what works and doesn't work for you here." The employee talked for almost an hour. Then, 5 years later, that same employee stood up after another "all hands" presentation by James and said, "When James first came here I thought he was just like all the rest. I have come to realize that he has a good system in place and really cares about employees—thanks, James." Such is the potential power of coaching. The employee might have formed coalitions and sabotaged James and his new approaches; instead he became a valuable change agent in the organization.

Coaching is one way to bring a form of alternative dispute resolution to individuals in organizations or families. Key people who manage others, or serve as the communication link in families, then spread the positive effects of what they learn. In this way, coaching for conflict resolution differs from counseling, in that the purpose of coaching is to spread high-level communication skills through the system.

Mike is a recent college graduate, in his first job. He recently found out that his father remarried suddenly, without introducing his new wife to his two grown sons and their wives. Mike came into counseling for one main reason—he wanted to decide how to deal with his father and his new wife. His dad pressured him to visit over Christmas, but Mike felt angry and uncomfortable. Previous conversations with his father, on the phone, ended up with his dad telling him to "deal with it" and stop acting like a child. The counselor, who knew this would be a short-term coaching relationship, helped Mike decide what to do, for now. Mike decided to write his father a letter and tell him that he was not going to come for Christmas, and that he felt pressured to just go along with a decision that felt disrespectful to him and his brother. Mike continued, in the letter, to say that he agreed that his father had the right to do as he pleased, but that Mike also had the right to wait until he felt more comfortable with his dad's decision, and when he did not feel pressured. He ended by saying that he wanted an ongoing relationship with his father, and might come to like and get to know his wife, but that the timing would need to be something they all decided together. Mike was not interested in devoting more time and money in trying to understand his father or his own reactions. He wanted to deal honestly with the present situation without cutting off future contact. He hoped the letter would be a start in the right direction.

Prerequisite skills for effective coaching are explained in the *Comprehensive Coaching Model* (Jones and Brinkert 2008). They are the foundational skills presented throughout this book, such as emotional intelligence, listening openly, reframing (like the coach helped James do), and supporting the identity of the other.

A coach looks for opportunities to teach, solve problems, and transform conflicts. Coaches do not side with any of the parties. Advice is focused on how to communicate, not what the specific resolution should be. Coaching helps people learn to be collaborative. It is a powerful set of techniques for helping parties work with conflict, with or without facing the other party. Coaching is becoming a recognized profession, with certification programs and supervision ensuring quality of coaches (Wildflower and Brenna 2011).

Application 9.2 Coaching People in a System

A communication coach was asked to provide help for a large nonprofit organization. The CEO told the coach that a problem person, Ted, was closed to feedback, did not share his opinions when asked, and played favorites, especially with young, attractive women in the organization. The CEO asked the coach to interview all six members of the management team. Everyone told the coach that, indeed, Ted was closed to feedback and withheld his opinions. Ted, however, told the coach that the senior members of the leadership team did not appreciate his mentoring of young members of the organization. He felt he was providing an important service in an organization that had a lot of turnover. He agreed that he kept his opinions to himself—he felt he was not respected for the work he did. The coach noticed that almost all the new hires were young women, so maybe Ted should not be viewed as preferential toward young females. As the coach, how would you help with the following issues?

- Letting the team know that Ted would like to be respected for the mentoring he did, as well as his other work

(continued)

Application 9.2 Coaching People in a System

- Letting Ted know that the rest of the team wants to hear more from him
- How would you create a more open and safe environment for all six people?
- How would you model feedback to both Ted and the other leaders, using descriptive and not evaluative communication?
- How would you defuse the issue of sexist communication?
- How would you coach other leaders to invite Ted to tell them what he thinks?

Notice that the role of the communication coach is facilitating communication. You avoid the role of "expert," or falling into the role of counselor or mediator. For instance in this case, you would be falling into a typical trap if you assume that Ted has a personality problem and needs to be referred to a counselor.

Counseling

Individuals, couples, and families often seek the services of a professional counselor or therapist to help them resolve disputes. The counselor must have certain, usually licensed, credentials and is paid for her or his services. **Counseling** might entail (1) meeting with one person individually and/or (2) meeting with two people or an entire family system. The counselor focuses on all the issues at stake—the emotional and relational issues in addition to the topic dispute, which often simply serves as the "presenting problem." Sometimes, the conflicting parties, such as a committed couple, want to move to forgiveness and reconciliation, but not always.

The counselor might help the parties with personal issues and relational issues. Depending on the counselor and the parties to the conflict, the focus may include psychological issues such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety issues, personality disorders, or substance abuse. The counselor might stress how personal issues intersect with relationship issues. A professional counselor usually does not control the conversation process in the same way as an arbitrator or mediator might, yet has the task of helping the individuals and the system attain improved functioning, insight, and prevention of future conflict.

When might you seek counseling for a conflict situation? When your own feelings are so highly engaged that you cannot be productive, or use effective communication, you might seek help. When you are very low power in a relationship you may need an advocate. A counselor can help you with self-confidence. When you are suffering emotionally or relationally, and feel isolated, you might benefit from professional counseling. When you want to get counseling help for relationship aspects, remember that you do not have the power to coerce others to enter counseling with you. You can only invite them, and continue to seek help for yourself.

Counseling can be similar to conflict coaching. A counselor who is educated in conflict resolution and communication skills can suggest midlevel approaches to parties in conflict, can coach the client on language that will help the client confront or approach another, and can listen with the intent to defuse harsh startups, defensiveness, blaming, contempt, and criticism. If you are the client, it will be helpful for you to tell the counselor what you would most appreciate exploring. A woman came into counseling because she

and her husband were at an impasse about buying a specific house. The woman wanted to locate her business in one level of the new house, and enjoy renovating the whole house. The husband continued to say, "We don't need all that space, and it's too expensive." They had reached impasse about the issue, and the woman was extremely frustrated. Rather than initiating couples counseling, the counselor suggested approaches to the wife that might open up the conflict they were having. She suggested:

- Ask for an open conversation, a dialogue, in which each listens.
- Suggest exploring the pros and cons of buying the property.
- Tell the spouse what the decision means to each.
- Use the metacommunicative statement, "I would appreciate your listening to my point of view. When you say we don't need all that space, and I have a plan for the space, I feel dismissed?" (An X-Y-Z statement.)
- Ask for a sit-down meeting with each other about their finances.

After several conversations, the couple agreed to walk through the property without the Realtor, discussing how they might use the space. They negotiated with each other on a price for buying that would work and beyond which they would not go. The woman reported back to the counselor that she felt relieved, close to her spouse, and that they were no longer at odds. Coaching in the context of counseling worked well for this couple.

Counselors sometimes serve as members of a team to help family members solve problems, usually involving children, when the parents divorce. *The interdisciplinary settlement conference* draws on the skills of counselors and attorneys, delegated through the court system, to help parents solve problems without further court involvement (Shulmeyer, Adams, and Wood 2015). The settlement conference is one more example of integrated conflict management systems.

More people want to become mediators than there is demand for mediation (Brubaker, Noble, Fincher, Park, and Press 2014). Mediator skills remain essential for those wanting to work in the conflict management field as professionals. Keep in mind that the field of Alternative Dispute Resolution is moving rapidly toward integrated conflict management approaches, rather than relying on separate fields of practice. As you read about mediation, imagine how the skills of mediation might be employed in many different ways. Rather than pursuing a career as a mediator, you would be well advised to learn many different ways of pursuing conflict management, then deciding how you would like to use your integrated skills.

Mediation

Mediation can be defined as "a process in which disputants attempt to resolve their differences with the assistance of a third party whom they find acceptable" (Kressel 2014, 817). The mediator has no power to render a decision or impose a solution. Instead, the mediator helps the parties themselves to work out their differences and to construct a mutually acceptable solution (Greenwood 2008). Mediation works best in conflicts occupying the middle level of difficulty—those with the following:

- Moderate rather than extreme levels of conflict
- Parties who are motivated to resolve their differences through mediation

- Available resources: material, social support, and emotional maturity
- Parties of more or less equal power
- Absence of value conflicts resulting from religious differences or ethical principles (Kressel 2014, 820)

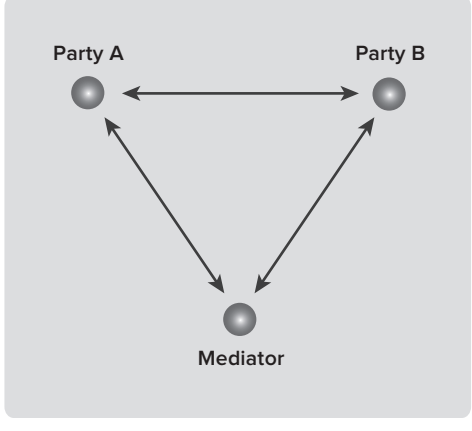
The mediator controls the process—not letting the participants interrupt, call names, speak in derisive ways, stonewall, escalate, avoid, or engage in other destructive moves. But the mediator does not control the outcome—the solutions to the dispute come from the parties themselves. Sometimes mediators engage in "shuttle diplomacy," keeping the parties separate and relaying messages back and forth. Separation of the parties is common in intense disputes such as court-ordered divorce mediation, or other situations in which the parties are unable to be in the same room with each other. However, most mediation is performed with the parties in the same room, with the mediator modeling and controlling the communication process for mutual benefit.

Originally, mediators were not expected to coach the parties. In contemporary practice, however, the roles of coach and mediator often overlap. A mediator, or person using mediation skills, may be interested both in teaching parties how to communicate and in helping resolving a specific dispute.

The structure of communication in mediation is shown in Figure 9.1. In true mediation, the mediator works to help the parties communicate, and is not a final judge or arbiter. As a result, as Figure 9.1 demonstrates, the mediator is present to serve the parties. The process of mediation assumes that conflict is inevitable and resolvable. It further assumes that people in a conflict have enough common interest to reach an agreement and that the parties are responsible for settling their own conflict. It assumes that the parties' solutions will be more responsive to their needs than a settlement imposed by a third party (Moore 2003).

Advantages of Mediation. Mediation brings distinct advantages to the management of conflict. First, because it relies on the parties' active negotiation and involvement, it promotes a *mutual stake in resolution;* therefore, solutions are more likely to be carried out by the parties. The agreement is theirs, not imposed, and as a result there is no "loser" who

Figure 9.1 Mediation (the solid lines indicate flow of communication)



feels compelled to strike back. The parties created the conflict, and they work for its solution. Their active involvement is a source of mutual empowerment; they take ownership of the conflict and, with the mediator's assistance, impose some limits on the process. In most mediation, the parties "have had some sort of prior relationship that will continue long after the dispute has been resolved" (Alper and Nichols 1981, 13; Kelly 2004).

Second, since mediated agreements represent the work of the parties, the solutions are more likely to be *integrative and creative* (Billikopf 2009). The parties know better than any outsider what will work for them, and with the assistance of the mediator, they can craft unique solutions that work for them. An example of this is two businessmen in a mediation process. When they first entered mediation, Nick demanded that Paul pay him $60,000 for his part of their business that Paul developed in Hawaii without Nick's input. Had they gone to court or arbitration, they would have "settled" for some amount between $0 and $60,000 (probably $25,000 to $35,000). They would have ruptured their business relationship and friendship. During mediation it was discovered that Nick really wanted (1) to be included and involved and (2) to be valued by his partner for his selling skills. They agreed to have Paul send Nick and Nick's wife twice a year to Hawaii, where Nick would train Paul's salespeople free of charge. This integrative and creative solution never would have happened in adjudication or arbitration.

Third, as this example also illustrates, mediation helps the parties meet their underlying interests rather than fight over positions. Nick's real needs were for involvement and being valued, not money. Fighting over the position of $60,000 would not have kept the business partnership together, and would have obscured the underlying interests. Often, someone wants an apology rather than money.

Fourth, mediation is usually cheaper than adjudication or arbitration. For instance, in one study of 449 cases mediation settled 78% of them with an average cost of $2,750, compared to $11,800 for arbitration (Brett, Barsness, and Goldberg 1996). The settlement rates for different types of mediation vary but are generally high (Kelly 2004).

Fifth, mediated parties are more satisfied with the process than are participants in adjudication or arbitration. All you have to do is talk to someone who has gone to court and ask, "How was that process for you?" You will hear frustration, blame, and anger. In contrast is a couple whose divorce was successfully mediated some years ago. They remain satisfied as their children have grown and their circumstances changed. They had two young girls and were committed to some form of co-parenting. Since the father planned a move to the West Coast, they had to work out living arrangements, child support, and travel and holiday agreements. Ten years later, the couple came back to the original mediators for help with a problem that developed when the girls went to college. As they called for an appointment, the wife said, "We didn't dare fight. We've told everyone how great this process is, so everybody is looking to us to see how we will do. We *have* to work it out."

Managers, counselors, and individual citizens can do much to promote mediation, when it is not widely available. Managers can provide mediation training for themselves and their employees, can establish formal mediation processes in an organization, and can develop an ongoing relationship with conflict resolution specialists who can provide coaching, informal conciliation, mediation, and training (Kressel 2014).

Gender and Mediation Styles. Three main findings result from ongoing research on conflict styles in mediation. Women tend to favor communal and process-oriented conflict resolution styles. This is true for conflict parties in general, and also for women mediators.

Men lean toward focused and task-oriented approaches. Mediators are evaluated by clients differently based on gender. Female mediators must demonstrate an impartial, unbiased approach, while male mediators gain trust by showing empathy (see Olekalns 2014 for an analysis of gender and mediation). As we have pointed out through this book, a healthy mix of male-gender and female-gender role styles adds up to the most trustworthy and effective style. The problem-solving style of mediating has, until recently, remained the default, preferred approach to mediation. Relational styles focus less on reaching specific agreements and more on facilitating communication and dealing with emotions and underlying perceptions so that the parties can reach agreements (Kressel 2014, 834). Mediators are well advised to be stylistically flexible, depending on the needs of the situation and the context.

How might this be accomplished? A *female mediator* should remain unbiased, and avoid becoming overly involved in the emotional communication of any one party. At the same time, she should ask questions that will help the parties to understand their feelings, and the importance of their ongoing connection. One example of an almost-failed mediation occurred when a female mediator began to admonish a man who was berating and threatening his female partner. She told him to stop communicating in this demeaning and threatening way (overly directive). He stood up to walk out, and the female mediator blocked his entry from the room. The situation almost escalated into violence (this unhappy incident was reported to one of the authors who was supervising mediators as part of their training). The mediator would have likely been more successful saying something like this:

Mediator: "Dan, it looks to me as though Karen is not listening to you; she seems to be tuning you out. I want to be sure you are heard. Would you tell me what your strong feelings are about, and I'll coach you on how to say what you need to say to Karen so she can hear you."

Dan: "I am **not** going to let my children have any contact with that sleaze-bag boyfriend she's hooked up with!"

Mediator: You are concerned about Karen's friend's contact with the children?

(The mediator reframes a dominating style into a concern, and reframes *my children* into *the c*hildren.)

One simple reframe will not resolve this relational dispute, but the mediator shows impartiality by respecting Dan and helping him to be heard. Notice that the mediator coaches while mediating.

A male mediator heard a strong outburst from a female party in the middle of a session.

Sharon: "I cannot trust a single thing this lying SOB says."

Male mediator: "Let's stay with the agenda we set up. We are discussing child support, based on your incomes. We'll get to issues of validation later."

Sharon: "He lies."

Male mediator: "The tax returns are official documents. We can work with those."

Obviously, the male mediator would have increased his demonstration of empathy by saying something like this:

Mediator: "Sharon, you are concerned that Ken is misrepresenting his income? Could you help me understand your concerns by telling me specifically what you can't trust?"

The couple is divorcing partly because of lack of trust. When the mediator listens to Sharon, begins to search for the source of her mistrust, both parties can see that their concerns will be taken seriously. Male mediators must treat emotion as part of the context and valid process of mediation.

Limitations to Mediation Limitations to mediation do exist. First, not all conflict parties can agree to work through their conflict with the "enemy." They may either not want to talk openly about their difficulties with the other or not want to be in the presence of the other person. Many conflicts escalate to the point where conjoint constructive work is not possible. The conflict may be so protracted that the only solution is a win/lose structure in which an outside party decides. In addition, if someone thinks he or she can win by going to court, that person is less likely to want mediation. Furthermore, attorneys who do not favor mediation will not refer clients to mediation. Attorneys who have not been exposed to nonadversarial methods of conflict resolution are less likely to refer clients to mediation.

Mediation may not be appropriate for certain types of relationships (Cloke 2001). Mediation involves considerable commitment to working on the conflict. However, many parties are not prepared to reinvest in a relationship that has been problematic for them; they would rather try other routes to settlement or just continue the conflict. For example, Kressel, Jaffee, Tuchman, Watson, and Deutsch (1980) discovered that enmeshed couples were so intertwined in their dynamics that mediation was not successful for them. Similarly, couples with weak relationship bonds are often not good candidates for mediation. Both too much and too little involvement with the other work against mediation.

Another limitation of mediation is that when one person, usually the woman, has been abused physically or emotionally, she may not be able to speak up with enough authority in mediation to generate options, argue for her perspective, and avoid being manipulated. Even when no overt abuse has occurred, many women are not able to negotiate with the person they once loved (and may still love) even if the relationship is breaking up. Some women try to work on the relationship as it is breaking up, sometimes out of concern for the children, but sometimes because of cultural conditioning. Such power imbalances can also happen in the workplace, where the woman is not able to stand up to supervisors and push for what she wants.

The final limitation of mediation is that involvement in mediation is sometimes not worth the effort. Many small disputes may be more efficiently handled by third-party adjudication, such as by small-claims court or a justice of the peace, than by the disputants trying to work with each other. The conflict may not be serious enough to warrant "working through" by the conflict parties.

Mediation Settings Mediation may be applied to a wide variety of settings and disputes. It has been used successfully in such diverse arenas as

- **Business disputes**
  - Partnership concerns
  - Contract disagreements Management team disputes
  - Entire work groups split into coalitions
  - Employee grievances
  - Sexual harassment
  - Employee–employee disputes

- **Domestic disputes**
  - Separation and divorce
  - Estate distribution after a death Parental conflicts
  - Parent–child concerns
  - Disputes between romantic partners who are splitting up
  - Grandparental visitation of children
- **Educational settings**
  - Disputes over grades or treatment in class
  - Relationships between students and other students
  - Student–faculty relationships
  - Faculty–faculty conflicts
  - Faculty–administration disputes
- **Community/neighborhood disputes**
  - Barking dogs
  - Property line disputes Small claims
  - Landlord–tenant disputes
- **The criminal justice system**
  - Juvenile court situations
  - VOR (victim–offender restitution)
  - Treatment in detention facilities
- **Labor–management conflicts**
  - Contract disputes
  - Work rules
  - Fringe benefits packages

Community mediation programs continue to expand across much of the United States, with high rates of settlement success. In Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, and other states, the success rates for mediating community disputes range from 75% to 95% (Umbreit 1995, 59). Community centers typically rely on volunteers who are trained by the local dispute resolution center. Community mediation programs offer excellent training, supervision, and guidance, as well as opportunities to help others resolve disputes. Complaints range from noisy neighbors to "He took my parking space"—almost any issue one can imagine that arises in a neighborhood. You can contact your local mediation center where you might volunteer and receive training. You should see this avenue as primary a place for you to volunteer, rather than to be paid for your expertise.

Schools, ranging from elementary schools to universities, are using considerable amounts of mediation. Many grade schools, middle schools, high schools, and universities have instituted programs of mediation and standards for programs have been specified (Association for Conflict Resolution 2007a). In peer mediation programs, the party's peers will help solve disputes ranging from playground difficulties to teacher–student problems.

As an example of peer mediation, here are some tasks for fourth- and fifth-grade mediators when they see a conflict beginning:

1. When you see a conflict brewing during recess or lunch, introduce yourself and ask both parties if they want to solve their problem.
2. If they do, go to the area designated for solving problems. Explain and get agreement to the four basic rules: (a) agree to solve the problem, (b) don't call each other names, (c) do not interrupt, and (d) tell the truth.
3. Decide who will talk first. Ask that person what happened and how he or she feels, using active listening skills to repeat what is said. Do the same with the other person.
4. Ask the first party and then the second party for alternative solutions.
5. Work with the students toward a solution that they both think is good.
6. After the agreement is reached, congratulate the parties and fill out the Conflict Manager Report Form. (Umbreit 1995, 78)

School mediation programs have had considerable success (Kowalski 1998). Of 137 disputes between students in Honolulu, 92% resulted in complete agreement, and after the institution of peer mediation in New York schools, suspensions decreased by more than half. Clearly, school mediation is a viable form of third-party intervention for a variety of disputes (Burrell and Cahn 1994; Umbreit 1995). In the university and college setting, campus mediation centers deal with disputes over grades and behavior in classrooms, dorms, and married-student housing. Some of the centers provide family mediation services to students as well.

Family mediation takes many forms, the most common application being separation and divorce. With almost half of all marriages ending in divorce and the pain of going through the court system all too evident, mediation of separation and divorce is becoming increasingly common. Mediation cannot replace the legal process; it is an adjunct to it. By law, the judge retains all the authority to decide the details of a divorce, but a cooperative couple that comes to a judge with a fair agreement will find the process much easier than trying to "prove the other one wrong." The couple, with the mediator's help, fashions (within the constraints of the law) an agreement that will work best for their unique situation. The acrimony, lingering conflict, and repeated trips to court by couples choosing the legal adversarial approach have catalyzed the mediation movement.

In the family context, family business and estate mediation are becoming more popular. When a family owns a small business, for example, and the time comes for Mom or Dad to retire, mediation involves all family members in the decision making so options can be charted that work best for all. Whether it is the family pharmacy, ranch, or Subway® franchise, (1) topic, (2) relationship, (3) identity, and (4) process issues need to be carefully addressed. Mediation provides a framework for discussing important family issues, in addition to the usual issues of taxes, estate planning, and control of decisions. With mediation, all the TRIP issues can be brought to the surface and negotiated, serving the entire family. The following article demonstrates the advantages of using mediation in estate planning.

Application 9.3 The Family Estate

A mother, in her late 70s, is worried about her fairly sizable estate. It includes real estate, stock, and a long-time family cabin in the mountains. She wants to do the right thing for her three grown children and their grown families so the adult siblings will not bicker after she's gone. She vividly remembers a nephew who, after her father's death, broke into the family house and took one of his guns. After 25 years, the family still talks about it!

The mother and two of the three siblings know nothing about mediation. The other sibling urges her to engage a tax attorney first and then ask a mediator to meet with the whole family of four. If she does this:

What content issues might possibly arise?

What relationship issues have not been addressed?

Whose identity concerns might show up?

What procedural issues could cause difficulties?

If she follows the advice of only one of the siblings, what concerns might the others have?

How might she or they proceed with selecting a mediator?

Mediation can be used in conjunction with counseling to resolve adolescent–parent conflicts—those natural calamities that arise in most families. Whereas for some, adolescence is a minor inconvenience, for others it is "a painful exhausting journey that cuts into the bond between parent and child" (Umbreit 1995, 116). A trained mediator can help both the adolescent and the parent(s) develop workable agreements to get them through this all too often contentious stage of family life. Whatever the need for family mediation, mediators who are members of the Association for Conflict Resolution follow specific standards for practice.

Victim–Offender Restitution (VOR) is a specialized form of mediation designed for cases in which someone is guilty of a crime (Umbreit, Coates, and Vos 2004). Rather than resolving the issue by involving the defendant and the court system, VOR brings the victim into the process. Both the victim and the perpetrator tell their story and review options for compensation of the victim. Such an approach allows the victim participation, brings the reality of the crime home to the offender, and sets the conditions under which the offender can compensate the victim for what was done. It recognizes the victim's rights, allows the offender to take responsibility for what he or she has done, and provides avenues for restoration. A poignant example of a creative use of mediation for a minor crime is presented in the box.

"I Stole Your TV"

An example illustrates the constructive use of mediation to achieve both symbolic and actual restitution. An elderly woman returned to her home one afternoon to find her television set gone. The

(continued)

"I Stole Your TV"

youth who had stolen it was apprehended and admitted that he had sold the set to a friend. Rather than face a fine or continuance under probation, the defendant, in the presence of the mediation board and of the victim, sat down to work out a nonpunitive resolution to submit to the judge for his approval. The woman broke down in the course of telling the boy, "I watch television all day. This is all I do. I watch 16 hours a day. You have taken the heart of my life away." Confronted with personal implications of his act, the youth agreed to accept a job in order to buy the widow a new set. In addition, he agreed that he would accompany her to the bank to cash her weekly check and escort her to the market to do her shopping. A postscript to the case reports that after inviting the boy to have coffee with her, the woman learned from him that his mother had died and that he lived in an uncongenial relationship with his father and brother. Thereafter, these Saturday morning coffee hours became a weekly feature. The closing entry reports that the boy had volunteered to paint the woman's kitchen.

Source: Alper and Nichols 1981, 146–147.

Mediation is used in the business setting as well. When a dispute arises between two co-workers, between a supervisor and an employee, or within a self-directed work team, mediation allows the parties to address the issue in a confidential way.

Some examples of the use of mediation in business settings are as follows: A wife and husband were co-owners of a business, and he took out loans against the business without consulting her. With the ongoing help of the mediator, they restored their working relationship, got their employees out of the middle of their struggles, and began cooperating fully with each other. In another case, a male supervisor in a large institution was investigated by the personnel office for sexual harassment. After he was found not guilty of harassment, something had to be done to reestablish the working relationship between him and his female administrative aide. The mediator worked with them to (1) set clear boundaries on appropriate behavior on both their parts, (2) stop tattling to higher authorities, and (3) establish clear protocols for communication behavior in the office. These are samples of the kinds of disputes that can be successfully handled via mediation.

Mediation: Agreement or Transformation? Mediators' views of the mediation process differ on two primary points: (1) What issues are tackled in sessions and (2) what the goals are for the mediation. Some mediators (usually those with technical and/or legal training) will only mediate on the topic or content issues. For example, many legal jurisdictions have a "settlement week" when they convene groups of attorneys to mediate cases that are backlogged on the court calendars. Usually, the process used is **shuttle diplomacy,** keeping the parties separate and going back and forth with proposals. This type of mediation is usually quite different from, for example, family mediation that deals with topic, relationship, identity, and process issues. In family mediation, the parties are together a good portion of the time. Both types of mediation have their place, but as a user of the services you should be aware that the mediators' views of mediation result in vastly different processes.

A local attorney who was going to mediate between two different factions (an insurance company with an attorney and a tribal elder with a representative) called for advice. In the phone call, it became apparent that his only considerations were topic issues. The

parties did settle the topic issues exclusively, primarily because of the natural empathy of the attorney, whom everyone saw as a warm and friendly person.

Disputants in an ongoing relationship do better when mediators expand the issues being considered. The results of research on family mediation are quite clear—when mediators bypass the relational issues and focus only on "facts," they have trouble obtaining agreement from the parties (Donohue 1991; Donohue, Allen, and Burrell 1988; Donohue, Drake, and Roberto 1994). Sustainable agreements take relationship and identity issues into account.

Mediators also differ on whether they search for agreement or transformation (Association for Conflict Resolution 2007b). Some mediators just want an agreement—to settle the present conflict. Others want to see clients undergo transformation—a change in how they see themselves and the other. The second approach combines coaching, counseling, and mediation.

Transformation occurs when clients experience empowerment and give recognition to each other. Clients are empowered when they more clearly realize their goals (empowerment of goals), become aware of a wider range of options (empowerment of options), increase their skills (empowerment of skills), gain new awareness of resources (empowerment of resources), and make conscious decisions about what they want to do (empowerment of decision making). "When these kinds of things occur within relationships, the party experiences a greater sense of self-worth, security, self-determination, and autonomy" (Bush and Folger 2004, 87).

The "just get agreement" problem-solving approach to mediation is more aligned with an individualistic worldview, in which we see ourselves as separate entities. On the other hand, the transformative view has as its underpinnings a relational view—that we are all interconnected and part of an organic whole.

Mediation Process and Skills For mediation that includes more than the just the topic dispute, the mediator needs to have an expansive set of skills to control the process of communication, affirm both parties, and move the parties toward creative content and relational solutions, all the while staying within legal and cultural parameters. The mediator needs to have both reflective skills and directive skills. The parties need to tell their stories, and later move toward solving the joint problems.

The stages of mediation are as follows:

- Entry
- Diagnosis
- Negotiation
- Agreements
- Follow-up

When one follows these steps in mediation, key tasks are accomplished at each step. The mediator wants to do the following things at each stage:

Entry

1. Explain the process.
2. Clarify your role and establish your credibility.
3. Explore consequences of not proceeding.

Diagnosis

1. Gather data with interviews and observations.
2. Look at the conflict elements:
   - Topic
   - Relational
   - Identity/face-saving
   - Procedure
3. Avoid rushing to solutions.

Negotiation

1. Create a safe setting.
2. Establish common ground.
3. Set an agenda.
4. Balance power/enforce equal talk time.

Agreements

1. Generate different ways to meet interests.
2. Specify who, what, when, where, and how.
3. Agree on the form of the agreement—oral, written, legal.

Follow-up

1. Decide on exact follow-up procedure.
2. Notify other stakeholders of actions.
3. Reach agreement for how to deal with future disputes.
4. Embed the agreement within the system. (Yarbrough and Wilmot 1995)

The key to effective mediation is the level of competence of the mediator and the motivation of the parties (McGuigan and Popp 2007). If you are to be a mediator or other type of third-party intervener, you have an ethical obligation to (1) receive extensive training in the necessary skills, (2) have the opportunity to try those skills with co-mediators or mentors, (3) be supervised by experienced mediators, and (4) continue your skill training and exposure to the literature on mediation. One cannot learn mediation skills solely from a book—they have to be practiced and critiqued. You should continually question all of your assumptions about what mediation is and what it can accomplish.

Culture In different cultures, the intervention forms will differ from the above. The Hawaiian system of Ho'oponopono is so creative that it is discussed in depth in the final chapter on forgiveness and reconciliation. In addition, Ury (1990) studied the Kalahari bushmen, who follow a sequence for solving conflicts that taps the **third force**—the power of the community. The disputants actually meet in front of others and work the conflict through with the participation of others.

In every serious dispute between two individuals or groups a third party is at work. The third party is usually not a single individual but a collective of third parties: a third force of concerned relatives, friends, and elders. These third parties are typically "insider third parties" with strong ties to either one or both sides. There can be no private disputes of any seriousness because a dispute affects everyone.

The role of spirit or religion in resolving disputes is also recognized in many societies. In Malay society, for example, the spiritual elements play a prominent role, and the mediator spends informal time with the disputants in all kinds of contexts—attending family gatherings and weddings, for example. Native American cultures that keep their spiritual traditions alive continue to use spiritual force to resolve conflicts. Umbreit (1995) provides a comprehensive overview of some of these approaches and says this about some Native American traditions of dispute resolution:

> A model of mediation that is culturally sensitive to Native Americans and aboriginal people in Canada would be quite different from the dominant Western models. Such a model is likely to include consensus decision making; preference for co-mediation; separate pre-mediation sessions with each person; involvement of elders in the mediation; presence of chosen family members; circular seating; silence as comfortable; interruptions as inappropriate; nonlinear agenda; and the use of cultural metaphors and symbols. From this culture perspective, mediation occurs within a large cultural context. (37)

Just as we cannot import other cultural forms into mainstream Western culture without modification, neither can we export Western modes directly into other cultural situations. Similarly, within subcultures of Western society, one needs to adapt dispute resolution mechanisms to address their special situations. Many community mediation centers solicit volunteers who are from diverse groups as a way to bridge the gap between traditional mediation techniques and the special needs of subcultures.

Application 9.4 You as Mediator

Go back to the section on "mediation settings" and pick a context that interests you as a potential mediator. Based on your selection:

- What about that setting seems to be a natural "fit" for you?
- List the specific skills you have that could be used in mediation.
  - Facilitation skills (the soft skills, listening, reflecting, and others)
  - Directive skills (taking control of the process, being firm and others)
- What skills of yours could be improved?
  - Facilitation skills
  - Directive skills
- If you want to become a mediator
  - What training would you seek?
  - What readings would you do?

(continued)

Application 9.4 You as Mediator

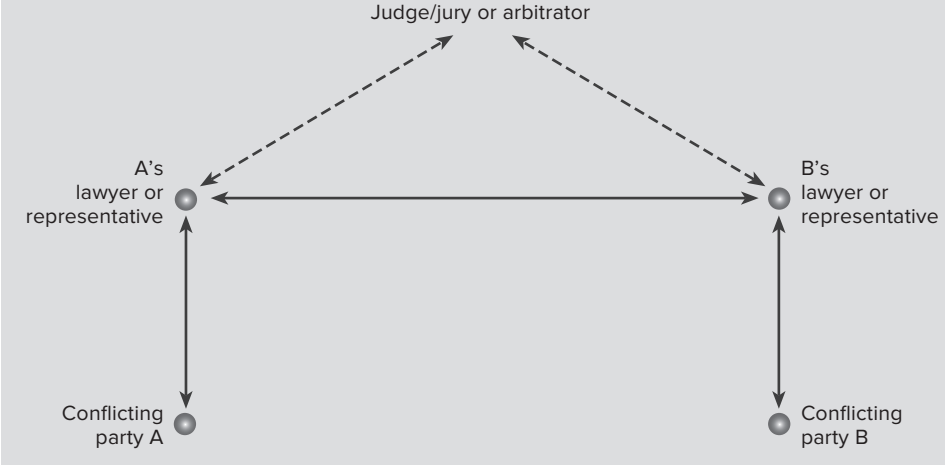
- How would you begin?
- Who might you select as a trained supervisor?
- What associations would you join as a way to stay current?
- Who might refer cases to you?
- Who might you go in partnership with?
- How would mediation fit with your other professional responsibilities?

The above questions might be answered best by interviewing a mediator to gain insight into what he or she suggests. This assignment might be part of a group report or activities for your class. If there are enough mediators available in your community to interview, you can compare and compile answers for a class report or paper.

When an Outsider Decides

The structure of communication differs profoundly between a mediation model and adjudication/arbitration. The mediator is there to facilitate communication between the parties. The mediator is the convener, the facilitator, but not the one who makes the decision. Figure 9.2 shows the communication linkages when arbitration or adjudication is used.

Figure 9.2 Lines of communication with professional advocates. (Solid lines indicate heavy communication; broken lines signify that the judge or jury is used as a reference point for the attorneys, often without direct communication; absence of lines signifies no direct communication.)



Arbitration: An Expert Decides

Arbitration and adjudication share a similar structure. In both, a third party is empowered to decide the outcome of a conflict. Parties who cannot resolve their conflict go before an arbitrator or judge/jury to solve their conflict. The arbitration might be focused on a labor contract, or between two business partners. Such contract disputes are a common form of "rights" arbitration; many managers and line workers routinely sign contracts with a clause calling for arbitration in the case of disagreement. If you buy a car, have to make numerous repairs, and cannot get compensation from the dealer, you can ask for arbitration. The arbitrator listens to both sides of the dispute, questions you and the car dealer (or your representatives), and renders a judgment. When the parties contractually agree to arbitration, the arbitrated judgment is enforceable in court. This process is called **binding arbitration;** the judgment is final.

Voluntary, or nonbinding, arbitration is sometimes used when the parties have not contractually agreed to binding arbitration. In nonbinding arbitration, if parties do not accept the judgment they then proceed to more arbitration or court.

Arbitration has some distinct features that make it useful as a form of third-party intervention. First, unlike adjudication, both parties enter into arbitration voluntarily, unless they have signed an arbitration agreement as part of the terms of employment. Second, it keeps one party from using passive-aggressive or impasse tactics on the other—sooner or later the issue will be resolved (Coogler 1978). Third, in many cases the arbitrator has special training in the content area of the dispute, such as in contract arbitration. When the arbitrator has special expertise in the content of the arbitration, he or she can often offer creative content solutions. Fourth, arbitration is readily available for use in situations in which the participants experience a communication breakdown and are no longer able to solve their own problems. Finally, arbitration is a process that can be used for a wide variety of content areas, ranging from contract disputes, medical malpractice, or landlord–tenant conflicts to domestic relations (Alper and Nichols 1981; Tyler 1987).

Most law schools now provide training in alternative dispute resolution. Thus, the well-educated attorney joins the conflict management community in providing flexible, appropriate levels of conflict management skills. Many attorneys provide informal coaching with their clients before settlement conferences or mediation.

Arbitration does have some limitations. It tends to resolve conflicts solely on a content basis. Arbitration typically does not address the relational or face-saving aspects of the dispute, which is unfortunate because if parties can reach some accord in their relationship, the content issues can often be worked out. Arbitration reinforces the assumption that the parties cannot learn to manage their own difficulties—that only a third party can find a solution. Arbitration reinforces escalation as a legitimate tactic because intransigence will automatically bring in an outsider. Despite these disadvantages, arbitration is still a widely used alternative in conflict management because it binds parties procedurally to seek resolution. The prerequisite that parties agree to arbitrate (either contractually before the dispute begins or voluntarily once they are in conflict) enhances the chances for productive conflict management.

Adjudication: Judge or Jury Decides

Adjudication is a process in which parties present their case before a judge or jury. Adjudication assumes that parties are unable to solve their own conflicts, and a decision must

be imported from outside (Wissler 2004). It is similar to arbitration in that a third party decides, but adjudication can be put into motion without mutual consent. In adjudication, you can sue the other party, forcing a decision whether the other wants to participate or not. Additionally, the officials of the criminal justice system can initiate charges, for instance, in cases of bodily assault, robbery, and related offenses. Adjudication assumes that a full argument of each side of a conflict will allow a judge or jury to make a just decision.

Once a suit has been filed with the court (or a petition filed for arbitration), lawyers or other advocates negotiate with each other, often instructing the conflict parties (the litigants) to not talk to each other. In this structure, the litigants set into motion a struggle that the lawyers act out. The original conflict metamorphoses into a conflict between the two lawyers (Irving and Bohm 1978). The attorneys become the prime players, who negotiate with each other, trying to estimate what the judge (or jury) will do with the case. Each lawyer's estimate of the judge's, jury's, or arbitrator's probable response becomes the basis of his or her negotiation strategy. The lawyers then try to persuade each other that their views are correct.

Court processes are fairly well known. One party files charges in court and the other must appear to respond. Between the time of the filing and the court date, the lawyers usually negotiate with each other regarding the case. For example, a landlord charges a tenant with violation of a lease agreement because the tenant signed a 1-year lease and moved after 4 months. The landlord files suit to recover the rent for the 8 months the renter was not living there. The two lawyers typically begin negotiations, calling and writing back and forth. If they are not able to reach settlement, the case goes to court; a judge or jury, after hearing testimony and evidence from both sides, may decide that the tenant must pay the 8 months' rent, plus attorney fees. If no appeal is filed, the resolution process will end with the enforcement of the action. In a case like this, a justice of the peace may decide the case.

Litigating a dispute is both an alternative to negotiating and, at the same time, a way to force negotiation. Since most lawsuits are settled before trial (more than 90%, according to most studies), it is useful to view litigation not only as a way to "go to court" but also as a highly structured negotiation game, a "refined and constrained version of competitive bargaining" (Goodpaster 1992, 221). Filing a lawsuit forces a nonresponding party to attend to the complaint—avoidance is not possible once a suit is filed.

Positive Features of Adjudication "Equal protection of the law" allows everyone access to a resolution process and does not require the agreement of the other party. Therefore, adjudication serves as a power-balancing mechanism. For example, individuals can sue large corporations. In the case of abused or neglected children, a state agency can bring the parents before a court to determine their suitability for continued parenting. The children's representative, a guardian ad litem, acts as their agent. When power is extremely unbalanced, as in cases involving children, intervention should empower the weaker party. A second positive feature of adjudication is that it provides rules for fairness, such as the admission of evidence. In some interpersonal conflicts, one party monopolizes the process, with few restraints. Process restraints are, however, built into the legal system. Each party has the equal right to speak. The process rules allow both parties to fully explicate their positions. Third, the use of professionals to speak for the conflict parties is an advantage for parties who need assistance in preparation or presentation of their case. The

trained legal expert can develop the best case for the client, ensure fair procedures, and set forth the case with vigor.

Finally, *adjudication serves as a backup for other conflict management procedures.* When arbitration, mediation, conciliation/coaching, and negotiation fail to produce agreement, the disputants can go to court. The appeal process allows people to present their case in a higher court if they dislike an earlier judgment. The moral as well as physical power present in our judicial and criminal justice systems provides a last-resort option when necessary.

Limitations of Adjudication The judicial system also has some limitations in dealing with conflict. First, it has been overused and, as a consequence, is overburdened and misused. Former chief justice Warren Burger, referring to the legal profession, said, "The obligation of our profession is to serve as healers of human conflicts" (Ray 1982), but "suing has become an American parlor game" (Marks 1981). As a result, there is an "unprecedented demand upon the judicial system, leading to considerable frustration and delay . . ." (Sander 1977, 2). Guarantees of speedy justice are difficult to receive; delays of as much as 2 years between filing and first court appearances are common. Because the judicial system has been used and talked about so much, many individuals automatically think of it as the way to "get even" for some wrong. They often do not realize they have chosen a mode of conflict resolution until "they find themselves caught up in it with apparently no way out" (Coogler 1978, 6). One legal scholar concludes, "It seems clear that it is simply too cumbersome and expensive for most (minor) disputes" (Sander 1977, 24). A continuing round of court battles in order to win can deplete almost anyone's finances.

A second disadvantage of using the legal system for conflict resolution is that *conflict parties no longer make their own decisions.* For example, in a dispute involving a community (such as one over an environmental issue), "Litigation takes the decision out of the hands of the communities who must live with its consequences" (Wehr 1979, 123). Similarly, if two people are involved in a protracted domestic dispute such as a contested divorce, the parties stop dealing directly with each other and the attorneys take over the negotiation process. Sometimes the conflict parties, after seeing the communication structure inherent in adjudication, decide to go a different route. For example, Sharon and her ex-husband, Ted, had been divorced for 3 years and were having difficulties agreeing on child visitation arrangements. They lived in different towns, and each had consulted an attorney about visitation options. One day in April, Sharon flew to Ted's city and called him, only to discover that his attorney had told him, "Don't talk to her, and hold out for all you can get." Sharon told Ted that she had received the same advice from her attorney. They realized that if they both followed their lawyers' advice, they would be in for a long court battle. The two of them wisely decided to empower themselves. They met the next day and worked out an agreement—though the process was difficult for them. They were the original parties to the dispute and were the ones who would have to live with the long-term results of a decision. Therefore, turning over the decision to their representatives wasn't desirable.

A final disadvantage of adjudication is that the *adversarial system operates on a win/lose set of conflict assumptions that encourages escalation tactics* (Hartje 1984; Menkel-Meadow 1986). Often the lawyer is seen as each client's only champion in a hostile world.

This belief promotes escalation when, in fact, it might not be necessary. In order to file an action, one has to blow up the magnitude of the conflict to a "You owe us" or "We'll get you" frame of mind; one tries to win at the other's expense. Filing an action is a signal of serious conflict, and unfortunately, filing sets an escalating process in motion. Because attorneys are charged with solely representing the interests of their client, "The client's interest is always perceived as being in opposition to the interests of the other party. The lawyer cannot and does not regard the parties as having a common problem which he or she will help resolve" (Coogler 1978, 7). The gathering of evidence for one side of the conflict disregards the relational and face-saving interests of both parties. While the parties cooperate by following procedural rules, this level of commonality does not open up creative outcomes. The escalating, win/lose atmosphere is often difficult to disengage from once it has been set into motion. Suits and countersuits reflect continual escalation, with each "loser" trying again on some other basis until resources or options are exhausted.

Summary

This chapter gives an overview of resolution formats that may be helpful in resolving conflict, ranging from informal to formal modes. The purpose of intervening in conflict is to transform the conflict elements, thereby allowing for effective management. You can intervene informally, especially when you are aware of the pitfalls. Formal intervention modes differ according to how much the original conflict parties determine the outcome. In both adjudication and arbitration, an outsider (judge, jury, or arbitrator) decides the outcome of the dispute. Coaching, counseling, and mediation, on the other hand, involve the participants in the management of their own struggle. Coaching has grown into a recognized field in alternative dispute resolution. Coaching, counseling, and mediation all employ the skills taught in conflict management. The mediator facilitates communication and helps the parties reach an agreement that will work for both of them. Various settings for mediation exist, ranging from family disputes to business concerns all the way to international conflicts. For instance, school mediation programs are useful throughout all levels of schools. Although some mediators want only agreement, others strive for transformation of the conflict parties. There are profound differences in third-party intervention across cultures. In collectivist cultures, people often use extended networks of people to help parties reach and keep agreements, whereas Western cultures generally do not.

Key Terms

informal intervention 290
formal intervention 290
unfair bonding 292
siding 292
conflict coaching 295
counseling 298
mediation 299
Victim-Offender Restitution (VOR) 306
shuttle diplomacy 307
third force 309
arbitration 312
binding arbitration 312
adjudication 312

Review Questions

1. Explain the statement, "The goal of all intervention is to transform the conflict elements." Choose an example to illustrate the idea.
2. What are the effects of siding with one of the conflict parties?
3. What are cautions to remember when you are considering being a third-party helper?
4. How do coaches help with conflicts?
5. What is the role of counseling as informal intervention?
6. Describe different approaches to mediation discussed in the chapter.
7. What are the interpersonal advantages and disadvantages of adjudication?
8. What are the interpersonal advantages and disadvantages of arbitration?
9. Explain how negotiation functions in all the forms of third-party intervention.
10. Explain how the mediator controls the process but not the outcome of a conflict.
11. What are the basic tasks of mediation according to the "stages of mediation"?
12. What are the advantages and limitations of mediation?
13. What are some differences between Western and traditional cultural expectations and procedures of mediation?

Chapter 10

The Practice of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

by Gary W. Hawk, M. Div., University of Montana-Ret.

He has ruined my past. I'm beginning to toy with the idea of forgiveness so that I don't allow him to destroy my future as well.
—Lynn Shriner (Zehr 2001)

Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Context of Interpersonal Conflict

In the preceding chapters of this book, we have sought to define conflict and help you understand different attitudes toward and metaphors for conflict. We have explored in depth the patterns of communication that contribute to destructive conflict as well as those that can reverse the spiral and direct it toward mutual understanding and collaboration. We have offered tools for analyzing conflict. We have shown how emotion enters into the process, how people negotiate their way through conflict, or seek third-party assistance in processing it. In this chapter we seek to go beyond all our best efforts to understand and analyze conflict. Here we consider the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, define the terms, and acknowledge and explore some of the growing body of literature on this topic. We outline common conceptions and misconceptions about forgiveness. We dig into both an internal process of forgiveness and the way forgiveness can be aided by interaction with the other party to the conflict. We describe various forms of communication, explicit and implicit, that enhance the process. In addition, we explore the complex role of apology in the movement toward forgiveness, adding necessary words of caution. We will also offer hope, calling attention to both some exceptional individuals and key principles that inform and enhance the process of repairing relational wounds. Along the way we rely on insights from communication research, the counselor's office, and human history. We explore the places where stories of human conflict and efforts to repair the hurt we cause one another find creative means of expression.[1]

Some Definitions

What is **forgiveness?** Because of its complexity, forgiveness is defined in many ways. Here we suggest *some* of the possibilities. In a conversation with Robert J. Lifton, journalist Bill Moyers quoted William Faulkner as saying that *Forgiveness is giving up the idea of a better past.*

[1] Some of these insights, perspectives, and examples derive from the writer's teaching of forgiveness and reconciliation at The Davidson Honors College, University of Montana, and a practice in pastoral counseling.

In a volume that reveals how much attention has been given in recent years to the study of forgiveness (McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen 2000), the authors say, "Interpersonal forgiveness can be seen as the decision to reduce negative thoughts, affect, and behavior, such as blame and anger, toward an offender or hurtful situation, and to begin to gain better understanding of the offense and the offender" (255). Emphasizing the emotional dimension of forgiveness, Kornfield (2001) says, "Forgiveness is the heart's capacity to release its grasp on the pains of the past and free itself to go on" (236). Sensing how the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions overlap, Deutsch defines forgiveness as "giving up rage, the desire for vengeance, and a grudge toward those who have inflicted grievous harm on you, your loved ones, or groups with whom you identify. It also implies willingness to accept the other into one's moral community so that he or she is entitled to care and justice" (Deutsch and Coleman 2000, 58). After studying clinicians who favored forgiveness as a therapeutic strategy, Martin and Denton (1998) concluded that forgiveness is "an inner process, central to psychotherapy, where the injured person without request of the other releases those negative feelings and no longer seeks to hurt, and this process has psychological and emotional benefits" (285).

Again, what is forgiveness? You will find that you might be drawn to the idea of giving up a better past, or the challenge of giving up negative thoughts, feelings, and behavior. You may resonate with the need to give up vengeful feelings and thoughts and release grudges. You may feel intrigued by the idea of how people are restored to community after they have been isolated or felt cast out. Whatever particular challenge meets your own experience, the following *elements make up a definition of forgiveness:*

- You are focused on the present after reflecting deeply on the past.
- You desire to be free of negative patterns that reduce the quality of your life.
- You are willing to do your own interior work, regardless of what the other person is able or willing to do.
- You develop compassion for yourself and others, giving up the idea of "getting even," therefore enabling yourself to live more freely and happily.
- You may engage in a negotiated process involving discussion of different truths, mutual contributions and impacts, and offering apologies as a strategy for relationship repair.

What's to Forgive?

Sometimes people do things to us that leave us feeling victimized. An assault or theft, for example, may forever change how we see the world and our place in it. Someone's failure to honor an agreement or a once-shared value may split a relationship apart, end intimacy, even lead to fantasies of revenge. A person's addictive behavior can cause emotional distress and financial loss for friends and family members to such an extent that they break off connection with one another. In some situations the one who caused harm is not a single individual but a whole institution, a vast amorphous, seemingly faceless system. Later in this chapter we will attempt to address this special case. Sometimes our best efforts to *prevent* destructive conflict fail. In the aftermath we feel betrayed, deceived, embittered, or isolated.

On the other hand, when we feel hurt, afraid, or angry, *we* may do things to other people that seem to violate all that we value and believe. We may have told ourselves stories and constructed internal narratives that cast the other person in a negative light. We may have convinced ourselves that the other person does not deserve our best efforts or our compassion. When this happens we may feel totally justified in acting badly in response.

People harm one another not just by what they do to each other but also by what they say and don't say. Relational harm occurs across a wide spectrum from regrettable and hurtful messages to psychological and physical violence. While this array is an entire field of study in itself,[2] a brief review of the elements within it helps us to see very quickly some of the relational transgressions that pose the question of forgiveness.

In a study of "messages that hurt," Vangelisti (1994) describes a variety of "speech acts" that may cause harm. These messages include such things as

- *Accusations:* "You're a liar."
- *Evaluations or judgments:* "I knew you weren't up to the task."
- *Orders or commands:* "Get that done now!"
- *Advice: "*I strongly suggest that you get a job before the Christmas break."
- *A statement of preference or comparison:* "I wish you were more like your brother."
- *A disclosure of information:* "We've decided your job is not needed with the company."
- *A judgment disguised as a question or opinion:* "When are you going to quit feeling sorry for yourself?"
- *A threat:* "If I ever see you with her again. . ."
- *A lie:* "I told you I'd quit drinking."

Metts (1994) adds to this list such things as

- *Blunders:* "How's your wife?" (not knowing that the person is divorced)
- *Group reference:* "Well, what did you expect from a white guy?" or "Nobody thinks Indians can run the refuge."

These various hurtful and regrettable messages may offend cherished values, pollute the relational climate, make it difficult to maintain closeness, and, in some cases, become grounds for ending the relationship altogether. In the age of Facebook and Twitter we can send hurtful and potentially destructive messages almost at the speed of light, leaving messages for all to see. Here, the private becomes public with potentially damaging consequences.

Any of the above situations or communications, often followed by our best efforts to address the problem, may leave us needing time to lick our wounds. Eventually we may begin to wonder about the possibility of forgiving others, seeking forgiveness, or forgiving ourselves. Forgiveness sometimes *follows* all our best efforts (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999).

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[2] For a more complete treatment of different types of transgressions, see Metts (1994); Roloff and Cloven (1994); and Wilmot (1995).

Application 10.1 At a Party

At an end-of-the-semester party in a local bar several friends are gathered around a table releasing the tension associated with final exams and demanding projects. A person across the table, someone you've always considered a friend but who does not know that your roommate is lesbian, says something blatantly offensive like, "I'm sick of dykes running that committee in the department." This comment takes you completely by surprise. It violates your standards for appropriate speech. You had no idea that this person harbored homophobic feelings. Upset by this remark, you consider your options. What are they?

- Do you try to break down your dismay privately or do you engage the person directly and try to confront this behavior?
- If you choose to confront the offense, what approach do you take?
- Do you get angry, take a moral position, make efforts to educate the person across the table, try humor or minimize the offense in some way? What do you choose and why?
- What do you actually *say* and why?

Relationships are strained not just by hurtful messages but by unresolved or poorly resolved conflict. People can remain at odds with each other over money, where to continue their education, the use of alcohol and other drugs, time spent with other family members, and family tragedy and loss. These difficulties are particularly common and painful in intimate relationships. Couples may argue unproductively, harbor unspoken grievances, unconsciously slight each other, or hold each other hostage for years after an affair. Hostility may linger in the aftermath of disagreement about how to manage the multiple requirements of work, parenting, and recreation. For a more thorough treatment of these and other topics over the course of the lifespan of couple relationships see Harvey (2004) and Waldron and Kelley (2008).

Stewart, Zediker, and Witteborn (2005) describe the damaging effects of deception, betrayal, and aggression. When someone deceives or betrays us, these relational transgressions can erode and jeopardize our sense of identity or well-being, not to mention the relationship. In addition, Cissna and Sieburg (in Stewart 2002, 431ff) contend that "disconfirmation" is a particularly damaging form of interpersonal behavior. A person is being disconfirmed when she feels invisible to another, unrecognized, ignored, unacknowledged, or without endorsement. When we are being disconfirmed it seems as though we do not exist in the eyes of someone else. Disconfirmation is a form of psychological abuse with potentially long-term consequences that may actually be more harmful than direct criticism or verbal attack.

When children are harmed physically or sexually, the effects are particularly traumatizing. The far-ranging consequences of this kind of relational transgression have been made especially clear in the case associated with Penn State University. In this case, boys were sexually abused by a trusted coach over the course of several years (Wertheim and Epstein 2011). In the relationship between adult men and women, domestic violence remains all too prevalent. For example, a recent survey for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Stobbe 2011) reports that one in four women report being assaulted by husbands or

boyfriends. As we discussed in Chapter 4 on power, this kind of harm often follows verbal aggression. While the abuse of men does occur, men are more likely than women to engage in physical violence when faced with noncompliant behavior, challenges to their behavior, or questions about their authority. As the tragedy of domestic violence becomes less concealed, we learn that 40% of the women killed each year will be killed by a spouse or lover. For an excellent summary of these and related findings, see Lulofs and Cahn (2000, 324–325) and research presented in Chapter 4. Whether harm comes to a relationship as the result of something as seemingly minor as a slight or blunder or as major as exclusion on the basis of race, sexual harassment, or an outright assault, all of the ways that people mistreat each other become the backdrop for a discussion of forgiveness. In the classroom and the therapist's office we have learned *not* to rank these relational transgressions but to recognize and take seriously their *impacts.*

We have also learned that it is relatively *un*important to distinguish between the effects of a *conflict* and the effects of an *injury.* Damage to the person(s) and damage to the relationship occur in both cases making the distinction seem vague. Both the effects of conflict and the effects of injury or violation give rise to questions about forgiveness and reconciliation.

The things that people *say* and *do* to one another inevitably cause us to ask, "Does this person know who I am?" "How am I going to outlive the impacts of this experience?" "Does this person know the harm s/he caused?" "How am I ever going to forgive this person?"

Application 10.2 I Thought This Happened to Other Girls

It has been a stressful semester. You are in the heaviest part of your history major and near the end of your junior year. You've been testing the water with a new guy. Like you, he's a good student, but seems pretty fresh at relationships. He knows you need a break from the grind. After texting with an idea, he comes upstairs to your room and says, "Hey, one of my buddies said it would be OK if we went over to the party at his frat house. You've been working awful hard. What do you think?"

You let the two angels of your nature argue on your shoulders as your new friend stands there, hands on hips, waiting for a decision. Aware of the risks, you say, "Yeah, let's go."

You know the scene—the punch bowl, the music, introverts on the couch, the boys with clever opening lines, the way people make comparisons. Telling yourself you're just going to have one, you dip what looks like grapefruit juice out of the bowl and pour the sweet liquid into the glass cup. You stick close to your new friend, letting him buffer the crowd and the noise. Having had the first drink on an empty stomach, and the second after appetizers that didn't taste very good, you start to feel disoriented. You excuse yourself to the bathroom. While there you feel the fatigue, the alcohol, and whatever else they put into the punch. Hungry and drunk, you find a bedroom and lie down.

When you wake up you're on a bed in one of the bedrooms, your skirt pulled up. In the language of Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, 65), you feel as if your body has been "pillaged." It's late, your new guy friend long gone. You wash up as best you can, head downstairs, and look for someone you know. Somebody from your seminar is still in the kitchen cleaning up with a guy you don't know. You ask for her help. She dries her hands and leads you home as you begin to cry.

(continued)

Application 10.2 I Thought This Happened to Other Girls

Because you've heard it all before from friends, the student newspaper, or Krakauer's book *Missoula,* you know what you're facing. All the questions start to pour in like flood water:

Should I head to the health center to tell the story and ask for a rape kit?

Should I call my parents and ask for help?

What if the County Attorney gets involved?

Would a trial wreck the trajectory of my studies?

What if the guy who did this turns out to be the guy I've been interested in?

What is it going to take to get at the truth and how can I face all the efforts to conceal it?

What if I face pressure to forgive the guy who did this, especially if the perpetrator is my new-found friend?

What is my own contribution to what happened?

How am I going to get through this?

Who's going to believe me?

Where do I begin?

The questions pile up like snow. Everything starts to feel suffocating. In a small group discuss your answers to these questions and others that may occur to you. What will you do first? How will you approach your new friend? What's it going to take? What are your resources? How will you gather them to help you face this situation?

Some Misconceptions about Forgiveness

In their formative work at the University of Wisconsin, Enright and others help us to understand what forgiveness is by reminding us of what it is *not* (Enright, Gassin, and Wu 1992, 102; Enright 2001, 23–34):

- *Forgiveness does not dismiss or minimize an event or situation.* It acknowledges the truth about what happened and the consequences that followed. Forgiveness does not excuse or condone the behavior or actions of another. It does not say, "Oh well, he just couldn't help it."
- *Forgiveness is not indifferent about justice.* It might very well hold someone to account, seek restitution or a form of reparation while releasing the resentment that often accompanies a protracted conflict or violation.

In a collection of first-person essays from crime victims, Zehr (2001) recognizes that pursuit of vindication or redress may actually be a relief from the humiliation and shame of having been victimized. Pursuing justice does not necessarily deny the possibility of forgiveness. Drawing a distinction between punitive or retributive justice and "restorative justice," Shriver (1995, 30–32) and others point out that retribution may exacerbate conflict, but "restorative justice" may help people through their victimization and make it possible for the offender to remain in or return to the community. (For a thorough exploration

of the difference between retributive and restorative justice, see Zehr 1999.) In addition, forgiveness is not the same as a pardon, which refers to a legal transaction that releases someone from a penalty.

Forgiveness is *not* a sign of weakness. Choosing to forgive another person may plunge one into the deepest reflection about who one is and how that identity is sustained. It requires us to consider who we are, independent of what has been done to us and independent of who the other person thinks we are. *Forgiveness requires an act of imagination* because it invites us to consider a future that is not merely a reaction to the past. Forgiveness requires us to undertake a long journey. It cannot possibly be for the faint of heart.

A misuse of forgiveness can make the process more difficult. After a crime— a shooting at a school, for example—people other than the victim sometimes presume to offer forgiveness *on behalf* of the one who was harmed. This gift is often motivated by the best of intentions and may be an attempt to spare an individual, family, or community suffering it cannot avoid. However, whatever the intentions behind the decision to offer forgiveness on behalf of someone else, this form of forgiveness may actually compound the original injury. It violates the moral agency of the person who has been harmed and it minimizes or may even circumvent the victim's struggle, choice, and freedom. This problem is at the heart of Wiesenthal's (1998) book, *The Sunflower.* Wiesenthal, a death camp prisoner during World War II, is summoned to the side of a dying S.S. soldier who confesses to heinous crimes against Jews. After listening to the soldier, Wiesenthal leaves him without the reassurance and absolution he craves. Later, Wiesenthal wonders if he has done the right thing by withholding forgiveness on behalf of his Jewish brothers and sisters. In the book Wiesenthal summons renowned people to reflect on this problem. In general they conclude that forgiveness, for all its value, cannot be offered by one person on behalf of another. Cose (2004, 49) also reflects on this problem. While he upholds the consensus in *The Sunflower,* he adds that we may choose to offer forgiveness for the harm that the person caused *us.* In other words, we might say something like, "On my child's behalf I cannot forgive you for what you did to her; but I can forgive you for the pain you have caused *me.*" The distinction he makes may seem small; but *we uphold the right of people to make a decision about forgiveness on their own behalf.*

Another cautionary note—given the frequency with which women are victimized and that they often fall under *pressure* to forgive, either within themselves or from others, we want to acknowledge that some authors argue *against* forgiveness. In an article that stirred up considerable controversy in religious circles, Lord (1991) described a situation in which a woman came to him asking if she should forgive the man who shot and killed her sons and nearly killed her as well. Later, and while in prison, the man made an appeal to this woman on the basis of his religious conversion and asked her to forgive him. After a period of study, Lord concluded that the woman was *not* obligated to forgive in this situation. Other authors (McFall 1991) believe it is better to emphasize righteous anger and remembrance over forgiveness as a way of holding people to moral account. As she says, bitterness can serve "as necessary reminder that something hoped for and greatly valued has been lost" (156).

While withholding forgiveness may seem necessary at times, or a means of self-protection, significant benefits *may* come to people who forgive, even in cases of domestic violence and abuse. Comparing two treatment modalities, Reed and Enright (2006) show that a process of forgiveness therapy is comparatively better than alternative therapies at

addressing the learned helplessness, debilitating resentment, shame, self-perception as a victim, and low self-esteem that almost always accompany mistreatment at the hands of a partner or spouse. They convincingly demonstrate that careful movement through a forgiveness process may replace the negative effects of abuse, depression, and anxiety in particular, with a sense of courage, increased competence and self-esteem, a sense of unconditional self-worth, and even expanding altruistic tendencies. While forgiveness has benefits for people who have suffered from abuse, the authors also point to possible benefits for people who are children of alcoholics or have suffered from other unjust suffering or trauma.

One last misconception needs clarification. Although the two words are often used together, as in the title of this chapter, or in the name of a course, *forgiveness* and *reconciliation* are *not* the same thing. In the context of interpersonal conflict, *forgiveness* is a process undertaken by one person in relation to another, with or without interaction with that person. On the other hand, *reconciliation* is a process of reestablishing relationship, renewing trust, and settling differences so that cooperation and a sense of harmony are restored. Reconciliation brings two parties together in a way that forgiveness may not. For this reason, in speaking of forgiveness and reconciliation, it is essential to emphasize that forgiveness does *not* necessarily reestablish a relationship. Forgiveness neither obligates one to reconciliation nor necessitates it. As countless students have told us, "If I have to reconcile, I won't even consider forgiveness." Forgiveness, then, may benefit the one who violates the terms of a relationship, but first and foremost it is primarily for the benefit of the person who has been harmed. Reconciliation, on the other hand, reflects the mutual interests of two parties and embodies a willingness to reengage in the relationship in the belief that further injury is less likely to occur and that the benefits of a new association outweigh the risks.

When There Is an Imbalance of Power

This distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation is particularly crucial when there is a serious imbalance in power between two parties or between an individual and an institution. With numerous anecdotes from students in mind, we have learned that children are often confused about the role of power in the forgiveness process. Trying to make sense of their own neglect or sexual exploitation, children can overlook the imbalance of power between themselves and a coach, babysitter, teacher, uncle, stepfather, or any other adult who took advantage of proportionately greater power to cause harm. Wrongly assuming that power in the situation was equal, children may put themselves under undue pressure to forgive. A child's need for physical and emotional support may make children particularly prone to forgive and reconcile, especially when the person with greater power uses coercion. Possibly for developmental reasons, children are unable to perceive that the person with greater power must assume *more* responsibility for harm to the person or relationship, not less. Transferring this responsibility to the child, more often than not, creates another layer of harm that the child may carry into adulthood.

Deeply concerned about hierarchical institutions, the church in particular, Keene (1995) tells a story about a woman who was sexually abused as an adolescent by her priest, a man who was clearly in a position of superior power. He describes the pressure to forgive that can be brought to bear on women in this situation. The church's teachings on forgiveness can be used against someone in the form of added pressure, as though a

woman resisting forgiveness is guilty of moral failure. This pressure may be compounded when combined with the assertion that forgiveness is good for one's mental health and spiritual well-being.

Keene warns that pressure to forgive, especially when it is applied by those with more power, may serve to protect the hierarchical structures that made the abuse possible in the first place. Sometimes people in positions of greater authority or power expect those with less power to forgive. This expectation can be used to *preserve* the **imbalance of power.** If the less powerful are pressured to forgive, then those with more power can escape necessary accountability and the just consequences of their actions. Furthermore, pressure to forgive a person who retains a position of power may, in effect, ask an injured person to bear the additional suffering of remaining in contact with the abuser. The additional burden of contact and connection, added to the original injury, may become unbearable. At the very least, it is an affront to justice. In such situations, closer proximity threatens the person who has already suffered harm. While we continue to hold the view that forgiveness is a choice and not an obligation, situations like those cited above make it extremely clear why forgiveness and reconciliation must not be easily blended. In situations like these, forgiveness, if chosen, should never obligate a person to reconcile. We will say more about reconciliation later in the chapter.

Thinking specifically of the therapy setting, McKay, Hill, Freedman, and Enright (2007) have warned that encouraging people to forgive before they are ready to take this action may be particularly damaging to women who in many cases already feel responsible for relational repair. A sense of shame and guilt for not being ready to forgive may fall like an additional weight on the shoulders of people who are struggling to recover self-esteem in the aftermath of a serious offense. Failure to take into account relative differences in power between the client and the perpetrator of harm may further compound the problem. *Requiring* forgiveness or *prescribing* it in a therapeutic situation may at best be untimely and at worst cause additional harm to an injured party. Concerned about such an outcome, these authors contend that "female clients (in particular) should view forgiveness as an informed choice they are making, not a gender-related mandate" (24).

Application 10.3 The Past Is Never Past

You are a dignified, reserved man in your 50s, married to an understanding woman, father of a college-bound daughter, and revered in your field of avian biology. But you suffer with a secret from your days as an undergraduate.

Participation in the campus ministry program at your private college helped you secure a good summer job: You became the janitor of the chapel on campus. You had a wide portfolio of responsibilities and flexible hours, perfect for someone who liked to go birding, listen to and play music. You prepared for and cleaned up after weddings, managed the soundboard controlling audio and video technology on Sunday mornings as well as arranged the radio feed. You were often in the chapel at odd hours. This meant that you could do your work while organ recital students practiced Handel and Bach. The danger of this schedule was that you were exposed to the university's lead organist.

(continued)

Application 10.3 The Past Is Never Past

More than once during that summer he approached you and made unwelcome sexual advances, usually when the two of you were the last people in the dark, cavernous building. Each time you made it clear you were not interested, but he persisted. One night you were putting away sound equipment in the closet. You heard the door click closed behind you. You turned to see the organist and instantly smelled gin on his breath. He was a large, overpowering man. After forcing you to the floor and holding you between his knees he demanded that you perform oral sex on him. He released you only when he was finally satisfied. Afterwards, you felt exhausted, as if you had been poisoned.

At first you told no one. You felt humiliated by what happened, tainted and stained by this man. But your dreams repeated the scene in the closet; you lost the ability to concentrate on your schoolwork and withdrew from friends. At a point of desperation you went to the campus minister. Needing to trust someone, you poured out the story. At first he listened compassionately but then began to fidget, clearly uncomfortable. After finishing your story and the account of how this memory was ruining your life, the minister said, "Look, this is a terrible thing that has happened, but there is nothing I can do. We can report this incident, but the organist is so well regarded by his graduate students, so much a friend of the college president, so renowned for his recordings that no one will believe you. Or, if they believe you, they will create a cover-up. I will make sure that you get the best of care at the counseling center, but I'm afraid no one will disturb this man's position in the life of the college." In response you enter a dark period, a time of depression from which it takes years to recover.

Though you eventually go on to create your own family, secure a university professorship, publish papers on avian distribution in changing habitats, you remain haunted by this incident. One day your understanding wife asks, "Have you thought about writing this story?" Over the next several days you give her question some thought. This seems like exactly the right thing to do. You don't yet know whether you will write the story as fiction or memoir, despite the public exposure that will come with telling the story. You ask for and receive a sabbatical and begin to throw yourself into the project with a great sense of relief.

Imagine yourself in this man's situation.

Do you see yourself more as a survivor, triumphant in what you have made of this adversity, or, because of the lasting effect of memories, still a victim because such events are never really in the past? Do past events continue to cloud the landscape of your life in the present?

How do you deal with the memory that people in power decided to protect the man who did this to you, that they chose the order and prestige of the college over your mistreatment and suffering?

What are your feelings in response to the friend who said, "I don't see any alternative but to forgive the organist and the campus minister?"

In the years between this incident and now what strategies and efforts seemed the most helpful? What worked for you? [3]

[3] This case was guided by NPR Author Interview with Raymond Douglas. 5/22/16: npr.org "On the Ever-Present Trauma of Rape: 'You Are Not Alone. Don't Give Up.'" Douglas is not the only man to bear the scars of such an experience. Rape of men, though not as widely reported as female victims, is not uncommon. In the United States alone, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2010 that nearly 1 in 71 men in America has been a victim of rape. That translates to almost 1.6 million victims.

Psychologists Smith and Freyd (2014) have studied cases like this one and have developed a language to describe what they call "Institutional Betrayal." When an institution like a university, a church, an athletic department, or corporation protects itself, blocks efforts to hold people accountable, rejects efforts to communicate about a grievance, it compounds the traumatizing effects of the original incident and complicates the forgiveness process. Suddenly the one harmed faces an amorphous system, not just the effects of an individual's action.

The Matter of Memory

Just as the words *forgiveness* and *reconciliation* are often joined, people often say, "Forgive and forget." This is a particularly unfortunate conjunction. The relationship between memory and forgiveness is extremely complex and important.

Memory is absolutely essential to the forgiveness process. People say "Forgive and forget" with the best of intentions, hoping to reduce another person's pain or their own. But "Forgive and forget" seems like dangerous counsel to an abused woman who believed she was safe, only to discover upon returning to a relationship that she has again been physically or emotionally harmed. "Forgive and forget" is unwise advice to an employee who trusted his employer to communicate expectations in private only to find that the employer consistently exposed the employee in front of a group. To ask a child abused by a priest or other religious figure to forget what happened, for example, creates a **secondary wound** because it asks the child not to trust his or her own perceptions. If no one seems to remember what happened, if no one receives a person's story about a transgression, the person who was harmed may come to feel confused, even that his or her identity is in jeopardy. While it is true that we are not what happened to us, we almost certainly are what we *make* of what happened to us. People who have suffered some form of sexual abuse or violence, for example, often feel as though the recovery of memory after a period of suppression or repression seems like the first step in the recovery of self. There can be no deep healing without it. The denial of memory comes to feel like the denial of being and is a genuine threat to personhood. Memory denied or ignored is like an untreated infection. It festers and threatens the whole body. Using exactly this metaphor, Isabel Amaral-Guterres, truth commissioner for East Timor, says in relation to conflict within his country, "For some people, it may seem better to leave the past untouched. But the past does not go away and, if untreated, may eat away at those people and maybe even destroy them. Remembering is not easy, but forgetting may be impossible" (Cose 2004, 182).

Archbishop Desmond Tutu makes much the same point throughout his book on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Tutu 1999). In the case of South Africa, the commissioners felt so strongly about the value of historical memory that they were willing to trade criminal prosecution of apartheid's torturers and executioners in exchange for the truth about what happened. While it may have seemed a "devil's bargain" to offer partial amnesty in exchange for truth, Tutu asserted that "To be able to forgive one needs to know whom one is forgiving and why. That is why the truth is so central to this whole exercise" (Cose 2004, 182).

Yet the matter of memory in relation to forgiveness is complex. While forgiveness does not require the denial of memory, the recollection of past injuries can be used as the basis for causing harm to others. The misuse of memory may contribute to what Hannah

Arendt calls "the predicament of irreversibility" (Shriver 1995, 34), in which the memory of one violation can be used as the pretext or justification for revenge, perpetuating and deepening the cycles of injury and retribution. Forgiveness does not throw memory out of the equation but cancels the *debt* that revenge purports to repay. Forgiveness takes the accounting back to zero and offers the possibility of a new starting point.

All this becomes especially clear when one looks on the international stage. In the 1990s the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 was used by Bosnian Serbs to justify the murder of Muslim Croats. The memory of European favoritism toward Tutsis in Rwanda provided the pretext for their murder by Hutus. The memory of the destruction of the World Trade Towers may have seemed to justify the mistreatment of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq or at Guantanamo Bay, which became the basis for beheading U.S. citizens and allies by Islamists. As one can see, the misuse of memory can become the basis for inflicting more harm. This misuse of memory occurs in interpersonal relationships as well. The challenge, then, is to learn to remember in what one author calls "a living way"—in a way that serves individuals, families, and societies in the future (Anonymous 1993, 24). To get over something in the hope of creating something new in our lives requires that we remember the harm we experienced without letting that memory create energy for revenge (Wiesel 2008, 2016). *Memory is absolutely essential to the forgiveness process* because it is central to the identity of individuals, peoples, and nations. Furthermore, it may reduce the susceptibility to repeated injury in the future. Nevertheless, memories should not be used to justify more harm, for this creates a circle from which no one may escape.

Application 10.4 Disappointment at Your Wedding

For a year you have been preparing for your wedding day. You, your mother, and friends have been working on every detail of the celebration. During the rehearsal you feel as though all this preparation has paid off. People know their parts; dresses are pressed and ready to wear; the florist and photographer are sure to fulfill their promises; the right rings are in the right pockets. On the day of the wedding the groom and groomsmen arrive in their tuxedos and tease each other in playful and affectionate ways. You and your bridesmaids make ready, talk excitedly, and adjust yourselves in front of the mirror. As the prelude begins, your father, who is supposed to accompany you down the aisle, is nowhere in sight. At the last second, just as the doors are about to open for the processional, he shows up disheveled and intoxicated. You alternate between disbelief and despair. On one hand you want to proceed into the sanctuary as if everything is going according to plan. On the other hand you want to give your father a piece of your mind for ruining your day. Seeing the look on your face, your maid of honor acknowledges your distress, but sensing how much is at stake, whispers, "Take his arm." You swallow your upset and take the first step toward your husband-to-be.

After the wedding and honeymoon, having processed some of your feelings with your husband, you know you have to speak to your father. Family life cannot go on without this conversation.

- Will you first contact him in person, by phone, e-mail, text message, or a formal letter? Why do you choose this method? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each method?

(continued)

Application 10.4 Disappointment at Your Wedding

- Would it matter to you if your father had been publicly intoxicated before?
- Do you feel open enough and prepared to hear his side of the story? How will you maintain your own story while listening to his story?
- What questions do you ask?
- What do you want him to know?
- Does it matter to you that this case involves your *father* (as opposed to a nonrelative)?[4]

[4] Carr and Wang (2011) address the particular challenge of forgiveness in families and draw helpful insights from relational dialectical theory.

Now that we have presented a few definitions for forgiveness and have discussed some misconceptions and problems associated with it, we are ready to look more carefully at how it works.

Decision or Process?

Is forgiveness a **decision or a process?** This is a complex question. An element of decision enters almost every forgiveness process and a kind of process figures in every decision. This is true even if the process seems to contain only the two steps of *grieving the original injury or transgression and letting go,* as Luskin (2002) contends.

In cases involving marital infidelity, but influenced by the forgiveness that sometimes takes place between family members when someone is dying, DiBlasio (2000) argues for a *decision* to let go of resentment and bitterness rather than waiting for a more or less lengthy process to unfold. He contends that "emotional readiness" is not necessarily a factor in the decision to forgive. He argues that forgiveness is more "an act of will," temporarily separating reason and feeling. Not wanting to bog clients down in a protracted emotional process, he says, "When clients discover that they need not be victims of their feelings but can decide to move forward despite the hurt, they become empowered" (151). DiBlasio then goes on to describe an intense and ambitious couples therapeutic session that may last 2 to 3 hours. It asks that partners establish the wrongful action that needs to be forgiven and give the offender an opportunity to provide an explanation. The long session provides for a question and answer period about the infidelity, a description of the impact of the infidelity, and a plan to stop or prevent similar behavior in the future. The injured party recognizes the offender's remorse, shame, and regret. The betrayer makes a formal request for forgiveness. This is followed by a ceremonial act in which both parties recognize that a decision to forgive has taken place.

In a meta-analysis of this question about decision and process, Baskin and Enright (2004) explain that DiBlasio's proposal is one among several that emphasizes the centrality of a **decision to forgive.** In the context of psychotherapy, a decision-based model may save time and serve to empower the client(s) trying to move toward forgiveness. Helping people *decide* to forgive gives them something to *do* at a time when they may feel helpless

to change their situation. Nevertheless, this approach may seem excessively prescriptive, unrealistic about the power of strong emotions, and even heavy-handed. For this reason Enright (2001) emphasizes that *willingness* to forgive is more important than "willfulness." Outside of the therapy setting, people sometimes commit themselves to forgiving another person by a certain date. For example, someone in the Christian tradition may decide to forgive someone in the weeks between Ash Wednesday and Easter or before receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion. Or someone in the Jewish tradition may decide to forgive by Yom Kippur. There may be analogous dates in other religious traditions that provide the impetus for a decision to forgive. People can decide to forgive by a specific date, especially one sanctioned by a religious institution or spiritual tradition. Some people decide to forgive a previous partner because they want to "move on" into a new and better relationship. It may not be possible to work through all the hurts in a previous relationship, but forgiveness may equip and prepare someone moving into the new relationship because lingering resentment may interfere with a successful relationship in the present.

How Process May Lead to Decision

Layton (1999) describes a **three-step model of forgiveness** that is particularly helpful because it is easy to remember and makes practical sense. She uses her former husband's betrayal and her subsequent divorce to explain how she entered these three stages on the road to forgiveness:

> *Injured Innocence.* After experiencing a deep personal hurt at the hands of another person, after being humiliated or having one's trust broken, we may begin the journey toward forgiveness. When we are in the stage of *Injured Innocence* everything we have believed about life suddenly seems open to question, especially the idea that if we are good, then we won't ever suffer. Victims of crime may especially feel as though an earlier state of innocence has been injured if not destroyed. In this stage we are likely to ask, "Am I no longer safe in the world? What happened to the world I used to live in? Will I ever be able to go back to the way things used to be?"
>
> *Obsession.* In this stage we replay things that were done to us, the words that we heard, all the impacts and details of our suffering. It feels as though our lives are defined by what someone else did to us. In this stage, thinking of the one who harmed us, we are likely to ask, "Will he/she ever be held accountable? How could he/she have said or done this? What did I possibly do to deserve this? Will I ever stop picturing the moment of betrayal?" In his brilliant animations Harchol (2011) says someone "lives rent free in our heads." In the obsession stage, many betrayed people are consumed with the desire to get the details, find the evidence, see the e-mails, track down phone records, ask friends about what happened, and try to reconstruct the calendar of events that outlines the betrayal. Friends and counselors often feel helpless in this stage when the person feels driven by an inner sense of injustice to "find the facts." Though the facts feel hurtful, the drive toward truth is not one that is easy to interrupt. While "obsession" may have a negative connotation for us, this stage of the process takes seriously the *impact* of what happened. In this stage one reality is trying to catch up with another—what we believe we were experiencing and what actually happened. The betrayed person is trying to make sense of what he or she thought was

"rock solid" in relation to what happened. This shakes the world of the betrayed person; it constitutes a traumatic event. The work of this stage cannot be rushed. In this stage we are trying to measure the size of what we suffered. We are trying to control through obsession what felt uncontrollable at the time of the transgression.

Transcendence. When we are in the stage of *Transcendence* we no longer contend with the shock of realizing that the world is not as fair as we first believed. We no longer replay every scene in the death of a marriage, or some other relationship. We come to believe, despite everything, that life will continue and that it may still be a "prize" worth having. In Layton's case, it was at this stage of her adjustment to the loss of her marriage that she began to give up her hatred, the desire for revenge, and her sense of being at the center of the world's unjust treatment of the innocent. She began to realize that the distinctions we make between perpetrator and victim are often drawn too sharply, that the hardness around each identity can soften in the balm of forgiveness, and that both sides need compassion. In time she learned to *transcend* what had happened to her and to join the rest of the human family. It was this movement from injured innocence and through the self-absorbed cycles of obsession that helped her get to the point where she could begin to let go of her own pain. She began to realize that her own experience of suffering acquaints her with the suffering of other people. At this point in the process we feel compassion for ourselves *and* others. In this stage we are likely to wonder, "What will this experience mean to me in the future? How will I be able to integrate it into the whole picture of my life? How can I make good use of this experience?"

Other researchers in the field delineate many more steps in the process. Enright (2001) provides a notable example of this model, describing 20 separate "guideposts" in four different categories by which people mark their journey. Having tested these guideposts or markers along a path in many different settings, we believe it is worthwhile to list them. In addition, these 20 steps apply whether one is the injured party seeking to forgive, or the one who has caused harm and is in need of forgiveness. These steps can also help a person seeking **self-forgiveness** (Enright 1996). Below are the steps and the kinds of questions one asks at each stage:

Guideposts along the Forgiveness Journey

A: Questions we ask when we are the injured party and consider forgiving others, including ourselves

B: Questions we ask when we have caused harm to another person

The Uncovering Phase

1. Examine psychological defenses
   A: What pain am I feeling and how am I defending myself against it?
   B: What pain have I caused another and am I in denial about it?
2. Face anger so as to release it
   A: Am I able to admit to myself what I am feeling, anger in particular?
   B: Am I able to face the other person's anger and my own sense of guilt or remorse?

3. Admit shame when appropriate
   A: Am I able to face the shame I feel about what happened?
   B: Am I able to face the shame I feel about what I did?
4. Become aware of emotional energy tied up in this (Cathexis)
   A: Am I aware of how much of my own emotional energy is tied up in this memory?
   B: Is my emotional energy tied up in what I did?
5. Become conscious of repetitive thoughts
   A: Am I repeating in my mind or obsessing over what happened?
   B: Am I repeating in my mind or obsessing over what I did?
6. Compare oneself to the other
   A: Am I comparing myself and my life since the transgression to the life of the person who harmed me?
   B: Am I comparing myself and my life since causing harm to the life of the person I harmed?
7. Realize that your life may be adversely changed, sometimes permanently
   A: Am I willing to acknowledge how my life has been changed by what happened?
   B: Am I willing to acknowledge that I have changed another person's life, perhaps forever?
8. Gain insight about how this injury/transgression has changed your worldview
   A: Can I face how this event has changed my worldview or sense of life's fairness?
   B: Can I face how what I did changed another person's worldview?

Decision Phase

9. Recognize that old strategies may not be working
   A: Am I willing to see that my old ways of dealing with this event may not be working? Can I cope with my pain in a new way?
   B: Can I change the course I'm on in relation to the person I harmed?
10. Consider forgiveness as an option
   A: Am I willing to consider forgiveness as an option?
   B: Am I willing to receive forgiveness, rather than continue to defend myself?
11. Commit to forgiveness
   A: Am I willing to work at forgiving the one who caused harm?
   B: Am I willing to receive the gift of the other person's forgiveness, waiting for it, if necessary?

Work Phase

12. Reframe the picture of the other person
   A: Can I begin to see the other person in context (what life was like for him/her)?
   B: Can I begin to see the person I harmed as vulnerable and needing time to forgive?

13. Empathize
    A: Am I able to feel some empathy for the other person?
    B: Am I able to feel the other person's hurt to which I contributed?
14. Let compassion emerge
    A: Am I able to extend compassion to the person who caused harm?
    B: Am I willing to suffer patiently with the person I harmed?
15. Let the pain in
    A: Am I able to let myself accept or absorb the pain I feel?
    B: Can I let the other person be angry, accepting the long path to receiving forgiveness?

Outcome Phase

16. Find meaning in what happened
    A: Can I begin to formulate a new meaning for myself in relation to what I suffered?
    B: Can I find new meaning in the harm I caused and the process of learning to receive forgiveness?
17. Realize that you have needed forgiveness in the past
    A: Have I ever harmed another person as I have been harmed?
    B: Have I ever been in the position of needing to forgive someone else?
18. Realize that you are not alone
    A: Is it possible that I am one of many who have gone through this process?
    B: Where can I find social support while waiting to receive forgiveness?
19. Realize a new purpose
    A: Can I find a new purpose for my life after this injury?
    B: Can I live a new life from this point forward?
20. Release
    A: Can I open myself now to the rest of life, having forgiven, even to the possibility of joy and hope after moving through this process?
    B: Will I let myself experience relief and freedom from guilt and remorse, having learned from this whole process? (adapted from Enright 1996)

While such a long list may seem overly detailed, in practice we have found it very helpful to people. It helps them see where they are on this list and what might be needed to proceed further. Some therapists have even rendered this list in a graphic form that resembles a map (Velez 2009). A visual aid helps chart a sometimes-long journey with twists and turns, setbacks and advances.

The author recognizes that some people simply decide to forgive and then work through, more or less consciously, the process of dealing with feelings of anger and resentment. In a sense this is a case of the chicken and the egg. Some people need to work through most of the feelings before entertaining forgiveness as an option (Step 10), while others receive emotional benefit from deciding to forgive, then sorting through the emotional debris. As with any attempt to describe stages of change, these models can be

misconstrued. People in the process of grieving, for instance, need to be reassured that there is no right order to the sequence and that it is often necessary to cycle back through earlier stages. In much the same way, before we reach a decision to forgive, we may need to review an offense repeatedly, search a long time for reasons to be empathic toward the offender, or dismantle and reconstruct our view of the world several times. It may take us a long time to realize that the only thing we have in common with the person who hurt us is our humanity. We may have made a decision to stay with the person who betrayed us, for good reasons involving love and commitment, but the process of forgiveness goes on even when people stay together. The struggle to forgive may be arrested at almost any point, be completed only partially, or come so easily that some stages seem unnecessary. Whether we decide to forgive and *then* have to work through the emotions later, or work through the emotions *before* deciding to forgive, forgiveness can be *both* a decision *and* a process.

In yet another variation on a process model, Holmgren (1993), like Layton and Enright, describes the importance of working through feelings such as anger and grief after a transgression and believes that forgiveness is not genuine unless people do this work. But she adds a step in the process that many students have told us seems essential. Holmgren argues that a person who has suffered at the hands of another must recover the self-esteem that has been damaged or removed by the person causing harm. It is easy to ascribe too much power to the wrongdoer's opinion about us. To counter this effect she says:

> . . .the victim must clarify for herself that the claim implicit in the act of wrongdoing is false. She must recognize that she is just as valuable as every other person and that her needs and feelings matter. . . Likewise she must come to see the wrongdoer as seriously confused about her status as a person (343).

In less philosophical language this means that the perpetrator of a wrong is usually mistaken or ignorant about who we are. For us to recover our self-esteem as a part of the process of forgiveness we need to remember our own status as a person and reject the other person's belief about who we are.

Application 10.5 Unjustly Accused

You have done very well in school, breezed through the courses that came easily and labored through the ones that came hard. Encouraged by one of your professors, you apply for a summer position as a lab technician job in another town. On the day of the interview you check your phone, figure out the route to this facility, and leave yourself plenty of time to get to your destination. The interview goes really well. The supervisor takes time to ask lots of questions about your field of study and, more importantly, the independent research you are doing for a senior project. He wants to know more about your work because of its relevance to the work being done in the lab.

As a result of the extended conversation at the lab, you leave this other town later than you planned. It is getting dark. Heading home you know you are at risk for being stopped by the local cops, because of your race. Sure enough, while waiting at a red light you see a bright light in your rearview mirror as a squad car points its spotlight toward the back of your car and the license plate. The next thing you know the flashers are on and when the light turns green you have to pull over.

(continued)

Application 10.5 Unjustly Accused

Two cops aim flashlights at you as they approach. You roll down the window so you can hear what they are saying. They demand your license and registration. When you say, "They are in my gym bag," they say, "Get out of the car and put your hands on the roof." This has happened enough times to your friends that you know the drill. You keep your mouth shut, get out, and take the stance.

One officer pats you down, feeling for a gun or knife, slides his stick up the inside of your spread legs. The other officer asks questions: "Where have you been?" "What have you been doing?" "What's your name?" You and your body are both being interrogated. Satisfied, he says to his partner, "He looks like him, but this isn't the guy. Behave yourself." He lets you go.

When you get back in the car you're shaking with humiliation and anger. For the first few minutes driving is impossible, so you wait until your heart rate goes down and you feel calm enough to drive.

For the next couple of weeks, as you wait for an e-mail from the lab telling you that you got the job, you have a hard time putting this incident out of your mind. Especially at night you replay the scene. You have been cornered by a system, its machinery and power reaching into almost every part of your life. Your father and friends said that something like this would happen sooner or later, and now it has. You obsess over the event and struggle to find a way to transcend its effects. With other students discuss the following:

Is it possible to forgive not just the officers who stopped you, but a whole system that suspects people who are lumped into a class or category? Why or why not forgive a system?

Is there any reason to feel compassion for the officers who participate in this system? If so, does this condone their behavior?

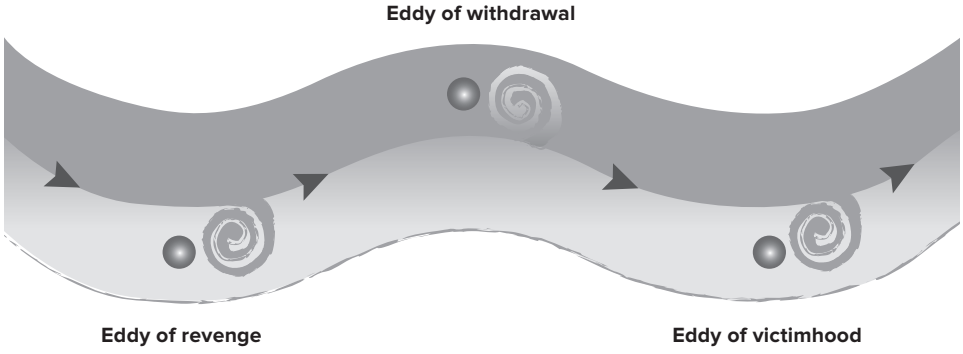
As you take the new position at the lab, what do you tell yourself as you make the commute twice a day?

How do you keep yourself from internalizing the identity that the cops wanted you to take on? What do you say to yourself to keep this from happening? How do you maintain your own self-respect, as Holmgren recommends?

Getting Stuck: Eddies in the River

We (authors) live in a valley where powerful rivers descend from the mountains and converge on a long journey to the ocean. The landscape affects how we view things. One of our rivers drops through a gorge with major rapids with names like "Fang," "Tumbleweed," and "Cliffside." Wherever the river bends sharply or pushes up against a boulder, the current creates an eddy. People who raft or paddle this river often rest or recover in the **eddies,** areas where it is safe to pull over. This feature of our watershed has given us an image that helps to explain forgiveness. If you live in an urban area, you might think instead of a city park where people gather to rest on a hot day. You might think of a favorite coffeeshop where you can go with your laptop and rest, tune out, and be out of the flow of the rest of your life. Listening to students, clients, and other people, we find that people sometimes get stuck in an *eddy of long-term, low-grade, simmering resentment* (see Figure 10.1). In this eddy a person may circle round and round looking for an opportunity to get even.

Figure 10.1 Eddies in the River



Here we may concentrate on the other person's offense, how that person has fared since doing us harm, and how he or she owes us a debt that may never be paid. The desire and impulse to get even may feel completely justified.

If we do not get caught in this eddy of *resentment and revenge,* we may get caught in an eddy of *depression and withdrawal.* In this eddy the hurt we have suffered seems so great that it seems better to withdraw from life because it poses too many challenges. In this eddy a person attempts to create a small and safe world out of the current and away from potential harm.

Around the next bend someone may become caught in the eddy of seeing oneself as a *victim.* In this whirlpool a person may ascribe special status to having been victimized. In this eddy people feel as though they have *become what happened to them,* and may use their story to elicit sympathy from others, demand extra attention, induce guilt in others, or excuse their own passivity (Exline and Baumeister 2000).

When we see a friend or family member in an eddy, we may grow impatient and be tempted to *push* that person back out into the current. Having observed this process in many situations, we believe that it is best to be patient, to see the eddies as resting places. When we see others in this eddy or find ourselves stuck here, it is important to have a keen sense of timing, to watch for a person's own motivation to return to the flow of life. This observation may be helpful to you as a supportive friend, family member, or third-party agent. A friend who has expertise in the world of river-running tells us that in certain rapids, it may be necessary to take off one's life jacket, temporarily at least, so as to descend deeper into the current and be carried back into the river. It can be terrifying to remove one's emotional life jacket. This image seems particularly helpful when we encounter people who seem to take a very long time to forgive. This extended metaphor may help when you or others to explore more completely the defenses we put on to protect ourselves against emotional pain. Sometimes we need to drop more deeply into our suffering before being able to leave it behind.

The Personal and Interpersonal Dimensions of Forgiveness

Reflecting on the models developed by Enright, applied by Palmer (1997), or distilled by Layton, you might conclude that forgiveness is something we do by ourselves and *without* interaction with the person who caused the harm. In some cases, after a violent incident

or fight, for example, or because of a person's extreme defensiveness, unwillingness, or inability to accept responsibility, interaction with such a person can seem unsafe, unwise, or undesirable, but this does not foreclose the possibility of forgiveness; it means that forgiveness takes place *internally.* Holmgren (1993) describes the value of this approach. *Internal or intrapersonal forgiveness* is not dependent upon the responsiveness, contrition, attitudes, or apologies of the person who caused the harm. This kind of forgiveness is "unilateral" in that it focuses strictly on the beliefs, feelings, attitudes, decisions, and behavior of the victim (345).

The beauty of intrapersonal or intrapsychic models is that they accurately describe an intricate process that does *not* depend on the penitence, remorse, or direct actions of the person who caused us harm. We can sometimes wait a very long time for a person to express regret about stealing from us, causing a car accident, or filing for divorce. You may never receive acknowledgment that a co-worker ingratiated himself with the boss and nudged you out of favor, or that a friend flirted successfully with your intimate other. Models of forgiveness that emphasize the internal process help us see that we are free to begin the work leading to liberation *whether or not* the other person acknowledges responsibility, seems aware of the impact of his or her actions, apologizes for harm done, expresses regret, and asks to be forgiven. In effect intrapersonal models for forgiveness say, "You can begin the work of breaking free from a legacy of harm on your own. You don't have to wait for someone else to act before you can begin the process of liberating yourself." In other words we may proceed without waiting on subsequent action, communication, or acknowledgment from the person who caused the injury. We cease to be the prisoner of someone else's actions. We reclaim ourselves as the active center of our own choices.

At the same time we must recognize that all of us belong to networks of relationships and remain connected to other people. We live with, work across from, eat meals, or share children with people who have caused us harm or whom we have harmed. In *some* cases we can go on about our lives after being harmed without needing to interact with the one who hurt us. But in a great many cases we are *not* so disconnected. The woman who left us is still the mother of our children. The father who hurt us when we were young shows up at a graduation. The person who wrecked our car lives down the hall. For complex reasons having to do with our investment in the relationship, economics, our moral code, and the history of the relationship, we may continue to interact with the people who hurt us or with the people we harmed. Therefore, we now see more clearly than ever that the process of forgiveness must be *intrapersonal*—within our own control—to preserve freedom from painful connection to the behavior of another person. At the same time the forgiveness process may be more *interpersonal* and require more interaction than we previously thought because of the way our lives continue to intersect, overlap, and collide. There are some relationships from which we cannot escape. This means that the interactive and communicative aspects of this process are more important than ever.

A person who has been harmed has a great need to speak about the impact of an event. The injured party feels a great need to be heard. The injured party may have questions about why this harm took place, how it could have happened, what factors were involved, and if the one who caused the harm understands the impact of his or her actions. These kinds of questions are at the heart of victim offender dialogue programs, for example (Obbie 2010).

Looking at the situation from the opposite side (and assuming that the transgressor has the courage and ability to accept responsibility), the one who caused the harm may have a great need to tell his or her story, not to justify the actions but to lighten the load of shame or at least explain factors that influenced the harmful choices. In short, forgiveness is likely to be a *communicative* process, not just a solitary labor hidden from sight. Careful listening, free of judgment, makes possible more complete disclosure that can inform and liberate both the listener and the teller. Courageous truth-telling, a deeply sincere apology, the full acceptance of responsibility, and complete acknowledgment of the impact of an event or action can make possible a more kind and generous response—and possibly the direct or indirect expression of forgiveness. In other words, where a relationship has not been entirely ruptured and abandoned, full and honest disclosure and grace-filled response dance around each other, listen to the same music of the relationship, and seek the gift of forgiveness for the perpetrator and liberation from resentment for the one who was harmed (Brown 2011).

All of this takes time, much more time than we often want to recognize or invest. It may take more time than we are willing to give, and more time than someone else is willing to offer. An interactive process can almost never be completed in one conversation. It may take many conversations and require repeated efforts to clarify and understand the same event. In the course of this kind of interactive process people often find that *each* side may have contributed to the injury, rift, or alienation. Sometimes, one person "drops out" or disengages before the process is completed. We cannot force another person to participate in conversations of forgiveness or reconciliation. We may be willing to explore the rupture in the relationship while the other person may not. Because of its challenges, the communicative, interactive nature of forgiveness is one of the growing edges of research and practice.

Implied Forgiveness

People renegotiate a relationship after an offense and work toward forgiveness in both i*mplicit* and *explicit* forms of communication (Worthington and Drinkard 2000). Sharing this perspective, Exline and Baumeister (2000) say, "In implicit forgiveness, one's statements or behaviors communicate either that no transgression was committed . . . or that the transgression was so minor as to be of no consequence" (136). In effect a person is able to interact with the person who caused the harm *without explicit reference* to the injury, transcending it indirectly. Implicit forgiveness remains communicative, however. It can be communicated by the tone of voice, gentleness in stressful situations, inclination toward humor, and lightness of mood. Implicit forgiveness may be expressed through face-saving behaviors. A willingness to engage and interact with another person may signal the beginnings of restored trust. These forms of communication are aspects of implicit forgiveness. For example, a friend or co-worker may have exposed some private information about you in a public or group setting. After processing some of the harm this caused, you may act in ways that imply your forgiveness, suggesting you transcended the hurt.

Gestures

Communicative **gestures,** not necessarily verbal, may indicate that the process of forgiveness is underway or may have been completed in an implicit way. For example, one person in a romantic relationship may kiss another as a sign that an earlier conflict or disappointment has been transcended. We may visit someone who caused us harm, attend that person's musical performance, graduation, wedding, or thesis defense. In these instances,

the willingness to be physically present becomes a sign that a wound is beginning to mend. A willingness to collaborate in a work setting after a time of estrangement may be a sign of forgiveness. Two colleagues may agree to work again on a joint project without first verbally processing an old conflict. One neighbor might bring a meal to another as a sign that a boundary line dispute has been resolved satisfactorily, the offer of food being an ancient gesture that helps to mend a relationship. Very often an appropriate touch signals the shift away from resentment. Historically speaking, a handshake is such a gesture. It signals that the open hand does not contain a weapon. A small gift is a highly communicative act—presenting a vase of flowers, offering a glass of water, sending a humorous cartoon or sketch, offering a ticket to a concert or sporting event—any of these gestures may communicate at least as effectively as words that something has been released and that the door is open. Also, it may be the case that one gesture begets another, setting in motion a positive, spiral that replaces longstanding resentment.

Communicating Forgiveness Directly

Exploring long-term couple relationships, Waldron and Kelley (2005, 2008) have made major contributions to our understanding of the role of direct communication in the forgiveness process. They delineate various forms of forgiveness-granting communication that involve such things as open discussion, explicit expressions of forgiveness, nonverbal displays, and efforts to minimize the harm to the relationship. They have discovered that *conditional* expressions of forgiveness such as "I told him I would forgive him if the offense never happened again" or "I told her that I would forgive her *only* if things changed" may help people "reclaim respect, rebuild trust, and assure themselves that the transgression will not be repeated" (2005, 739). At the same time, however, looking at relational *outcomes,* they discovered that conditional expressions of forgiveness are actually associated with a *deterioration* of the relationship. How can this be? Perhaps conditional expressions of forgiveness imply lack of trust, increase the uncertainty in the relationship, and may set in motion various forms of self-protective behavior. This finding makes it very clear that *how* people communicate about their grievances and how they communicate their forgiveness after grievances take place have enormous implications for the future of relationships and the prospect of reconciliation.

Though a direct expression of forgiveness correlates positively with relationship outcome, some forms of direct expression of forgiveness may harm a relationship. In some situations a person who has been harmed or offended may offer forgiveness with the best of intentions but unconsciously express contempt for the other person. It may sometimes sound sarcastic, as in "Oh, don't you know, I forgave you long ago?" This kind of forgiveness feels condescending, even suspicious. It can humiliate or insult the dignity of the other person. This way of expressing forgiveness has a top-down quality to it and may be a disguised attempt to rebalance power in a relationship, power that was lost in the course of an injury or transgression. Unfortunately, such expressions of forgiveness rarely repair a relationship. If people value their relationship, hostility disguised as forgiveness works against relational satisfaction.

Having both an appreciation for the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of forgiveness, it now appears that these two approaches may each have their time and place and may weave around each other in a dynamic fashion. Assuming that interaction is emotionally and physically safe, we sometimes take a direct route to relational repair, engage in discussion, risk self-disclosure, listen as much as speak, and work actively within the framework

of the relationship. We hope for clarity, understanding, and the freedom that comes with open discussion and overt expressions of forgiveness. On the other hand we sometimes need to drop down into the interior work, take time to be more reflective than interactive, before continuing to work our way along the path. At the same time we sometimes take an indirect route, processing the intense feelings privately or with a neutral ally, working toward the guideposts on a long journey that Enright and others describe, and *then* assume the risks of interaction. After the interior work we can reveal our discoveries, ask for an explanation, issue an apology, and so on. The two approaches serve each other; prepare for and precede each other. Both serve the larger purpose of relational repair (see Figure 10.2).

Figure 10.2 Direct and Indirect Routes for Relational Repair

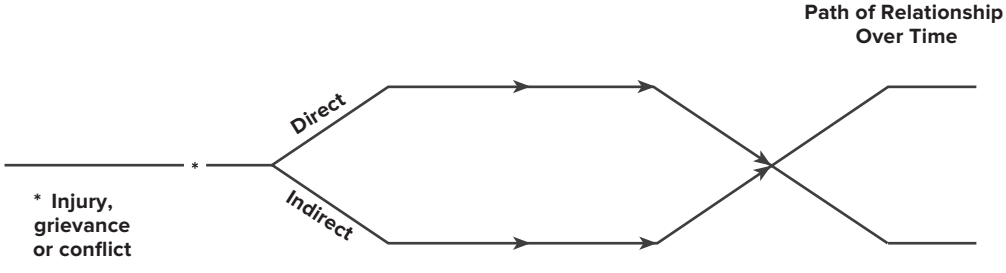
Direct Route:

Possibilities

- **Interpersonal communication about situation**
- **Learn more through interaction**
- **Receive an account**
- **Receive/offer forgiveness, apology**
- **Move toward relational repair**

Risks

- **Exposure to defensiveness and resistance**
- **Exposure to inadequate apology self-justification**



Indirect Route:

Possibilities

- **Explore the intrapersonal process as a way of reducing resentment**
- **Search internally for meaning or event(s). Process emotions privately or with a supportive third party**
- **Prepare psychologically for interaction**
- **From a place of safety look for change in self or other person**

Risks

- **Cut oneself off from helpful information**
- **Deny oneself benefit of restored relationship**

To summarize this section, forgiveness may come about as a result of an intensely private process or it may come about through interpersonal communication. Forgiveness may be enhanced by verbal communication, such as an expression of remorse. Or, a wide range of communicative and creative *gestures* may be the means by which people request or convey forgiveness. In one relationship, the process may start in the private room of one's memories. In another relationship, the decision to forgive may be facilitated by an open apology. Both the private and interactive dimensions of this process influence each other. The internal work of forgiveness may eventually make someone more receptive to an apology if it is offered, accelerating the process of repair. Likewise, the internal process that helps a person forgive may change the conditions in a relationship so that it is more likely that an apology is offered. This sequence of steps can accelerate the repair and mending of a relationship (Morse and Metts 2011).

In this review of the "intrapersonal" and "interpersonal" forms and expressions of forgiveness, we came close to talking about reconciliation, especially when describing gestures. Before exploring reconciliation more completely, however, it seems wise to say more about apology and express some words of caution.

The Value and Limits of Apology

In a comprehensive article that explores the role of communication between aggrieved parties, and that corroborates the research of others, Kelley (1998) points out that people who have been harmed by others are more willing to renegotiate a relationship when they know the following three things: (1) *that there is essential agreement as to the nature of the violation,* (2) *that the other person acknowledges the hurt and pain that the violation caused,* and (3) *that the offending person will make an apology for the hurt and pain that the violation caused.* These three elements sound something like, "I am so sorry that when I borrowed your car I failed to return it in good condition. I did not realize how important this is to you and I see now that my carelessness really upset you. I sincerely apologize and want you to know that I will to do everything necessary to make things right."

Confirming the work of McCullough, Worthington, and Rachel (1997), Kelley also found a correlation between a person's apology and the extension of empathy toward the offending partner. This empathic response to a sincere apology sounds something like, "Now that I understand how badly you feel about what you did, I promise to work at forgiving you and letting this go." When an offender makes a direct explanation of the offense, acknowledges responsibility, requests forgiveness, shows remorse, and apologizes, this form of communication is likely in 76% of the cases studied to influence the decision to forgive. The influence of this strategy is so significant that Kelley (1998) concludes that we need "to conceptualize forgiveness as a dynamic interpersonal process" (267). Reflecting on this same process, Exline and Baumeister (2000) say that these actions "may intercept a downward spiral started by the transgression" (136). Research by Morse and Metts (2011) confirms this earlier work as they describe "the transformative power of apology" (19).

However valuable apologies may be in the interactive process of forgiveness, we live in an age when apologies have become commonplace, if not trite. We have become so accustomed to public apologies that we may have lost the ability to discriminate between different **kinds of apologies.** Politicians, for example, apologize for marital affairs or failure to account for taxpayers' money. In America and Canada, apologies have been offered

for the treatment of Native children held in boarding schools. Ronald Reagan and George Bush apologized to Japanese Americans for their internment during World War II (Barkan 2000). New Zealanders apologize to indigenous populations for introducing diseases. In Australia, whites apologize to the aboriginal peoples on "Sorry Day." Former President Bill Clinton apologized for "the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male." Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld signaled responsibility for the treatment of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Professional athletes are routinely compelled to apologize for abusing their partners or using performance-enhancing drugs. On the other hand, public apologies when done well may open doors that separate communities, lay the groundwork for productive associations in the future, and protect individuals and groups against similar injustices and offenses in the future. The overarching purpose of apologies, delivered well, can be seen as repairing "relationships between victimizer and victim harmed by past wrongdoing" (Edwards 2010, 61). Rhetorical analysis of good public apologies indicates that *three elements were present:*

- Leaders acknowledged wrongdoing by their governments.
- They accepted responsibilities for the wrongdoings and expressed remorse that they occurred.
- They made pledges or took actions to ensure that similar wrongs would not be repeated (Edwards 2010, 64).

In the flood of apologies, especially public apologies, we fear that apologies can create the *illusion* that something significant has happened or will soon be set right. Apologies can be another form of manipulation, put an aggrieved party under extraordinary pressure to respond graciously, or merely serve as a means of self-protection. People may apologize as a kind of shortcut to avoid further engagement with an aggrieved party. Concern about the indiscriminant use of apology leads us to make distinctions between kinds of apologies and even develop a set of criteria that may help us make more effective apologies. There are at least three forms of *suspect* apologies:

- *Expedient apology.* An expedient apology, often arranged in private, merely benefits the one who offers the apology and provides little or no benefit for the person who was harmed. A person offering an expedient apology says something like, "To avoid more controversy over this, let me say I am sorry so we can move on." Clearly, the goal is to avoid rather than engage, to escape the consequences of one's actions rather than learn more about the actual harm caused by one's actions. Physicians in Michigan, for example, have been encouraged to apologize for medical mistakes. Insurance companies have discovered that malpractice suits have dropped significantly in situations where physicians offer a sincere rather than expedient apology (Merriam 2004). Reporting on similar stories, a Chicago Public Radio program on apology also indicated that patients and families are extremely astute at discerning whether an apology is genuine or designed merely to placate (Glass 2004). It seems we humans have a well-developed ability to distinguish deep apologies from expedient ones.
- *Compelled apology.* A compelled apology may be empty because it is offered without an adequate understanding of the full effect of one's actions. In an organization, a peer may be told by her manager to apologize to her colleague whom she treated with disrespect in a public meeting. The mumbled, "I'm sorry I made you look bad at the board

meeting" or "I'm sorry you interpreted my remarks that way," may do nothing at all to repair the relationship. This kind of compelled apology is much like kids being told by a middle school principal to shake hands and make up. Or if a wronged romantic partner says, "If you don't apologize for sleeping with that X%@! I will never speak to you again!" Any forthcoming apology is likely to sound like, "I know, I'm sorry, I had too much to drink and she was just there. It didn't mean anything." These and other *forced* apologies rarely communicate depth of understanding or a full grasp of the impact of our actions. Efforts to justify our actions can make the situation even worse.

- *Delayed or surrogate apology.* In a delayed apology, someone far removed from the wrongdoing accepts responsibility for the harm and offers an apology on behalf of people no longer present. We issue a delayed apology when we say something like, "I know a lot of water has gone under the bridge and the people who did this harm are long gone, but on their behalf I want to say . . ." Delayed or surrogate apologies may be as comprehensive and necessary as an apology to African Americans for the harm of slavery or as specific as apologizing for the behavior of a friend in a restaurant. The person *receiving* the apology should be the one who determines its value, *not* the one offering the apology.

Concern about inadequate forms of apology has led us to develop a set of criteria for good apologies. Influenced by a comprehensive study of public and private apology (Lazare 2004), we have developed a set of criteria for good apologies. *Apologies require:*

1. Acknowledgment of harm without an accompanying justification ("I see that my actions impacted you in these specific ways . . .")
2. Acceptance rather than deflection of responsibility ("I now see clearly that I am largely responsible for what happened. This is my fault.")
3. Sincere expression of regret or remorse ("I am deeply sorry that my thoughtless action had this effect on you")
4. Reparation in some form ("I would like to compensate you in some way for the harm I caused")
5. Assurance of safety for the sake of the future of the relationship ("This will not happen again")
6. Reaffirmation or clarification of shared values so that both parties will understand the terms of any future relationship ("In the future you can count on me to uphold my promise that . . .")
7. In rare cases an apology may require an explanation *if* it is requested by the injured party ("What was in your mind when you . . .?")

Even with these criteria in mind, a poor apology may compound an injury or conflict. Therefore, we suggest the following:

When Receiving an Apology, Ask:

1. Who is served by this apology?
2. Can I trust that change in behavior will follow this apology?

3. Does the apology seem sincere, genuine, or authentic? Is it accompanied by acceptance of responsibility for the wrongdoing?
4. Was the apology followed by a justification or excuse for the action that harmed me?
5. What is the purpose of this apology? (Repair of the relationship, preparation for another harmful act, an attempt to disarm or equalize power?)
6. Is the apology accompanied by pressure to forgive the person who caused the harm, thus transforming a choice into an obligation?
7. Does the apology precede confrontation or follow it? In other words, how well does the person understand the harm he/she caused? In some situations an apology that precedes an airing of the transgression may be an attempt to avoid a full reckoning of the harm that was caused. A preemptive apology can sometimes cause more harm than good unless the full effects of a person's actions are understood.

When Offering an Apology, Ask:

1. Do I really understand what hurt or offended the other person?
2. Am I truly aware of what I did and the consequences for the life of the other person?
3. Do I intend to change so that the injury or transgression won't be repeated?
4. Am I prepared to make some kind of restitution if that is requested?
5. Do I mean what I say?
6. Is the apology for me, the other person, or the relationship?
7. Can I apologize without also adding justification for my actions?

Application 10.6 A Friend Request

One day while scanning your Facebook feed you spot a "friend request" from an old girlfriend. You feel amazed to see her request. In high school you were her "bad boy" and she was a stellar student who went on, mutual friends tell you, to become an ophthalmologist with a specialty in surgery. You are so surprised to see this invitation that you take several days to figure out how to respond. Now in your 30s you have achieved your own professional accomplishments, so it is not easy to look back on this time of your life without feeling shame. During your senior year you took advantage of your connection to Jennie and made several attempts to divert her from her goals, enjoying this relationship for your own purposes. You were not at your best in those days. You feel both the desire to connect with her again and some hesitation as you recall some of the things you did during that phase of your life.

Between high school and now you realize that you have made peace with yourself and have integrated the pain that led to some of your poorer decisions, so you decide to accept the request. You follow up with an instant message that only Jennie will see. You make a full and thorough apology without any attempt to justify or excuse yourself. Guided by your respect for Jennie, you acknowledge some specific incidents that are painful to recall and express your sincere regret. Toward the end you write a couple of lines about your marriage and two sons.

(continued)

Application 10.6 A Friend Request

That evening you receive a reply. Jennie is nothing but gracious and kind. While being honest about the impact of some of your actions she reminds you of the things about yourself that she found charming, creative, and lovable. You feel tremendous relief that she has responded this way. Before telling her more about your life you let your wife know that you have made this contact and that you would like to tell Jennie more about your life. She knows how much this former girlfriend meant to you, but trusts you to keep things appropriate.

In a role-play with one other student and a "coach" imagine and act out each of these conversations:

- *What does the friend request sound like?* Is there more to it than a click?
- *How do you express your apology so that you avoid self-justification and too much explanation?*
- *What does Jennie's gracious response sound like?*
- *How do you approach your wife about this reconnection?*
- *How does she respond?*
- *Together, reflect on the value of the time the male character in this story took to think about the past* before *he responded.*[5]

[5] For a relational dialectical analysis of online forgiveness communication see Pederson (2014).

Final Thoughts on Apology

In some cases it is very clear that an injured party wants us to go beyond a mere verbal statement. Sometimes a specific *action* is required before the relationship can be resumed or trust can be restored. For example, Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* (2001) provides an extended example and gripping account of the impact of an extremely destructive lie. The novel takes the reader into the rigorous demands of an interactive repair process, the need for apology, and the way we sometimes need to go far beyond verbal apology to restitution and reparation.

Despite appearances and shortcuts, apology is not simple. People often find that giving and receiving apologies becomes a mutual exchange as each side to a conflict acknowledges its own contribution to a damaged relationship. One person in a relationship remembers being belittled in front of peers at a business meeting, while the other person remembers being passed up for promotion. In an intimate relationship one person remembers the effects of an inappropriate flirtation while the other person remembers feeling neglected or disregarded. Efforts to improve a relationship through apology must contend, therefore, with the challenge of untangling these braids, mutual and interwoven contributions to a problem, conflicting memories, and the different ways that people punctuate the beginning and conclusion of a grievance. This process is not for the faint-hearted or insecure; it requires emotional bravery, a willingness to look at one's own contribution to a problem, and a deep understanding of how apology can beget forgiveness and forgiveness can beget apology on the road to reconciliation.

Also, it may be that no apology can be completely purified of some kind of self-interest. Perhaps it is too much to expect that every apology be cleansed of any effort to secure a lost advantage. But because apology can be a powerful facilitator of forgiveness, and because sincere apology and forgiveness can twine around each other in a braid, we want to uphold high standards for apologies. Our criteria and these suggested questions may lead us to make better apologies, ones that are worthy of the trust we seek to restore.[6] As Lazare (2004) contends throughout his book:

> One of the most profound human interactions is the offering and accepting of apologies. Apologies have the power to heal humiliations and grudges, remove the desire for vengeance, and generate forgiveness on the part of the offended parties. For the offender, they can diminish the fear of retaliation and relieve the guilt and shame that can grip the mind with a persistence and tenacity that are hard to ignore. The result of the apology process, ideally, is the reconciliation and restoration of broken relationships (1).

Switching the Point of View: Receiving Forgiveness and Forgiving Oneself

Thus far in this chapter, the subject of forgiveness generally unfolds from the standpoint of the person who is in a position to forgive someone else. This discussion would be incomplete, however, without looking at the process from another angle: What is it like to **receive forgiveness?** While it can be extremely difficult to offer forgiveness to someone who has hurt us, it also can be very hard to *receive* it after we have done the harm. Accepting forgiveness requires that we shift our attention away from ourselves, away from fear of retribution or our own feelings of guilt. When we are in a position to receive someone's offer of forgiveness, we can no longer focus exclusively on the harm we caused; we need to focus on the other person's experience and understanding of it. Suddenly the way we view and define ourselves becomes more complex. Instead of seeing ourselves only in relation to something we did in the past, we are faced now with responsibility for new choices.

Receiving forgiveness can be difficult for another reason. In his formative article outlining the relationship between forgiveness, receiving forgiveness, and self-forgiveness, Enright (1996) asserts that a person hoping to receive forgiveness must *wait* for the *gift* of forgiveness to come from the person who has been harmed. It is as if there is an interval between the action that hurt another person and the forgiveness that releases that person from resentment and anger. In this interval, a person who has been harmed has the necessary freedom to choose between vengeance and forgiveness. Whatever the benefits of forgiveness, a person is not *obligated* to forgive. In this profoundly important interval, the person who caused harm has an opportunity to *reflect rather than deflect* awareness about the actual harm that was caused. Waiting in that interval can be extremely difficult because it requires that a person stay close to the awareness of the harm he or she caused. Yet, this interval also may be the birthplace for self-forgiveness.

As with receiving forgiveness, self-forgiveness presents some major challenges. Students sometimes report that they may be willing to receive forgiveness from someone they have harmed but find that they cannot grant themselves this same gift. They say, "I can

[6] To see a fine example, watch this lieutenant governor's apology (Hersher 2016): http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/06/15/482207689/watch-utah-lt-governor-apologizes-for-past-attitude-toward-gay-people

imagine forgiving someone else, but myself? Never. I *know* what I did." When we refuse to forgive ourselves, or to accept the offer of forgiveness from someone else, we lock ourselves in a room. Inside this room it seems impossible to live past the shame associated with some wrongdoing. Meanwhile, on the *outside* of the room, people go on about their business. Some people stay in this locked room for a very long time, sometimes because it seems safe. In fact the refusal to accept offered forgiveness may be another eddy in which people get stuck, staying out of the current of life that brings people back together (see Figure 10.1).

Forgiving oneself can be particularly difficult because it first requires that we reconcile *two different images of ourselves:* the person we think we are and the person who caused someone harm. The person we think we are (and would like to be) may resist the truth about the part of ourselves that told the lie, robbed the store, or betrayed a friend. It may seem that as long as we withhold forgiveness from ourselves, then we cannot possibly be the person who did this deed. To accept forgiveness, whether from someone else or from oneself, is a form of admission that, yes, we are *both* these people—the one who finds such actions abhorrent *and* the one who did them. Self-forgiveness requires that we *see these two selves clearly* and help them recognize and accept each other, extending compassion to each until the self becomes less divided. Undertaking this work requires us to reckon with the complexity of our identity, seeing the "both/and" quality of who we are.

In this chapter we described the internal process of forgiveness, using Enright's four phases with their many steps and Layton's movement from injured innocence and obsession to transcendence. It is quite possible for people to apply these same steps to themselves. As in the effort to forgive someone else, we must take steps to *uncover* what happened and face that truth courageously. We must *work* at facing our self-protective defenses and begin to let them down. We must be willing to extend empathy and compassion to ourselves in the same way that we might readily offer it to someone else. We must be willing to move toward a *decision* to release ourselves from self-punishing tendencies, without denying accountability. And finally, we must be willing to move toward an *outcome* phase where the truth has been integrated and the story of our life becomes more rich and complicated than we first thought it would be. The end result can be the same sense of freedom as when we forgive someone else. In this case we can make what we did to someone else less central to the story we tell about ourselves. It becomes part of the story, not the *whole* story.

Application 10.7 Trying to Recover

Imagine that you have just returned from Iraq or Afghanistan. You bear the psychological marks of having seen friends die in IED explosions, the effect of seeing civilians killed, deaths caused by "friendly fire," and the never-ending images of nighttime assaults on ridgetop outposts, not to mention the daily difficulties of public suspicions, desert heat, windblown dust, street noise, and children begging for gifts.

Initially, you are so happy to be home. You are reunited with your wife and the child born on your second tour of duty. At last your surroundings are comfortable and familiar. You still arrange to see platoon buddies. But you also notice some scary signs of the lasting effects of this deployment. You spend several hours a day watching violent video games.

(continued)

Application 10.7 Trying to Recover

You are drinking even more than you used to. You occasionally drive through red lights or race your motorcycle in the nearby mountains as though there is no tomorrow. You are definitely short-tempered.

One evening after supper, and after you've had a few beers, your child is crying inconsolably. She has begun to grow new teeth. Your wife is in the kitchen and she seems intolerably slow to give you a hand as you try unsuccessfully to comfort your child. When your wife finally shows up, wiping her wet hands, you hear yourself say, "Where were you, you lazy bitch?" Instantly, you realize what you have done. You see the effect of your words on your wife's face. Now your child cries even harder. You run out of the house and into the night.

Though slowed by the beer, you keep running, running until it occurs to you that you could spend the night at an old friend's house. You find the light on the porch, approach, and knock. Your friend opens the door and motions for you to come in. He can tell you are really upset. When he asks you what's going on, you tell him only that you and your wife are having "a little trouble." He doesn't probe further and sets up the couch so you have a place to sleep.

The next morning you wake up suddenly when you hear the phone ringing. Your friend motions with the phone as if to say, "It's for you." When you take the phone you hear your wife in tears. She is relieved to have found you, upset that you left the house, still angry about what you said to her. She also wants you to come home. What do you do?

- Do you retreat farther into your sense of shame or go back home?
- What do you need to understand about the impact of your deployment on your wife?
- What do you want *her* to understand?
- What will it take for you to begin to forgive yourself? What kind of help do you need from her, from yourself, and maybe from someone with a little distance from the situation?
- What kinds of changes are you willing to set in motion so that this kind of thing does not happen again? Or, do you feel so far outside your family and so distant from your former self that you can only imagine moving out?
- What will it take, both inside yourself and in the environment around you, for you to come back in?

Reconciliation: A Late Stage in the Journey

Trying to be clear about forgiveness, we have kept reconciliation waiting for a long time, almost like a patient in the office of a physician delayed by an emergency. Our friend has been patient but now she wants to claim her rightful place. If forgiveness is a process or decision involving the whole person that releases feelings such as anger, resentment, and the desire to retaliate, **reconciliation** is *the process of repairing a relationship so that reengagement, trust, and cooperation become possible after a transgression or violation.* The things we say and do to each other create chasms that divide us. When we forgive someone,

or when someone else forgives us, the distance between people may remain in place. It is not necessarily filled in or spanned by a bridge. It may be good to forgive but not safe to reconcile. When it is safe, reconciliation is about spanning the chasms between people. It is about the bridges that people build, one stone or cable at a time, sometimes from one side, occasionally from both.

What are the cables in this bridge? We are already familiar with some of them. A genuine and trustworthy apology may be a central cable in the span. Explicit and implicit expressions, as well as nonverbal gestures, help signal that forgiveness has taken place and open the way for reconciliation. What are some of the other ways we cross over toward each other?

Insights from History, Politics, and Literature

In the winter of 1965–66, flooding rivers wiped out key bridges connecting people and communities throughout the northwest coast of California. Living in the area a few years later, I heard stories about a resourceful man in the community who offered to shoot an arrow across the swollen Trinity River. He tied a strand of monofilament to the arrow. This fishing line allowed people on the other side to attach and haul a heavier line across the river, and then a rope, and finally a cable strong enough to allow for passage across the river. The cable prepared the way for rebuilding the bridge.

In his remarkably comprehensive book *An Ethic for Enemies, Forgiveness in Politics,* Shriver (1995) develops the same metaphor to help us understand *four key aspects of reconciliation.* He invites the reader to imagine a cable spanning the chasm of conflict and alienation that divides individuals, groups, and nations. Based on his knowledge of history, politics, and world literature, Shriver asserts that this cable is woven of four strands—*truth, forbearance, empathy,* and *a commitment to remain in a relationship because of our essential interdependence.* Let's examine each of these strands that together form the cable spanning the chasm that sometimes opens between individuals.

The Strand of Truth

Nothing obstructs the effort to repair a relationship as much as the experience of having your own sense of truth denied. When a friend denies having taken a possession you know he borrowed, when an employer denies having made an agreement that you were counting on, or when a person refuses to hear and respect your point of view, movement toward each other seems impossible. For this reason the ability to acknowledge, honor, and communicate about what happened and its effects is the first bundle of wire woven into the cable—**the strand of truth.** When people openly acknowledge the truth about what happened, conditions are established that make possible each succeeding step in the process of reconciliation. Even in situations where reconciliation is out of the question, as after a rape or murder, a more complete disclosure of the truth contributes to healing. Victim–offender mediation programs facilitate conversations in which victims of crimes benefit from face-to-face conversations with those who committed the crimes. Often, victims seek the *truth* about what happened as much as remorse on the faces of those now in prison (Obbie 2010).

Application 10.8 Infidelity in Marriage

For a few weeks, your partner's behavior has seemed suspicious. Several times she has arrived home later than she promised. While on a business trip, she called to say that the meetings had been extended for a couple of days and that her return would be delayed. When you called the hotel where you thought she was staying, you were informed that "No one by that name is in the hotel." You feel shaken by your suspicions. After her return you feel irritation as she works on her e-mail late into the night, protecting the screen when you approach. The next day you do something you swore you'd never do. You enter her e-mail records. Torn between a sense of guilt about compromising her privacy and a desperate need to know, you read the record of her affair. You, sadly, no longer have any illusions. Armed with this information, you set a time to confront her.

In a role-play with others, enact the first part of this conversation. Remember and apply the communication approaches we describe and recommend. Speak your truth with as much strength as you are able without degrading the personhood of your partner. Describe in whatever detail you deem necessary the harmful effects of her actions, the impact on your days and nights, the way this affair calls into question everything you have assumed, and how this affair has changed your life from top to bottom. Also, include in this conversation your needs and expectations for the future if the relationship is to continue.

Let the role-play include three radically different outcomes. In the first version the betrayer is defensive, resists taking responsibility, justifies her actions, and may even blame the other for her actions. What is the effect of this kind of response on the person who discovers the betrayal? In the second approach, assume that the betrayer takes responsibility and wants to repair the relationship. What is the effect on the relationship of a complete disclosure of the truth? In the third option, the betrayer might say, "I have met the love of my life. I want to be with him. I will always care for you, but I no longer feel the kind of love for you that I did. I am sorry. I think our marriage is over."

How do these approaches change the potential outcome for the relationship? In the third approach, how can the person who wants to leave take responsibility for her choice?

In the first two situations Janice Spring (1996) says it is necessary for the unfaithful partner to say, "I promise:

- *To be the gatekeeper of my life, and take full responsibility for remaining faithful to you;*
- *To keep my word that I have said goodbye to the lover; to prove to you with words and actions that this person is not a threat to us;*
- *To work out my problems in the context of our lives together;*
- *To never cheat on you again; to make it unnecessary for you to play the role of detective any longer; to prove to you that you don't have to be afraid to trust me again (p. 245).*

Alternatively, the betrayer might say:

- *"I am leaving this marriage." I won't lie to you; this time of our partnership is over," or "I want to talk with you. I am unhappy enough to have entered into this affair. What can we do?"*

From Spring's perspective these promises are the minimum steps necessary to begin the process of restoring broken trust, or making a more or less clean exit. It's also possible that being caught in a transgression makes it possible for a person to question their previous commitment.

(continued)

Application 10.8 Infidelity in Marriage

When people make it safe for another person to reveal the truth about an event or transgression and when the truth is told, recognizing that "truth" can be a complex matter. The first strand in the cable of reconciliation is laid across the chasm of conflict that divides people. This assumes that reconciliation is desired by both people.

But why is it so hard to reveal the truth? Stone, Patton, and Heen (2000) remind us that every conversation has at least three levels—*what happened,* the *feelings* associated with what happened, and *questions about the identity* of those involved. When someone is pressing for the truth it can be difficult to reveal because it may feel as if the deepest foundations of our identities are being shaken. The humility required of us in such situations may feel excruciating. In these situations we often want to defend and protect ourselves, which complicates the search for truth. Our own experience in the counseling and consulting environments, and insights from Hyde and Bineham (2000), shed light on this problem. Defensiveness is almost inevitable when identity is threatened; yet it is the task of adulthood to recognize these tendencies, claim them as our own, and work to transcend them for the sake of truer connections and, ultimately, reconciliation. Hyde and Bineham give us all the challenge of asking, "Am I willing to consider giving up a part of who *I* am, in the interest of what *we* might become?"

The Strand of Forbearance

The second strand in the cable that crosses the canyon of alienation is what Shriver calls **the strand of forbearance.** To forbear means to *refrain from revenge or punishment* after someone has hurt us or transgressed against us. Forbearance is essential to the forgiveness process and to reconciliation because revenge, its opposite, sets in motion an uncontrollable chain of consequences that often eliminates the possibility of reconciliation.

Revenge, especially in the form of violence, seems to settle the score in the short run, but almost always provides justification for counter-revenge. In one study of interpersonal romantic relationships, subjects reported a great desire to *dominate* over the target of their vengeful behavior. Diverse emotions accompanied retaliation—anger, fearful anxiety, positive feelings, and remorse (Yoshimura 2007). Painful remorse can serve a positive function when the person feeling the remorse learns to change future behavior. Revenge may have had evolutionary value because the threat of it can protect a person or group, deter mistreatment, or help clarify norms for behavior. But people planning revenge usually have little foresight. They are incapable of looking beyond the action they are considering to contemplate the wider consequences of meeting one terrible act with another. *Resentment enacted in revenge, may spell doom for the relationship and even harm oneself.* As much as retribution seems like justice, it can double back in some form and strike the ones who imposed it. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1957) may be the finest example of the costs of revenge, the way one heavy stone tossed into a pool sends waves across the whole body of water.

As we explained in Chapter 4, thoughts of revenge may provide emotional relief or seem to equalize power, but enacted thoughts can create the predicament of irreversibility.

You can't "take it back." As Anne Lamott says in *Traveling Mercies* (1999, 134), it is like taking rat poison and hoping that the rat will die, or as Some (2003, 37) says, "Resentment is like making a cup of tea with poison in it for the other person. Somewhere along the line you always forget and drink it yourself." Or, as Gandhi reminded us, if everyone were to follow the principle of "an eye for an eye," then the whole world would go blind.

Application 10.9 Shocking Discovery

One day while looking at a Facebook page you discover a post showing a photo of you taken at a party. The photo shows you in an extremely compromising position. You are virtually certain who posted this photo and you are overwhelmed with thoughts about the consequences of this image becoming more widely known. You seriously consider posting some photos of the person who posted this photo of you. The internal pressure to do this is nearly irresistible, seems only fair, and feels like justice for the person who has harmed you.

- What do you ultimately choose to do and why?
- What are some of the alternatives to posting a negative image in response to what was done to you?
- Would you need some form of support to overcome this temptation to take revenge? What would it look like and where would it come from?

For another example of how social media contributes to conflict and can set up conditions for vengeance and revenge see Hepola (2016): http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/03/29/472207613/when-you-become-the-person-you-hate-on-the-internet

Hardly a day goes by that someone does not cut in front of us at the grocery store or make a bad move in heavy traffic, justify one sexual infidelity with another, or fire off one text message in response to another. Forbearance is essential because revenge sets in motion a train of events that cannot be predicted and that guarantees that people will have an even harder time coming back together in a renewed state of trust.

The Strand of Empathy

Forgiveness and reconciliation are predicated on truth, and depend on forbearance rather than revenge. Developing and expressing empathy for the offending person form the third essential strand in the cable stretching across the chasm between people—**the strand of empathy.** Empathy—feeling with or for another person—is rooted in the realization that the one who hurt us is, despite everything, a human being with terrible struggles of his or her own. We are empathic when we recognize that another person needs our kindness despite the harm he or she caused. The expression of empathy communicates that we have some understanding of the other person's problems, motives, and needs, however confused they may seem, no matter what harm they caused. Empathy recognizes that at some point *we* may have done to someone else the very thing we are now trying to transcend. The memory of our own failing fosters empathy for others. Empathy, like forgiveness as

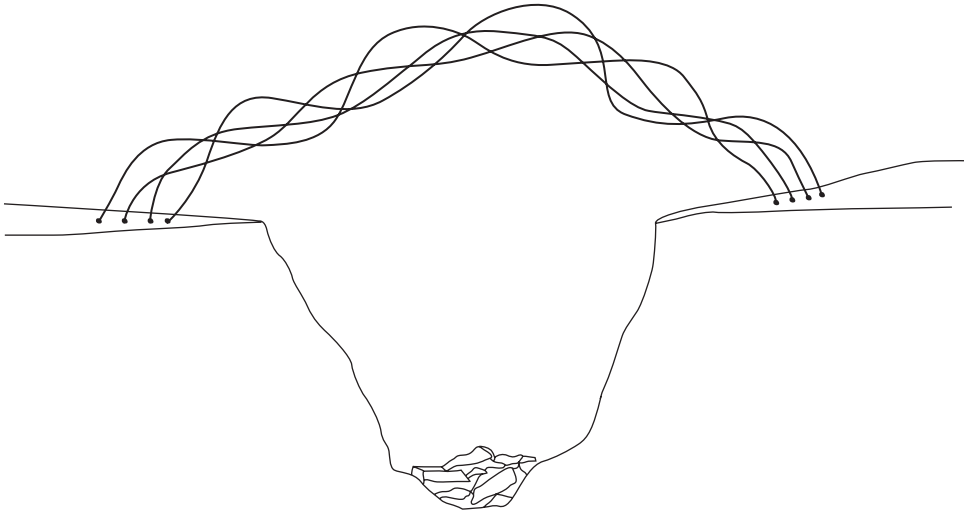
a whole, requires an exercise of *imagination.* It asks us to imagine ourselves in the place of the other person and begin to picture how the other person could have done the act that now awaits our forgiveness. Empathy recognizes that the bully almost certainly had been bullied; that the rapist had been raped; that the thief had had something stolen. By means of imagination empathy reaches into the life history of another human being, even in the absence of specific information, and begins to picture what life was like for that person before harm was inflicted on us. If we have never seen what empathy looks like, it is extremely difficult to extend to other people. But if we have ever seen it modeled, or if we have received it ourselves, then we know how instrumental it can be in bringing people back toward each other. Empathy says, "I see what has happened to you, how it affected you, and even how it led you to hurt other people. Because I see our shared vulnerability, it is now safe for you to be who you are in my presence." Empathy adds a third strand in the cable underlying the bridge spanning the chasm between people. By means of empathy we begin to cross over toward each other.

Commitment to the Relationship out of Awareness of Our Interdependence

In some ways this fourth strand in Shriver's cable that crosses the chasm of conflict is the most crucial. The economic hardship for families during the most recent economic recession, or the way climate change recognizes no boundaries, remind us of how our lives keep being thrown together. Now more than ever, with 7 billion of us on the planet, often seeing each other through the eye of our electronic devices, we seem to belong to a single household. What is true on the economic level is often true on the psychological or relational level as well. If global economics bind us together, so does our web of relationships, whether in families or our communities. A sense of how our actions affect one another places responsibility on us to work things out with one another. People like Martin Luther King Jr. and Archbishop Desmond Tutu have a particularly firm grasp on this fourth strand. In King's case, he knew that the goal was not just a seat on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, where his activism began, but the creation of a "beloved community" among all the races and classes (Lampman 2005). Deeply steeped in the African tradition of "Ubuntu," which recognizes that no one person can be a human being without belonging in some sense to another human being, Tutu (1999) has a clear understanding of the same point. He knows that "we experience fleetingly that we are made for togetherness, for friendship, for community, for family, that we are created to live in a delicate network of interdependence" (265). It is because of this interdependence that we are called upon to use all our interpersonal skills and ability to communicate with one another for the sake of some small version of our place in the "beloved community." This fourth strand ties us together in recognition of our shared membership and mutual responsibility to work things out. To summarize all that we have said about the "four strands," it may be helpful to picture something like what we show in Figure 10.3.

Tippet (2011), through her project on "Civil Conversations," has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the *interactive* dimension of reconciliation. She brought a number of thoughtful contributors together to discuss conflict over things such as abortion, race relations, the environment, and relations between the "straight" and LGBTQ communities. In conflicts over values, not just personal injury or transgression, it can be

Figure 10.3 The Four-Strand Cable



very helpful to have what contributor Gushee (2011) calls a "bi-focal vision." Looking at a conflict through dual lenses we don't seek agreement on an issue so much as a much deeper understanding of our own and the other's position. As we are unlikely to change a person's position, we can at least change our perception of who the other person is and what experiences helped shaped that person's perspective. This process is aided when we ask questions like the following:

You can write about these, or discuss these in a small group.

- What values shape your thinking?
- Who or what experience has influenced you the most?
- Has a particular story had an effect on you and shaped your views?
- What is at stake for you in the position you take?
- What do you fear most?
- What is it about people like me that scares you so much?
- What doubts do I have about my own position? Can I risk acknowledging them?
- What values of yours can I come to appreciate without losing mine?

In situations where people are at odds over values and positions on important personal and public issues, questions like these help us see the other person not as an enemy but as a person whose views have evolved as a result of significant life experiences that are different from our own. By exploring such questions with others we learn to be less afraid of moving *toward* another person; we overcome the tendency to see the other person as flawed or evil or ignorant; we may even develop enthusiasm for difference. By getting better at asking these kinds of questions, we increase the likelihood of mending relations not just after harm has been done but in the everyday clash of values and opinions.

In *Beyond Revenge* McCullough (2008) describes a process, mainly associated with groups, that provides some useful terms for what can take place in interpersonal relationships. He tells about two groups of boys at Robbers Cave State Park. In this now famous experiment, two groups of boys are separated and allowed to develop a strong, well-defined group identity. After a while the two groups are brought together to compete with one another. The competition sharpens their differences. Eventually the researchers intervene and stage some emergencies that impact *both* groups. As boys from both groups learn to cooperate with each other, they begin to redefine themselves and each other. McCullough calls this process "decategorization, recategorization, and intergroup differentiation" (195). In other words, individuals and groups can learn to break down categories that keep people separate, revise old categories on the basis of new information, and learn that individuals are more complex than their group identity. This learning is at the heart of reconciliation.

The Tie That Binds: A Multicultural Example from Hawaii

I traveled to Maui, Hawaii, to learn more about an ancient Hawaiian practice known as **Ho'oponopono.** I spent time in a predominantly indigenous community where I quickly realized that forgiveness expresses itself differently in different cultures. While in Hawaii I gathered information, like bits of broken shell scattered on the sand, from many sources—from a private library and conversations with community elders and clergy. What follows is a brief summary of a mostly hidden way that Native Hawaiians help family members untangle the nets of grievance, hurt, and resentment that threaten the vitality and well-being of their families. This account should *not* be taken as a full explication of the practice.

Ho'oponopono, developed by the first Pacific Islanders to inhabit Hawaii, nearly disappeared in the years after James Cook landed on the islands in 1820 and the Congregational Church sought to suppress the practice. Yet it persists in the memory of elders. Some Hawaiian families still practice this ritual in the privacy of their homes. Ho'oponopono occasionally reemerges less formally in drug treatment, recreation, and juvenile justice programs. In light of everything else we have said in this chapter on forgiveness and reconciliation, this introduction to a complex method sheds light on important aspects of the effort to improve relations between individuals who are members of an extended family network. As it was originally practiced, and for those who continue to use some version of the process, Ho'oponopono assumes an underlying cosmology, a harmonious triangular relationship among God (Akua), the land (Aina), and the people (Kanaka). Any disturbance to any one part of this triangle affects every aspect of this complex set of relationships. Living on an isolated archipelago, Hawaiians could not afford disharmony in relationships. Travel between islands, collaborative efforts to catch fish, the planting of taro, construction of shelters and ceremonial sites depended on the cooperation of family members and harmony between them. Ho'oponopono was developed to restore this fragile harmony after it had been lost.

The most precise account of this practice is preserved in a two-volume book called *Nana I Ke Kumu,* or *Look to the Source.* In this book, the principal author (Pukui 1979) describes a process, led by a trusted elder, whose goal is to gather family members for the purpose of discovering what has gone wrong. It aims to restore relationships between supernatural powers, the land, and its people. Literally, *Ho'oponopono* means "to make

right." The process begins with an opening prayer led by the elder (Kahuna or Haku), establishing the spiritual context for social relations and their repair. The elder then *initiates an investigation* into the problems underlying this disharmony. This part of the practice is like peeling an onion or opening bark around a tree (Mahiki). As the parties to the conflict *tell their stories,* one by one, the elder keeps a close eye on everyone and people who are expressing their feelings. If this uncovering phase becomes too intense or dissolves into blaming or excusing, he or she may call for a *time-out* (Ho'omalu) in which silence is enforced and *deep introspection is required.* When participants are able to return to the discussion, sometimes days later, participants continue to open up the hidden layers of the conflict or trouble (Pilikia). During the course of the discussion, the leader expects *absolute truthfulness and sincerity,* examining all parties to the conflict. Likewise, in a resolution phase of the process, the leader expects *honest confession,* the deepest *acknowledgment of wrongdoing, apology, and expressions of regret.* The injured party is *expected* to offer forgiveness (Kala) and release from obligation without further recrimination. At this point in the process the elder prescribes appropriate forms of *restitution* so that the wrongdoer is not burdened by a sense of guilt or discomfort in social situations, and so that the injured party has no further claim that might again entangle the interdependent relationships. The leader and participants expect that this cycle of acknowledgment, expression of remorse, and the offer of forgiveness, *completes* the process. It is said to be finished or cut off (Oki), so much so that a person who refuses to accept the resolution of the problem may, in rare cases, be excluded from the community—a most severe punishment in the island context. Finally, the elder leads a concluding prayer that summarizes the discoveries and actions of the parties, asking for a blessing on the participants. Occasionally, a modest cleansing ritual follows Ho'oponopono.

Part of the genius of Ho'oponopono is that it recognizes that *grievances are often tied together* and that one layer of resentment underlies another. In a well-known story told by Mary Pukui, a woman receives a quilt from her mother. In time she was supposed to pass it on to her daughter. But feeling hurt by what she perceives as her daughter's apparent inattention, the mother sells the quilt rather than pass it down to the next generation. Feeling guilty about her action, the mother becomes ill and begins to dream about her daughter. The illness and the dream precipitate the call for Ho'oponopono. Hawaiians see illness and a particularly vivid dream as evidence of disharmony in the cosmic triangle, a kind of trouble that is best addressed through Ho'oponopono. During the course of Ho'oponopono, the daughter communicates her disappointment and resentment toward the mother who failed to pass on the quilt. But peeling back a deeper layer, the elder discovers that the mother is feeling hurt because the daughter has been ignoring her. Peeling to the core, the uncovering process reveals that the daughter is preoccupied with her new husband and child. The restorative part of the process requires the mother to create another quilt for the daughter (with the help of other women in the community) and the daughter to communicate more frequently with her mother. Through this example, Mary Pukui illustrates how family members become entangled in a net of resentments. The Ho'oponopono leader disentangles the binding cords, freeing all the parties caught in this crow's nest of misery. In discussion about this process, other elders likened Ho'oponopono to removing a fishhook caught in the flesh of each family member. The person with the grievance must let go the far end of the line so that the hook can be removed through acknowledgment, confession, and forgiveness. Linguistically speaking, the language surrounding the practice of

Ho'oponopono employs a host of metaphors derived from traditional Hawaiian culture that reinforce the spiritual and psychological process of making right a disturbance in once-harmonious relationships.

From the vantage point of a different culture (the United States) that has wittingly and unwittingly contributed to the destruction of traditional Hawaiian culture, it may seem to us that Ho'oponopono depends too much on the skill of a leader at a time when few are trained to carry out this kind of responsibility. Also, it may overestimate the possibility of achieving closure through a stylized ritual process. Nevertheless, Ho'oponopono, wherever it is still practiced or remembered, has much to commend to anyone concerned with forgiveness and reconciliation. It recognizes and uncovers the *layers* of grievance that often keep people apart and the way there are *shared* contributions to conflict. It sees through the surface glare of one story to get at another deeper story and recognizes how two stories may be deeply intertwined. It creates a container in which multiple truths can emerge. It discourages the most primitive expressions of emotion that can cause additional injuries and interrupt the restorative process. It demands restitution as a part of restorative justice. It asks participants to cleanse themselves of the residue of resentment through the expectation that they achieve closure in relation to one another. And depending on one's point of view, it recognizes and awakens spiritual resources that help people restore the lost harmony of the world.

Other cultures have developed their own methods of untangling the strands of conflict and retribution that give rise to injury upon injury. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, for example, is only one of many efforts following civil conflict in Africa to reveal painful stories, and to create a setting in which confessions could be made and forgiveness enacted (McLaughlin 2006). Wherever we live, whatever our cultural identity, these practices have merit as it becomes increasingly clear that we all live on the same small island.

Conclusion

Sometimes, after a history of conflict with another individual, or worn down by unproductive interactions and with little sense of hope, we let a relationship wither. It becomes like a plant we fail to water; it's not worth the investment. We sometimes need to accept that no amount of effort, no desire to repair the relationship, to forgive and begin again, or go through the work and humbling process of being forgiven, will make any difference. Even in a time of social media some relationships become inaccessible to us. People drift out of reach, leaving us with no reason to pour our energy into the connection. In these situations it is hard or impossible to take an active approach to the relationship. We simply have to let it go.

While acknowledging that sometimes we simply have to let a relationship fade away, this chapter assumes that we can sometimes take an *active* rather than *passive* approach to a relationship. In some cases, despite a history of conflict, or because of a compelling need to cooperate with another person, we have a sense that a relationship might be reparable or made more workable with an active approach. In this case learning more about the process of forgiveness, even if it does not directly involve the other person, might lead toward a clearer understanding of the relationship and possibly even reconciliation and restored trust. This chapter turns around a central question: What are the requirements and demands of forgiveness and how might we transcend a history of conflict or transgression and move toward reconciliation? This chapter takes an *active* approach to the repair of an interpersonal relationship.

I conclude with a question: Following conflict or a transgression, what should we *expect* of forgiveness? However much process models of forgiveness warn us that the path to forgiveness is *not* linear, they imply a destination and suggest closure. In truth we are never really free of our memories, memories of what has been done to us, or memories of what we have done to others or ourselves. This means the practice of forgiveness, at best, is a gateway, a turnstile, a mountain pass beyond which the trail continues. Whatever metaphor you use, once we are through the intersection of forgiveness some things are different. We may feel a little more empathy toward the transgressor or even for ourselves. We may leave behind some of the obsessive self-focus that naturally accompanies a wound to the heart. Memories can fade with distance. We can feel a little freer than when we first picked up a load of resentment. Nevertheless, the integration of our experience is not arrival. We will always have something to learn from the past and work to do in the future, some shame to overcome, some anger to release so we do not contribute further to a world of wounds.

As I have mentioned, we authors live in a place where rivers cut their way through mountains on the way to the sea. Some of our rivers have been assaulted by a history of mining and misuse, the effects of dams and accumulating pollution. In 2008, one of these dams was breached. As dramatic as this event was, those of us who live near the confluence of the Blackfoot and Clark Fork Rivers remember that a great deal of work took place *before* heavy equipment pulled away the last obstruction and released the river: Permits and agreements needed to be secured; poisonous sediments had to be removed; a diversion channel and temporary coffer dam had to be built. Once the river flowed free it took with it a certain amount of leftover arsenic and copper, toxic substances now distributed downriver in eddies, on inside turns, beaches and reservoirs. Some of the effects are still with us, but they are dispersed rather than concentrated. In much the same way, forgiveness involves a great deal of work, the excavation of toxic memories and the eventual release of the animosity we hold against others and ourselves. Some of this work takes place silently and deep within us. Some of it requires cooperation, patience, and the assistance of other people who facilitate the process through their apologies, their willingness to listen, and the courage it takes to acknowledge one's own contribution to destructive conflict. Nevertheless, the river of our relations can eventually run free, assume its natural rhythms, and support the lives we all hope to lead.

Summary

In this chapter, informed by stories and a growing body of research, we define forgiveness, discuss misconceptions about it, and describe how the process of forgiving may take a path with many steps or be the result of a decision. Forgiveness does not require forgetting, but depends on a full acknowledgement of the truth. On the journey of forgiveness, whether taken privately or in cooperation with the person who caused harm, we must take into account differences in power between parties to a conflict or transgression. For this reason we stand by the view that forgiveness is more an option, a choice not necessarily an obligation. People may get stuck in the process and may need patience and

resting places while on the journey to forgiveness. Forgiveness is both intrapersonal and interpersonal in nature. We may take the indirect route of private reflection and nonverbal gestures toward an offending party or we may risk direct communication about the offense, the harm it caused, and the need for restitution and amends. We set a high standard for apology, recognizing that good apologies often foster and speed the process of repairing relational damage. Reconciliation is not always an appropriate goal or outcome. Relying on Shriver, we see great value in telling and hearing the truth, resisting the appeal of revenge, developing empathy that softens the hardened heart, and working toward the awareness that our ties of mutual dependence invite us to keep working at restoring our connections. Informed by insights and practices in other cultures, we have a growing appreciation of the role played by other members of the community who can help us remember, grieve, and let go, and who can help us untangle the nets of our own complicity in destructive interactions. Other people can sometimes help us accomplish what we cannot achieve by ourselves.

Listening carefully to the stories people tell, we have realized that the process leading to forgiveness is not always scripted or linear; sometimes it is simply mysterious. At the end of the journey people say things like, "I found that the stones I wanted to throw simply slipped out of my fingers." "The gate to a future I could not have imagined simply swung open when I let go of what they did to me." "Resentment no longer holds me hostage." "Like a scarred tree, I've begun to heal." "The journey is not over, but I have started out on the road."

Using examples from the lives of our student and counseling clients, and insights from film, fiction, and international relations, we have illustrated some of the challenges inherent in this process. Forgiveness, and reconciliation its close cousin in the next room, are the by-product of a complex interaction of several factors. Forgiveness that restores us to ourselves and reconciliation that restores us to one another are the result of time, but not time alone. The human desire to transcend injury, clarifying conversation, the courage to place a violation, betrayal, deception, or some other wound in the larger context of additional experience, and perhaps the mysterious effect of what some call "grace," all contribute to a better outcome. When we forgive someone else or ourselves, or when we are forgiven by those we have harmed, we affirm the world is much larger than the injury that dominates our thoughts and feelings. An invisible door opens and we step out onto a stage where it is possible to associate with one another in ways less impacted and dictated by old memories. In this light we subjugate the memory of past harm to the hope of a new future. In the face of conflict or injury, we see our mutual vulnerability, our inevitable interdependence, and the need for compassion so all of us can transcend the injuries and bitter conflicts associated with the past and move more freely as creators of a new story.

Key Terms

forgiveness 317
imbalance of power 325
secondary wound 327
decision or a process 329
decision to forgive 329
three-step model of forgiveness 330
self-forgiveness 331
eddies 335
gestures 338
kinds of apologies 341
receive forgiveness 346
reconciliation 348
the strand of truth 349
the strand of forbearance 351
the strand of empathy 352
Ho'oponopono 355

Review Questions

1. Discuss some definitions of forgiveness. What are the key components of forgiveness?
2. What are the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation?
3. What is the problem with the phrase "forgive and forget"?
4. Compare and contrast the ideas of "forgiveness as decision" and "forgiveness as process," giving your own opinions based on the ideas presented.
5. Explain the "eddies" in which a person may be caught.
6. In what way is forgiveness both intrapersonal and interpersonal? How might these aspects be woven together?
7. How do gestures function to lay the groundwork for further change?
8. What makes apologies ineffective or inappropriate?
9. What makes a genuine apology?
10. What are the characteristics of good public apologies?
11. What are the purposes of well-constructed public apologies?
12. What makes self-forgiveness so difficult?
13. Explain Shriver's four strands of reconciliation.
14. What are some of the guidelines for a reconciling conversation?
15. Describe cultural practices of the process of forgiveness.

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