

Dispute Resolution Institute
J - Term 2003

Hamline University School of Law
January 2, 4, 7, 9 and 11

Theories of Conflict

Instructors:

Kenneth H. Fox, J.D.
305 Law/Grad Building, 523-2411, kenfox@hamline.edu

Jack B. Schaffer, Ph.D.
(651) 699-4751, schaffer@pmlink.com

“There are no data independent of theory, no observations not made from a perspective. Data alone do not tell us anything; they do not speak, but are interpreted by people.”

- Carol Gilligan (1993) Reply to critics. In M.J. Larrabee, An ethic of care: Feminist and interdisciplinary perspectives, 207-214. New York, NY: Routledge.

About this course: This interdisciplinary course introduces students to important theoretical perspectives on our understanding of conflict, which has a profound impact on how we view conflict response.. This class provides the necessary foundation and context for understanding and evaluating the dynamics of conflict interactions, and the assumptions underlying specific approaches to intervention.

After a general introduction to the concept of perspectivism and the connection between theories and perspectives, students will survey various perspectives on conflict and attendant theories. Specifically, students will explore the biological/physiological, psycho dynamic, social psychological, communication and sociological/political perspectives on conflict by reading and discussing major theoretical works within each perspective. Emphasis will be on comparing and distinguishing key dimensions of these theories, such as the nature and sources of conflict, conflict escalation, conflict resolution, and the nature of the third party role.

The class will follow an interactive format, using exercises and group discussion to draw upon personal experience and demonstrate the usefulness of each theory to understanding the experience of conflict, whether in the context of interpersonal, inter-ethnic, domestic or international disputes. Class participation is essential, which means that class *preparation* is essential.

Readings: Because this is a theory (as opposed to a primarily skills) course, there is a fair amount of reading. To the extent possible, we have distilled down the readings to accommodate the intensive schedule of this course. Thus, for each perspective, we have listed only the required readings. We strongly recommend you complete each reading before the class in which it is

covered. As a supplement for those students wishing more complete exposure to the various theoretical perspectives, we will distribute a list of additional recommended readings during the course.

Reading Worksheet: In order to assist with course readings, we have included a “Reading Worksheet” which is for your use as you complete the various readings. The worksheet can help you in three ways: First, it will assure that you are prepared for class, and have focused your efforts on understanding those portions of the readings that are most relevant (i.e., it supports selective skimming if you really, really must!). Second, it will help you remember things that you read before class, and save you the trouble of rereading. Third, it will help you organize your thoughts for the final paper as you go along at each class meeting, so it is not too large a project at the end.

Grading: The final grade for this class will be based upon class preparation and participation (20%) and a final paper (80%).

Class participation will be self-rated at the end of each class, using the guidelines on the attached Participation Worksheet. We believe that this approach accomplishes a couple of things. It makes you responsible for your own learning. It also accommodates to some extent the uniqueness of our learning styles and interaction styles, including the fact that what is active participation for someone who is quite introverted may be merely average engagement from someone else. Nonetheless, honesty is the best policy, and we reserve the right to override any rating that does not reasonably comport with our perception of reality (whether too lenient or too harsh)! Your Participation Worksheets will be collected at the end of each class.

Final paper: We have several objectives in assigning you a final paper. At the most general level, we want you to demonstrate your understanding of the course material. We also want you to synthesize the material and apply it to a practical problem. And finally, we want to encourage your critical and creative thinking. We will distribute the final paper topic on the first day of class.

Your paper should be between 10 and 15 pages in length, double-spaced, with 1” margins all around. The final paper is due no later than **4:30pm, Monday, January 27, 2003** (fourteen (14) days after the end of the course). Final papers should be submitted to the Hamline University School of Law Registrar’s office. Identify yourself with your student number, rather than name, on your final paper.

Ken wishes to acknowledge the important role Dorothy J. Della Noce played, with whom he has taught this course in the past, in developing the course syllabus.

PLAN OF STUDY THURSDAY JANUARY 2

Course overview and introductions

Introduction to Perspectivism

Perspectivism and Conflict Theory

Key questions in analyzing conflict theories for understanding perspective

Required reading: Anderson, W.T. *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be*, Chapters 1, 10 and 11

Individual and Social Identities perspective (who we are in relation to conflict)

1. Biological theory

Required reading: Baron, R.A. and Richardson, D.R. (1994). *Biological bases of human aggressive behavior*. In R. Baron and D.R. Richardson, Human aggression (2d ed.). New York, NY: Plenum.

SATURDAY JANUARY 4

2. Displacement theory

Required reading: Volkan, V. (1994). The need to have enemies and allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relations. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson. Chapters 2, 6, 15, 16.

3. Learning theory

Required reading: Kanfer, FH & Phillips, JS (1970). *Learning Foundations of Behavioral Therapy*. NY: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 51-77.

4. Social Identity theory

Required reading: Ashmore, RD, Jussim, L. and Wilder, D.(2001). *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction* (pps. 1-41)

TUESDAY JANUARY 7

Individual Needs perspective

1. Social Confrontation Episode

Required reading: Newell, W. and Stutman, R. *Negotiating Confrontation: The Problematic Nature of Initiation and Response*, in Research on Language and Social Interaction, Vol. 23, 1989/90: 139-162

2. Cognitive/social psychological theories

Required reading: Rubin, J.Z., Pruitt, D.G. & Kim, S.H. (1994). Social Conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement (2d ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. Chapters 1, 2, 3 (We recommend chapters 5, 9, 10 and 11 if time permits).

THURSDAY JANUARY 9

Relational perspective

Relational theory

Communication theories

1. Discourse Analytic theory

Required reading: Conley, J.M. and O'Barr, W.M (1998) Just Words: Law Language and Power. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 3 (The language of mediation). And

Bush, R..A.B. and Folger, J.P. (1994). The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict Through Empowerment and Recognition. Chapter 7.

2. Social Constructivist theory

Required readings: Smith, R.C. & Eisenberg, E.M. (1987). *Conflict at Disneyland: A root-metaphor analysis*, Communication Monographs, 54, 367-380. And

Pearce, W.B. and Littlejohn, S.W. (1997). Moral conflict: When Social Worlds Collide. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapters 1, 2, 3. (We recommend chapters 5, 6, 7 and 9 if time permits)

SATURDAY JANUARY 11

Social Structural perspective

systems theories

human needs

Required reading: Burton, J. (1993). *Conflict resolution as a political philosophy*. In D.J.D. Sandole and H. van der Merwe (Eds.), Conflict resolution theory and practice: Integration and application, pp.55-64. New York, NY: Manchester University Press.

Summary and Application