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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Thomas Rhett Graves entitled "The Thematic Meaning of Face-to-Face Conflict Experiences: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Investigation." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

Howard R. Pollio
Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Lowell Gaertner

Kathleen Row

Sandra Thomas

Accepted for the Council:

Linda Painter

Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records)

THE THEMATIC MEANING OF FACE-TO-FACE CONFLICT EXPERIENCES: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Thomas Rhett Graves

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DEDICATION

To my cats, who, pouncing on and sleeping among my books, articles, notes and various drafts of this dissertation, made an important contribution (even if it was because I could never again find that *essential* citation or note I jotted).

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many pleasant evenings of food and drink (the best sort of *dissertractions*). My sister, Lone, and brother, Bob, also deserve thanks for keeping me in orbit and for their sense of humor.

ABSTRACT

Face-to-face interactions are the experiential basis for our reflected understandings of the social world. Face-to-face conflict (as a form of social transaction) is present across different forms of social conflict (e.g., international or intergroup conflicts). Understanding the phenomenology of face-to-face conflict thus provides insight concerning experiences of social conflict and our evaluations of it. In this investigation, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to describe the thematic meanings of face-to-face conflict experiences.

Eleven dialogical interviews were conducted concerning situations in which participants "experienced a conflict between themselves and another person(s)" and comprise 17 hours of recorded dialogue between the participants and investigator. Two different groups conducted interpretation of transcribed interviews: one at the University of Tennessee Center for Applied Phenomenological Research and the other at the University of Tennessee Nursing College. Interpretive groups were composed of 10-15 scholars from the University and surrounding community, trained in hermeneutic phenomenology. Interpretation also was conducted independently and presented to both groups for discussion and further analysis.

Results of the thematic analysis indicated that the structure for the face-to-face conflict experience consists of three *moments*—the *betrayal*, *fight*, and *aftermath*—which emerge against the ground of a *preexisting relationship*. The themes associated with *betrayal* are (1*) issue(s) and problem(s)*, (2) *seriousness of the issue(s),* (3) *shock and surprise*, (4) *feeling hurt and losing trust*, (5) *unfairness and wrongness*, and (6) *deciding whether to act*. The *fight* is structured by themes of (1) *control, power, strength*, (2) *blaming and being blamed*, (3) *frustration and confusion*, (4) *fear and anger*, and (5) *disconnection and difference*. The *aftermath* concerns (1) *accountability and responsibility*, (2) *hope and regret*, (3) *learning and change*, and (4) *deciding on the relationship*, that is, (a) to leave the relationship, (b) to remain in the relationship without changing it, or (c) to change the relationship. One may further understand these moments

and themes as structured in terms of interpersonal and psychological processes of *controlling the conflict*, *judging the conflict*, *understanding the conflict*, *feeling the conflict*, and *explaining the conflict*.

Prevailing models of social conflict tend to view it in terms of interdependent exchange relations in which rational social agents seek to secure a share of finite and valued resources, often at the expense of others in their social environment. The understanding of face-to-face conflict that emerges here suggests an alternative to the utilitarian and functionalist understandings. Face-to-face conflict is a dialogical relation that challenges, questions, and recreates the meaning of self-in-relationship within the context of a particular sociocultural world. The findings are discussed in terms of qualitative and quantitative studies of anger, intractable conflict, victim-perpetrator relationships, and forgiveness; they also are described with respect to various theories concerning the role of conflict in individual social experience.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

Now it was, after the passing of days
that Cain brought, from the fruit of the soil, a gift to God
and as for Abel, he too brought—from the firstborn of his flock,
from their fat parts.
God had regard for Abel and his gift,
for Cain and his gift he had no regard.
Cain became exceedingly upset and his face fell.
God said to Cain:
Why are you so upset? Why has your face fallen?
Is it not thus:
If you intend good, raise it up!
But if you do not intend good,
at the entrance is sin, a crouching demon
toward you his lust—but you can rule over him.
Cain said to Abel his brother, come, let us go out into the field
but then it was, when they were out in the field
that Cain rose up against Abel his brother
and he killed him.

Genesis 4: 3-8 (Everett Fox, trans., 1997)

Social conflict often makes our experience of the everyday social world unpredictable and complex. This unpredictability and complexity seems inevitable and far from reassuring. Self-help books become best sellers by promising to aid readers in navigating inevitable conflicts and much like predecessors in ancient texts—such as *Genesis'* account of Cain and Abel—these texts provide accounts of conflict, moral lessons, and relationship advice (e.g., Elgin, 1980; Rosen, 1998). These texts also explain how to manage conflict, addressing the dynamics of personal and public relationships encountered in everyday social environments (e.g., Greene, 1998; Jandt & Gillette, 1985).

Historical memory, likewise, is populated with famous figures and protagonists of fiction who exemplify shrewdness, wisdom and clarity in conflict. History lauds those who are skilled in conflict—one reason, Prime Minister Churchill famously quipped, is

that "history is written by the victors." In war, historical memory valorizes leaders who succeed and makes unseen or notorious those who fail. American economic history also has its heroes, the industrialist ethos producing admirable and daunting characters in Carnegie, Rockefeller and Vanderbilt. Conflict tests mettle and resilience; those who prevail draw generations of interest.

Professional attention to social conflict is as extensive as that found in popular literature and historical memory. A review article from 1977 documented over 1,000 studies published on experimental conflict simulation between 1950 and 1976 (Pruitt & Kimmel, 1977). Conflict simulation (e.g., experimental gaming) remains a popular approach to research on social conflict. Nevertheless, it represents a minor aspect of the field when considering the literatures of sociology, jurisprudence, political science, ethics, economics, mathematics, anthropology, business, medicine and psychology. In fact, a literature search conducted in 2005 for studies related to social conflict yielded over 12,000 hits in the *PSYCHINFO* and *ISI Social Science Citation Index* databases, spanning a century of publications.

The Present Investigation

Absent in the literature is an investigation of the phenomenology of social conflict. One reason for this is the topic's extraordinary breadth. A viable solution emerges, however, when considering the social constructivist contention that knowledge of the social world comes directly from experiences of face-to-face interaction in everyday life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). A comparable claim from the conflict literature suggests that dyadic (two-person) conflict is the simplest, commonest and most experientially salient form of social conflict (e.g., Simmel, 1908/1955; Smith, 1987). If face-to-face encounters ground everyday social experience, perhaps a basis for understanding social conflict is to be found in the meaning of conflicts we experience with others who are, or were, directly present to us.

Conflicts take place within an individual or between an individual and his or her environment. They also take place between individuals, within or between groups, and

within or between nations, religions, cultures, ethnicities, and so on (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003). Understanding the human meaning of face-to-face conflict may open us to exploring the more general meaning of social conflict as it emerges in our experience, thought and discourse about it. While each form of conflict necessitates a different analysis of causes, processes and consequences (Fink, 1968), the face-to-face situation seems to crosscut these various forms and exhibits an underlying structure that derives from direct human experience and that may inform our understanding of other forms of social conflict. The present investigation utilizes a phenomenological method to address the meaning of the human experience of face-to-face conflict, a phenomenon that seems prototypic for what becomes the reflected understanding of social conflict.

Phenomenological Methods Applied to Face-to-Face Conflict

Phenomenological methods in the social sciences focus on describing the structure of meanings that emerge in everyday life experiences. The data are linguistic, rather than numeric, and are collected in an open-ended dialogue between participant and investigator. Phenomenological methods seek meaningful consistencies among different experiential accounts of a phenomenon (Ihde, 1986). Quantitative approaches to social conflict have primarily understood the phenomenon in terms of objectively measurable characteristics. This investigation, however, seeks to elaborate consistent patterns of meaning that crosscut otherwise diverse accounts of face-to-face conflict.

Many approaches to social conflict often conceptualize factors of interest—such as decision-making, stereotyping, conflict-handling styles, agreeableness, etc.—in terms of cause-effect relationships that are addressed using inferential methods, such as hypothesis testing (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003). Causal relationships are established when experimental manipulations have a measurable effect on some dependent variable (Druckman, 2005). Phenomenological research has no independent or dependent variables, no *experimental* methodology (in the positivist sense) and thus is not a proper procedure for establishing causal relationships. Existential-phenomenological methods focus instead on the human meaning of a phenomenon as it is

communicated in participant descriptions of everyday life experiences (Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2005). The outcome of this investigation will help define the thematic structure of meanings that emerge for individuals in life situations of conflict.

This investigation is located within the constructivist tradition of social psychology. This perspective suggests that conflict is prototypically situated in face-to-face interaction. It is an interaction—or dialogue—integrally shaped by its historical, cultural and institutional contexts (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Language is a significant mode by which culture and history shape human social experience (Whorf, 1956) and it is important then for the results of this investigation to be presented in the idiom participants have used to describe their experience. In using idiomatic language, the investigator maintains a stance toward the social reality of the phenomenon in as close a way as possible while retaining the methodological rigor necessary for a proper empirical investigation (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). In accord with this tradition, the investigator defines a situated perspective and an additional voice within this investigation, as both an interpreter and co-constructor of meaning in dialogue with participants and their accounts.

Data Collection and Analysis

Eleven participants described life experiences of 'conflict between themselves and another person.' These descriptions were produced in an open-ended, dialogical situation. Participants were interviewed until they felt that their account had fully addressed the central aspects of their experience as they lived it. Some interviews were as brief as 30 minutes (covering a single situation of conflict) and others as long as 3.5 hours (covering multiple situations). The typical interview lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours and covered approximately five situations.

In the process of data collection, participants were interviewed until the investigator began to notice central sets of themes were repeating across diverse accounts. While no statistical test allows for estimation of sample size for a phenomenological investigation, the typical practice is that additional interviews are

conducted until themes begin to repeat and no new themes emerge. At this point, the corpus of interviews is understood to have reached *thematic saturation* (Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2005). The corpus of accounts seemed to reach thematic saturation at nine interviews. Two additional interviews were conducted to verify saturation. The present analysis is based on approximately 17 hours of face-to-face dialogue with participants. These interviews often were extensive, as participants were encouraged to provide as much detail as necessary to feel that the account they had given did justice to their lived experiences of conflict.

Before conducting interviews with participants, I engaged in a bracketing interview. In a phenomenological approach, participating in a bracketing interview allows an investigator to become aware of the personal meanings being brought to the interviewing situation and thereby allows for greater openness to the similarities and differences in meanings that emerge in dialogue with participants (Van Manen, 1990). This interview was conducted by an individual who has had graduate-level training and practice in this method of interviewing. This interview elicited the prejudgments and biases I brought to the situation of the interviews and later hermeneutic analysis of the resulting corpus.

A single statement opened the interviews: "Please describe a situation (or situations) in which you experienced a conflict between yourself and another person." This statement was intended to focus participants on face-to-face situations in which they were directly a party to a conflict rather than a bystander or witness to a conflict, as is possible with the statement: "…describe a situation (or situations) in which you experienced conflict with another person." Utilizing the phenomenological interviewing protocol described in Pollio, Graves, and Arfken (2005), follow-up questions were asked only to clarify meanings or to ask for in-depth description of points already addressed by the participant. Interviews were recorded using a SONY ICD-SX25 digital recorder and transcribed using proprietary software designed for use with this recorder.

The investigator and an interpretive group at the University of Tennessee Center for Applied Phenomenological Research (CAPR) carefully read and interpreted four

interview transcripts, including the investigator's bracketing interview transcript. In the group readings, the investigator and the interpretive group derived a set of themes for each account. The investigator then developed a general set of themes by interpreting across the remaining accounts. This set of general themes was presented to members of the Phenomenological Research Group at the University of Tennessee Nursing College—an interpretive group unfamiliar with the work done by the group at CAPR. Additional input was sought from this group about the reasonableness of the thematic structure developed from CAPR's and of my own interpretive work.

Concluding Remarks

From the present perspective, face-to-face social conflict is a dialogical event that has the potential to shape, alter and reframe an individual's basic understandings of self, other and world. The predominant understanding of social conflict in the social sciences usually assumes that human beings are rational, utilitarian and independent social agents. Conflict processes are viewed as emerging in exchange relations between rational actors who perceive, evaluate, decide and act with the intention of maximizing personal gain (benefits) and minimizing personal loss (costs). Many techniques have been developed to research conflict processes and often these employ the rational-actor assumption. This assumption is powerful for developing abstract mathematical models of conflict dynamics; however, by maintaining the very assumptions that make it so elegant and compelling, one may lose the experienced human meanings of the phenomenon.

Two general objectives motivate this investigation: one is a pure concern, the other, applied. First, phenomenological methods have not been applied to address the human meaning of face-to-face social conflict and this has resulted in a gap in the social scientific understanding of conflict. By addressing face-to-face conflict in this way, the results of this investigation may serve as an additional criterion with which to assess the validity of various theoretical conceptualizations of social conflict as well as of various experimental analogs and operational definitions of the phenomenon.

Another potential theoretical benefit of this research is that psychologists and other social science researchers may utilize its findings to complete the empirical chain of scientific reasoning about social conflict from direct experience, to description, to theorizing, to hypothesis testing, to assessing the results of experimentation in light of further direct observation. As Pollio, Graves, and Arfken (2005) observe: 'the scientific method begins in experience and ends in interpretation,' and the phenomenological method is a systematic and rigorous approach for addressing human experience and its meaning.

A second significant concern for this investigation is an applied one: in developing a description of the structure of meanings that emerge in situations of conflict, professional conflict analysts and other specialists in conflict mediation and arbitration will come to possess a template with which to compare and understand the experiences of the conflicting parties with whom they are now working. This template—in the form of a thematic structure—may serve to further nuance professional understandings of conflict causes, processes and consequences by adding a dimension of understanding in terms of the experiential meanings of social conflict and the fundamentally nonrational process of conflict dialogue.

A phenomenological approach encourages a suspension of any assumptions of rationality in the prereflective experience of conflict and allows us to describe the emergence of rational (e.g., reflected) understanding that takes place within conflict when it is conceived of as in an ongoing dialogical relation. The conflict experience is both a dialogical process and a configuration of meanings of which rationality and irrationality are aspects. What I hope to achieve is to make comprehensible the phenomenology of conflict activities and meanings by providing a depth understanding of the prereflective meaning of conflict as it relates to reflected, after-the-fact, understandings of such conflicts.

The phenomenological approach, with its focus on the lived meaning of human social experience, has the advantage of not assuming a utilitarian basis for individual choices and actions. Further, it does not assume a particular moral stance toward conflict

phenomena nor towards the outcomes of conflict. Here, I attempt to assume a position of neutrality with respect to my own and the participants' experiences of conflict. This neutrality should not be taken as a lack of empathy for the significance of the life events that participants have revealed to me in good faith; it is an indication of the necessary rigor for proper phenomenological investigation.

A phenomenological approach also allows for a focus on the culturally particular meanings that emerge in how participants come to make sense of and describe their conflict experiences (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1994). It is significant to note that one finds across cultures many different interaction rituals, role relationships (cf. Goffman, 1967) and practices for specifying the relevant causes of, and strategies for managing, social deviance and conflict (cf. Herdt & Stoller, 1990). A body of literature has developed in social psychology, cultural psychology and psychological anthropology concerning the similarities and differences in conflict handling, power dynamics, and other conflict-relevant phenomena in cross-cultural contexts (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). The results of this investigation may contribute to this literature if viewed as describing face-to-face conflicts that have taken place largely within the context of a culture that tends to be highly individualistic. This tendency may instigate, perpetuate, and intensify conflicts between persons viewed as independent social agents (McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

Individualistic biases may also permeate the accounts and interpretations that serve as the basis of this investigation. In Chapter III, however, I argue that face-to-face conflict is a basic interpersonal process that allows individuals within a social system to develop a meaningful social world out of problems that emerge from the shared existential situation of being-together in human life. This basic existential situation may be understood to be present across social/cultural worlds (Shweder, 1991). As Sedikides, Gaertner, and Toguchi (2003) argue, even in cultures that can be broadly classified as collectivistic, a member may seek to differentiate his or her self from the group identity (i.e., to engage in "tactical self-enhancement"); he or she tends to do so, however, along dimensions valued to the group, e.g., 'I am a *better team player* than the others.' The

basic existential situation of negotiating a relationship between self and other is one that transcends culture; how this problem is resolved, however, is fundamentally cultural as it emerges in different practices and with respect to embedded meanings associated with those practices. It seems that no type of social organization is free of conflict, but the particular issues around which conflict emerges, and is conceptualized and handled, vary with considerable margin.

The phenomenological meaning of face-to-face conflict is significant in itself and in that it seems to be an aspect of social conflicts taking place between groups and nations as well as of psychological conflicts within an individual or between an individual and his or her environment. The phenomenological approach leads one to consider carefully the human meaning of social conflict as it emerges in everyday life contexts. I assume that persons in conflict are neither rational nor irrational but that they are co-constructors and negotiators of meaning (rationality and irrationality being aspects of that meaning) and that the possibility for that meaning has (within our cultural world) a particular phenomenological pattern that is coherent and knowable to social science. As the interpretive anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) has maintained,

> Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (pg. 5).

Face-to-face conflict is perhaps one way in which these webs of significance are spun and as such, it is a phenomenon of great social and scientific import.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON SOCIAL CONFLICT

Face-to-face situations are the experiential basis of the social world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Across social, historical and linguistic traditions, face is an ever-present metaphor. The Fourth-century Chinese, for instance, captured the connotations in two words used to describe face: *Lien*, meaning 'moral character,' and *Mien-tzu*, meaning 'reputation' (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001). A face is also a concrete object of social experience. To be face-to-face is to be in another's presence, and the concrete presence of the other makes significant demands. Faces, as objects in the world, are perplexing: they are the only objects that can be genuine or duplicitous, that can turn toward us in admiration or away in disdain. As faces—that is, as concrete things in the social world—we accede to, and make demands of, each other (Levinas, 1969).

The hyphenated term, *face-to-face*, is meant to capture the existential situation of interdependence in social life; what McNamee and Gergen (1999) call the conjoint relation. When face-to-face, and present to each other, each person's possibilities for action are contingent upon the actions of the other. Not only actions are contingent on this relationship, social meanings are also at stake. Our own face is an open region in our experience; we come to know its meaning by its reflection in the social world, in the response of other faces (Mead, 1934). The sociologist Goffman (1959; 1967) and the phenomenologist Levinas (1969) have explored the social and experiential meanings of face in the face-to-face relation. Levinas (1969) describes his experience:

> The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new dimension. For the resistance to the grasp is not produced as an insurmountable resistance, like the hardness of the rock against which the effort of the hand comes to naught, like the remoteness of a star in the immensity of space. The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power.…[T]he face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised (Levinas, 1969, pg. 197).

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Social presence, face-to-face, is a situation in which claims are made for care, for time, for emotional involvement and attention, etc., and no less for a share of valued resources. For Levinas (1969), the most fundamental claim the face makes is on conscience. Another's face demands of us acknowledgement and moral treatment, fairness and consideration, and a willingness to share in the social and natural world. Levinas contends that most actions toward objects in world are those of possession and consumption, as we might own a book or consume food. A face, while an object in the world, is the outward expression of another human being, thus it cannot be possessed, and no power exercised over it.

It is true that one can present one's face strategically, perhaps in politeness or deception, but one cannot determine the meaning one's face has for another. The social meaning of face, our social presence, emerges from an interdependent relation—that is, when we are face-to-face. It is face-to-face in everyday life in which we create the calm and the conflict of our personal relationships and the stability and instability of the social world.

While Levinas (1969) views the face as an existential reality that demands of us a moral conscience, Goffman (1967) articulates an entirely different set of concerns. The *face-to-face* situation for Goffman is one of interpersonal complicity in which social actors make claims and maintain lines concerning the public presentation of self. Berger and Luckmann (1966) see human beings as creating and conveying a meaningful social world face-to-face; Levinas (1969), as making possible for each other a moral social existence. For Goffman, however, face-to-face is a strategic and instrumental social relation—a 'play for each other on the stage of the social world' (Pollio, 1982). Face-to-face conflict seems much more than a play in the social world. It brings together these variants of face in a co-constructive dialogue of moral concern and strategic maneuvering; of egalitarian and, at other times, greedy motives. Our conflict interactions go well beyond those of claiming, exchanging and distributing finite resources. Face-to-face interaction is a primary mode of relation in which personal identities and meanings are challenged and recreated between concrete persons in the social world.

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The Structure of the Review

This review weaves together philosophical treatises and empirical studies from disparate social science fields and seeks to describe a common set of issues that emerge for our understanding of the human experience of face-to-face conflict as it is situated in the Western sociocultural world. The first section enumerates the features of 'social conflict' as a scientific construct, as these are presented in contemporary social science research. This overview will focus on the construct's interpersonal, emotional and temporal characteristics.

The second section moves from the construct to various theories concerning the causes, processes and consequences of conflict; its role as a social process and its relationship to individual experiences in, and of, the social world. Here, we will consider research by historical social theorists, such as Weber, Marx, Durkheim and Simmel, whose impressions remain on current-day social science theory.

Section three follows a similar plan. As with most phenomena that are considered fundamentally social, conflict has characteristics that crosscut different levels of explanation. The third section of this review therefore turns to conflict processes as these have been described in biological terms, i.e., in terms of the natural rather than social world, since these descriptions have been used to explain conflict in the social world. Particularly, it addresses the role of conflict processes in Darwinian evolutionary theory and how the sociologist Spencer (and others) applied the concept of natural selection to the social world.

Together, the second and third sections define two essential historical understandings, which agree in many key ways about the causes, processes and consequences of social conflict. The fourth section provides a synthesis of these views that focuses on the human meaning of conflict as it emerges in our interactions with others in the social world. The view discussed here derives from existentialist and constructivist theories of social conflict and concludes by looking at face-to-face conflict as a special type of dialogue in which social actors and their actions and meanings, are situated in a cultural and historical world.

Section five shifts to specific social psychological theories of social conflict. Since traditional social psychology is a science based on observations of other people, a phenomenological description of the *experience of others* offered by Nowell and Pollio (1991; as in Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) proved appropriate as a classificatory scheme for organizing selected theoretical and empirical work. Social psychological theories are discussed in terms of their central emphases, be these relational factors (such as interdependence), perceptual or cognitive factors related to social comparisons (e.g., discrimination, categorization), or rational decision-making in conflict (e.g., cognitive exchange, microeconomic behavior, game theory). These approaches represent general research trends within experimental social psychological studies of conflict.

As an alternative to the perspective outlined in section five, section six explores qualitative and other meaning-centered approaches to conflict-related phenomena. In meaning-centered studies, the victim's role is constructed and his or her perspective articulated. This perspective understands conflict-related phenomena in terms of issues of social meaning, identity, expectations of reciprocity and morality, relational breaches or violations, disruptions of self and/or time experiences, emotional experiences and expressions, and issues surrounding power/powerlessness, control/loss-of-control and others.

Section seven responds to the fact that qualititative research has often presented conflict-related phenomena from the victim's perspective. A description of the perpetrator's perspective was, therefore, sought in philosophical, historical and social psychological accounts of 'evil.' In the seventh section, I also address issues of accountability, blindness to the consequences of actions, social complicity and other phenomena associated with the perpetrator's perspective.

Finally, a concluding section addresses an existential-phenomenological and social constructivist understanding of issues in the social scientific and more general cultural meanings of social conflict.

The Scientific Construct of Social Conflict

Social science researchers have approached the problem of identifying the central characteristics of social conflict in a variety of ways, each reflecting the researchers' particular disciplinary affiliations and *a priori* research concerns. Since social conflict possesses characteristics that may be viewed as emerging both between and within disputants (Druckman, 2005) a core issue has been whether to place emphasis on observable aspects of conflict contexts and behaviors and/or on the perceptions and emotional experiences of disputants (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001).

Characteristics of the phenomenon that may be viewed as *within* an individual are related to relationship perceptions, interpretations of beliefs and goals, the values of the disputants and of the causes, processes, and outcomes of the conflict situation (Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000). The understandings that disputants have of their shared situation may have significant consequences for the escalation and de-escalation of conflict (Bargal, 2004) and for transforming the interaction from blame and opposition to one of mutual problem-solving (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). When emphasizing observable aspects of social conflict, however, researchers view the interaction as a sequence of communicative exchanges and/or behaviors exhibited when disputants interfere with each other's goal-directed behavior and seek to obtain a disproportionate share of a limited resource (Carothers, Vaske, & Donnelly, 2001).

One way researchers define the phenomenon is in terms of both covert (i.e., subjective or first-person) and overt (i.e., objective or third-person) aspects. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003), for instance, specify both 'perceived' and/or 'actual' incompatibility and interference. What this definition loses in parsimony, it gains in offering a greater understanding of what is involved. Since conflicts often are rooted in different perceptions and interpretations, researching first-person experience is as important as documenting observable interactions and behaviors (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003).

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Features of Social Conflict

In reviewing research on interpersonal conflict in the work place, Barki and Hardwick (2001) identify four general features: relational interdependence, disagreement, interference and negative emotion. They emphasize the contextual and relational nature of social conflict by grounding it in interdependence, much like Deutsch (1973). Parties are interdependent when one party's actions affect the possibilities for another party's actions, each party being subject to shared consequences. Interdependence may be perceived as a detriment particularly when gain-producing actions of one party consistently result in losses for the other party (Deutsch, 1973), with the relationship perceived of as a constraint (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001).

Three further characteristics define social conflict. The first is a perceived and/or actual divergence of values, needs, goals or objectives, which Barki and Hardwick (2001) refer to as disagreement. Disagreement emerges in the understanding that although parties are interdependent, their motives are incompatible. A second characteristic, interference, emerges when one or both parties perceive the other as impeding goal-directed behavior. In conflict, each party is seeking to influence the other's ability to pursue objectives. In disagreement and interference parties act and react, escalating the conflict. Reciprocal interactions that escalate the conflict are referred to as the conflict spiral, and create a situation with potential for violent action (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001). A conflict spiral may lead parties to develop a single-minded objective to destroy each other.

When caught in a spiral, parties intensify already negative feelings toward each other and their shared situation. Fear, jealousy, anger, frustration, anxiety and so on, further escalate conflict. Intense emotions often lead to blaming and resentment between parties (Barki & Hardwick, 2001). The final characteristic, negative emotion, also increases the likelihood of aggressive actions. Intense negative emotion can move parties from realistic concerns, focusing on problem-solving and resolution, to nonrealistic concerns, focusing on attacking and destroying 'the opposition' (Coser, 1956; Rapoport, 1960).

It is generally accepted that the situated nature of conflict and its emergent communicative pattern are significant to understanding it (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003). Conflict emerges in a particular context and its dynamic aspects are shaped as much by the interactions of the parties as by the structure of meanings brought to, and developed within, the situation (Lewin, 1948; Martin & Bergman, 1996). The conflict episode is a *Gestalt* (Deutsch, 1973) emerging both from the context of interaction and the approaches of each party to the problem at hand—what is at issue for each party—as well as from the exchanges between parties that transform and develop the conflict (Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000). Taking these general points concerning social conflict into account, one may define face-to-face conflict as *a reciprocally co-constituted social activity that emerges between two or more interdependent persons who are known to each other and who are interacting within a particular institutional, social, cultural, temporal, and geographic context concerning matters that are in dispute and that are meaningful to both.*

Patterns of Social Conflict

Researchers have sought to describe the temporal patterns of conflict by utilizing case studies of conflicts in organizational, labor relations and negotiation contexts (cf. Morley & Stevenson, 1977; Pondy, 1967; Rummel, 1976). In common among the developed models are the initiating conditions of conflict, which exist within the particular structure of the parties' interdependent relationship and available resources (Pondy, 1967; Rummel, 1976). The first phase of conflict does not have overt characteristics but exists as a potential incompatibility in terms of the respective attitudes, beliefs or goals and the limitations the shared environment imposes. A conflict begins when one or both parties recognize mutual differences in goals and objectives and a limited resource in dispute (Pondy, 1967). Suspicion and hostility emerge in this phase.

The triggering event for overt conflict comes when each party begins to interfere with the other in acting to claim portions of the limited resource (Pondy, 1967; Rummel, 1976). Various tactics are used to test demands and to gauge the opponent's ability and

willingness to use force or to make concessions (Morley & Stevenson, 1977). If all is going well, parties attempt to achieve a balance of power, to establish rules for the interaction and to arrive at criteria for a mutually satisfactory solution (Rummel, 1976). Cheldelin, Druckman, and Fast (2003) note that in this phase the focus of interaction shifts from processes of differentiation to integration, with parties beginning to focus not so much on what makes them different but on what makes them similar. When parties are able to recognize their mutual interests, and that cooperation will produce the best outcome for both, the issues of conflict may be addressed and become a solvable problem, with actions moving from coercion to persuasion and conciliation (Morley & Stevenson, 1977).

Once a balance of power has been achieved, solutions implemented, and consequences assessed (Rummel, 1976), parties begin to explore and evaluate the new relationship (Morley & Stevenson, 1977; Pondy, 1967). Rummel notes, however, that over time the potential for new conflict surfaces since either party may later perceive themselves to be disadvantaged by the solution and might choose to initiate another conflict episode.

Patterns of Conflict Narrative

Another way that the temporal characteristics of social conflict have been addressed is in terms of narrative structure (Kellett & Dalton, 2001). Social conflicts may mirror culturally familiar structures of narrative that circulate in a cultural world (Laursen & Collins, 1994). Another possibility is that conflicts are interpreted in terms of narrative structures to provide coherence and meaning for an otherwise chaotic social process (Kellett & Dalton, 2001). The conflict narrative is often conceptualized in terms of a protagonist and an antagonist who engage in a series of exchanges that increase in complexity until a climax occurs. At the point of climax, one or both parties are put into crisis, in which the hoped-for outcome of the interaction is in jeopardy. Subsequent exchanges lead to a resolution of the initial conflict.

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In light of parallels between narrative structures and Western conceptualizations of social conflict, Kellett and Dalton (2001) produced a guide for laypersons and mediation professionals for analyzing personal and social conflict in terms of narrative structure. These researchers believe that formulating life conflicts as complex, well-formed narratives has benefits for individuals and may provide researchers and other conflict-management professionals with a systematic approach to analyzing the convergent and divergent perspectives and interests of conflicting parties. Kellett and Dalton use narrative analysis as an organizing principle in their approach to conflict analysis in a similar way to uses of narrative in therapeutic practice (cf. Greyner & Luborsky, 1996) or in contemporary research practice (cf. Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990).

Beyond simply elaborating the temporal elements of conflict, narrative analysis provides access to the social context of stories, how particular story structures arise, how individuals understand these stories, and how story structures differ across cultures (Johnston, 2005). Various approaches to narrative ask investigators to attend to the structural characteristics of the conflict narrative in terms of setting, themes, plot structures, episodes, resolution, organizational structure of the story, and so on (cf. Greene, 1986; Johnston, 2005; Riessman, 1993; Toolan, 1988). Narrative analyses of conflict provide a researcher access to a disputant's description of a particular conflict episode as this account transmits a 'cultural commentary' and provides an indication of the mental processes involved in constructing a plausible account that can be shared meaningfully with other individuals (Johnston, 2005).

As examples of this cultural commentary, Kellett and Dalton (2001) enumerate five basic 'life metaphors' that serve to structure personal conflict narratives. Each of the metaphors creates a particular type of "communicative reality" for the disputant/narrator. For instance, the metaphor of life as an 'adventurous journey' may tend to frame conflicts as necessary and essential turning points in a life, with "conflicts remain[ing] an important, if sometimes painful, part of the journey" (pg. 55). For individuals who frame his or her conflict narrative in terms of 'life as a learning process,' conflict becomes a

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source of deep life lessons and knowledge. Conflict from this perspective is a motivator and creator of knowledge. When an individual adheres to a metaphor of 'life as a cycle of give and take,' he or she will tend to frame conflicts as collaborative ventures. Life metaphors that cast conflict in a negative light are those of 'life as conspiracy' and 'life as a game.' The 'life as conspiracy' metaphor tends to relate to narratives that exhibit elements of coercion and violence and little open dialogue between disputants. Finally, the 'life as game' metaphor tends to frame conflict as competitive and includes elements of rational calculation, strategy, and manipulation. While Kellett and Dalton's description of how to construct a conflict narrative is significantly complicated to capture the phenomenon from many perspectives, their process tends to assume beforehand how the narrative should be structured in order to maximize a disputant/narrator's understanding of his or her life experience.

Key Features of Conflict: Summing Up

What becomes clear in looking at social conflict in terms of its characteristics and temporal patterns is that a structure seems to emerge. This structure suggests that different strategies and approaches may be appropriate to understanding different aspects of conflict (Munduate, Ganaza, Peiro, & Euwema, 1999). The particular patterns of interaction, however, need to be understood in terms of the particular cultural world in which they become meaningful in the social practices of everyday life (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Cognitive psychology makes a similar point in that patterns of social interaction may relate to culturally particular schemas, which are learned through direct experiences and observations of conflict (Braver & Rohrer, 1978). Conflict schemes may also be learned through hearing descriptions of other's experiences and encountering fictional representations of conflict in movies, novels, and other media accounts (Asendorf & Wilpers, 1998). Researchers have developed their ideas of social conflict along the lines of first person and third person perspectives, but have not yet addressed the co-constructed phenomenological meanings of experiences of face-to-face conflict for individuals in the context of their everyday lives.

Conflict in the Social World

A long-standing issue in the history of the social sciences is the relationship between the self and the social world. The debate continues today in fields such as psychological anthropology, cultural psychology and social psychology, with some researchers arguing that cultural worlds create individual subjectivities, others arguing that interactions between subjectivities create cultural worlds, and still others arguing that the self and the social are inextricable in that they 'make each other up' (Shweder, 1991). Early theorists recognized the constructive and destructive possibilities of social conflict for individual lives and social institutions and sought to explicate the relationship between operations of culture and the social world (the macrocosm) and the face-to-face activities of individuals within that social world (the microcosm).

Much of this early research developed in response to industrial modernization beginning in the early 19th century (Turner, 1996); an historical period defined by its extraordinary economic and social change. Populations began to concentrate in cities. Market economies moved from a local focus to ever-increasing national, even global, foci. Agrarian and artisan means of production became the repetitive work of mass production in factories and on assembly lines. Religious beliefs declined, individuals became more alienated from each other, and social institutions underwent steady secularization.

The sociologist Weber (1904/1930) noted that these events brought about dramatic changes in how individuals experienced themselves and their social world. In the pre-industrial world, individual identity centered on being connected to a local community and to one's history and functional role within a community. When individuals began to leave rural communities for the urban environment, however, social connectedness became a system of affiliation. Under the best of circumstances, the displaced individual could connect with others who held similar beliefs, interests, hobbies, jobs, etc., and under the worst of circumstances, individuals found themselves isolated and lost, without a clear core of identity and meaning (Turner, 1996).

Urban industrial contexts fostered the competitive ethos of capitalism and encouraged the exploitation and sacrifice of the individual to the mechanized activities and bureaucratic structures of the modern economy. While Weber (1904/1930) sought to describe the experience of living in the modern industrialized world, other theorists such as Durkheim (1893/1997; 1902/1997), Marx and Engels (1848/1978), and Simmel (1908/1955) developed explanatory theories to describe the process and anticipate the effects of these extraordinary changes in the social order, both for society and the individual. Central to the work of these theorists is the problem of social conflict.

Marx and Engels: Conflict Theory, False Consciousness and Alienation

Karl Marx was one of the first theorists to address the role of conflict in social history. Within his scheme, class conflict enacted between the proletariat and bourgeoisie is the fundamental driving force of history. Rather than viewing historical progress as Hegel (1837/1991) did—as a pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis— Marx believed that history is a series of unending antitheses; the result of persistent exploitation and economic conflict. The Hegelian position, he claimed, is a fiction used to justify and maintain the *status quo* that allows the owners of the means of production to continue to deceive and exploit the working classes by maintaining an economic system that makes material products (capital) more valuable than the labor (people) that produces them. Marx and Engels (1848/1978) state:

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles…. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms: Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat (pg. 473).

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels were responding to the social and economic changes brought about by industrial modernization and believed that these changes would ultimately intensify class conflicts, forcing society to address unacknowledged inequalities and effect positive social change. According to this view, a society without class conflict indicates that the proletariat has abdicated its identity, and

hence its true value, to the interests of the ruling class. Marx and Engels refer to this as false consciousness and its consequences for social relations, alienation from authentic social identity.

The ultimate result of such social conflicts is a violent revolution, and its consequences in overthrowing a capitalist system are viewed as positive for the proletariat. When false consciousness and alienation are overcome, a class-conscious proletariat will unite, seize control of the economic structure built by the bourgeoisie and establish a communistic state in which all people are considered equal and all have access to the means of production. This change in economic relationships will dispense with the competitive acquisition of private property or capital as an organizing principle and thus ultimately will result in decreased social conflict. From this perspective, conflict may be troublesome in the short term, but its long term effects indicate that Marx and Engels viewed it as a positive social process, resulting in shared power and social equality.

The critical conflict theorist, Darendorf (1959) has been heavily influenced by the Marxist tradition in his understanding of social conflict as resulting from opposed interests and power disparities between groups in society. Society, in his view, consists of dialectically opposed groups: those with power and those without. Conflict emerges when individuals who are deprived of power and resources become aware that the structure of social relations is not in their best interest and they commit themselves to contesting the power disparity as a cohesive group (Turner, 1975). In Darendorf's account, power has a face—a person or group with whom to engage; other theorists who are influenced by Marx, such as Foucault (1980), argue that power disparities are inherent in the discursive practices and structures of knowledge present in a sociohistorical tradition. For Foucault, there is no escape from the effects of power, even in situations of revolution and social conflict, as power operates covertly in the very things we *know*. *What we know* identifies for us that which is significant within our social world and it is within this system of knowledge that we orient our activities—both activities that support and/or undermine the social system.

Durkheim: Disequilibrium and Anomie

Durkheim, in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1997), made use of an organic/homeostatic metaphor to describe the structure and function of society and to explain the changes associated with industrial modernization as the cause of social conflict. The core assumption here is that a healthy social system is one with minimal social conflict; that is, one operating at equilibrium. When a social system becomes anomic it is out of balance and this has significant social and existential consequences for members of that society. Like Weber (1904/1930), Durkheim (1902/1997) argued that in this state of social conflict individuals lost their sense of connectedness to each other and to a meaningful social world. The chaotic social context and cause of this interpersonal loss, he called *anomie*:

> It is this anomic state that is the cause … of the incessantly recurrent conflicts, and the multifarious disorders of which the economic world exhibits so sad a spectacle. For as nothing restrains the active forces and assigns them limits they are bound to respect, that tend to develop haphazardly, and come into collision with one another, battling and weakening themselves. To be sure, the strongest succeed in completely demolishing the weakest, or in subordinating them. But if the conquered, for a time, must suffer subordination under compulsion, they do not consent to it, and consequently this cannot constitute a stable equilibrium (pg. 3).

Anomie results from the exploitative practices of the industrial economy and perpetuates a system that is out of balance. In Durkheim's world, face-to-face social interactions take on a hue of antagonism, oppression and alienation, leading to widespread suicide in the urban population.

The solution to this problem was, for Durkheim (1902/1997), social regulation: "…only social rules can prevent abuses of power" (pg. 4). This position suggests that Durkheim believed the social order open to regulation by law and it was through regulation that social equilibrium could be reestablished and conflict controlled (Woehrle & Coy, 2000). Major 20th century theorists of social conflict temper his view of the role of conflict in society while upholding his general view of the social system as organic. Consider Coser's (1956) position:

> No group can be entirely harmonious, for it would then be devoid of process and structure. Groups require disharmony as well as harmony, dissociation as well as

association; and conflicts within them are by no means altogether disruptive factors
….On the contrary, both "positive" and "negative" factors build group relations. Conflict
as well as cooperation has social functions. Far from being necessarily dysfunctional, a
certain degree of conflict is an essential element in group formation and the persistence of
group life (pg. 31).

For Coser (1956) social conflict should not be regulated out of existence nor interpreted
as reflecting disequilibrium; rather some types of social conflict serve to "build group
relations" and so have essential social functions.

Simmel: Face-to-Face Conflict and Social Change

The sociologist Simmel (1908/1955), who also influenced Coser (1956) and later
social constructivists such as Schutz (1967) and Berger and Luckmann (1966), held a
positive view of the role of conflict in society, focusing on the face-to-face aspect of
social experience. Simmel parallels the activities of individuals face-to-face in the social
world and ongoing historical change in the social world. Social institutions, from this
perspective, represent the historical events of their creation and seek to maintain the
tradition that grew out of those events.

Individuals within a social system are in a constant state of change and this
existential fact puts individuals in direct conflict with the social order: "Man is always in
danger of being slain by those objects of his own creation which have lost their original
human coefficient" (pg. 2). Human beings establish and maintain a social order in
everyday interactions with each other, but sometimes the social order becomes outmoded
and oppressive—as in Durkheim's view. Simmel (1908/1955) understood processes of
social conflict as taking place in a relationship between the macrocosm of social
institutions and the microcosm of individual acts of rebellion against these social
institutions. These acts take place in face-to-face encounters between individuals within
the context of the institutionalized social order. The "dialectic of life" produced in these
interactions takes on an oscillating pattern of creation and destruction—as "life is always
in latent opposition to form" (Simmel, 1908/1955, pg. 12). Conflict in the everyday lives
of individuals produces the unyielding force of historical change.

Given a sufficient number of individuals engaged in acts of individuation against outmoded social institutions, new institutions come to be established. Simmel (1908/1955) understood this process in the long view, with conflict serving a creative rather than a destructive function. Social conflict is indicative of a healthy and vibrant society rather than an underlying systemic pathology. Simmel's emphasis on face-to-face interactions in social life has been carried forward by Berger and Luckmann (1966), and his approach to understanding the societal role of transgression, by Stivers (1983).

The Individual in the Social World

Personal, societal and cultural domains often organize around the management, regulation and control of face-to-face conflict (Simmel, 1908/1955). The first reason for this is the prevalence of the phenomenon (Smith, 1987), the second, its potential negative effects on the relational processes of the social world (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003) and the third, the consequences these processes have for individual, and socially maintained, identities (Goffman, 1959; Lewin, 1948). Face-to-face conflicts are dialogical relations and as such introduce "an existential risk—a moment of transparency in which a seam in our everyday performance of being ourselves appears" (Kellett & Dalton, 2001, pg. VIII). The seam that face-to-face conflict opens can destabilize and reconfigure ongoing relationships between individuals and the social supports for individual meanings and identities (Goffman, 1959; 1967). Face-to-face interactions in everyday social life provide the stability, coherence and meaning necessary for producing and maintaining personal and social identities and may serve reciprocally to legitimize the activities and meanings of the social world itself, both for individuals and groups (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Significant conflicts may also demarcate periods of life in an individual's autobiographical story. The "moments of transparency," to which Kellett and Dalton (2001) speak, takes place when two face-to-face disputants come to realize that what they thought they knew about each other and what they are experiencing is incongruous— social relationships, like individuals, are always in a process of becoming something

other than what they presently are (May, 1983). Conflict, in otherwise stable relationships, may indicate powerful personal and interpersonal change and, writ large, sociohistorical change (Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams, & Malcolm, 2003).

Psychological research has long placed conflict in a central position in human social and emotional development (Suls, Martin, & David, 1998)—Piaget, Freud and Erikson's theories each place their relative emphases on an individual's cognitive, intrapsychic, and interpersonal conflicts. Throughout the life span, conflicts may elicit positive personal change (Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams, & Malcolm, 2003) and may be necessary in establishing and strengthening interpersonal and intergroup relationships (Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001). The early sociological theorists recognized the parallel between experiences of the individual interconnected with other individuals in society and the larger scale changes of the social system in historical context.

Since interdependence is the basis of interpersonal relationships, it can also be seen as the basis for social conflict (Barki & Hardwick, 2001). In interdependent situations, a shared moral code develops as the relationship develops. When partners are highly interdependent, the greater the consequences of conflict and the higher the expectation for following an established code. Such situations allow more latitude for occasional transgressions (Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001) and this creates a situation of security by supporting predictable face-to-face relations with those to whom we are closest. Predictability is a significant basis for interpersonal trust (Insko, Kirchner, Pinter, Efaw, & Wildschut, 2005) and judgments about trustworthiness are based on the perceived consonance of the other's actions with our own (Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001).

Interdependence establishes the *Gestalt* of a relationship, in which relational conflict may or may not be perceived to have negative consequences (Deutsch, 1973). The social world facilitates our survival in terms of both interdependent support and oppositional competition for scarce resources. Interdependence between individuals is a basic condition of social life; it is defined by the limits and possibilities it creates for

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personal and social action (Barki & Hardwick, 2001). Political and economic systems may foster particular types of interdependence: either positive relations of interdependence in which all members of a social group benefit or exploitative relations in which a small group of individuals gains greater access to basic resources necessary for physical survival and psychological well-being (see Burton, 1990 for discussion of contemporary human needs/critical theory; also Maslow, 1968). Interdependence consequently can serve as a ground against which opposition and interference emerge in face-to-face situations (Simmel, 1908/1955).

Take, as an example, the etymological roots of 'conflict': *con*, meaning 'together,' and *fligere*, 'to strike' (Websters International 2nd Edition, 1955). The original usage of the word *confligere* pointed to instances of people or things 'striking-together.' What is essential here is that social conflict occurs in the context of an interdependent relationship: the meaning of the "strikes" each party makes in opposing and interfering with the other is inseparable from the "together" aspect of the preexisting face-to-face relationship. When interdependent parties both need and oppose each other, 'striking-together' can be among the most significant, frustrating and emotionally difficult experiences of everyday social interactions (Barki & Hartwick, 2001).

Conflict as a Basic Process of the Natural World

Schellenberg (1996) offers a useful overview of the relationship between evolutionary theory and historical developments in theories of social conflict. He argues that the theory of natural selection has been one of the more influential theories in the social sciences, its sway ranging from sociological to psychoanalytic theory. Darwin's (1859/1995) theory of natural selection concerned a way to explain the already established phenomenon of evolutionary change in biological organisms. Darwin's theory was introduced in *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. The relevance for conflict research falls conspicuously at the end of title of this book: *the Struggle for Life*. Species in the natural world are engaged in a struggle for life, and those who are able to obtain a

greater share of resources necessary for survival are able to live long enough to reproduce. The adaptive characteristics that facilitated survival in one generation are passed on to subsequent generations. Extending this logic, one may argue that current day species possess characteristics that facilitated their ancestors' ability to survive in harshly competitive environments and thus they too will be better able to survive and pass on these adaptive characteristics. What perhaps became the most controversial aspect of natural selection theory was its application to human psychological processes and social behavior, and then by extension to macro-level social processes and to particular groups within society (Jahoda, 1992). In *Descent of Man*, Darwin (1871/1997) introduces the concept of sexual selection. Sexual selection occurs when conspecifics mate selectively with others who exhibit characteristics indicating health, ability to acquire resources and to defend themselves against same-sex competitors.

During the 1860's, the sociologist Spencer was influenced by Darwin's natural selection and sexual selection theories. Spencer was further concerned by the demographer Malthus's (1803/1992) contention that the human population was growing at an exponential rate such that available natural resources would eventually no longer sustain the world's population (Schellenberg, 1996). In Spencer's *First Principles* (1862/2002) he applied natural selection insights to human social processes, coining the famous phrase the "survival of the fittest" (Schellenberg, 1996). Spencer argued that in society people are engaged in a struggle to survive, as are institutional and other cultural forms. In early societies these struggles took the form of *militaristic competition*, in industrial society, they take the form of *functional cooperation* in which economic competition facilitates or inhibits survival. Unlike Durkheim and Marx, Spencer viewed the struggle for life as the foundational force of social evolution from which higher cultural forms have emerged, such as the market economy against which Marx railed. Responding to Durkheim, Spencer would have viewed state regulation of conflict as stultifying to individual and social progress.

According to this view, governments should not regulate conflict processes because regulation interferes with the selection of better social institutions. In this

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respect, Spencer tends to take a view toward social conflict similar to Coser (1956) and Simmel (1908/1955). Spencer's ideas were primarily influential in both paralleling and differentiating processes of biological and socio-cultural evolution. This comparison is of particular significance when interpreting current day theorists such as E.O. Wilson (1980) and various contemporary applications of sociobiological ideas to human social behavior (cf. Aylor & Dainton, 2004; Buss, 1989; Keltner, Young, & Buswell, 1997).

Wilson (1980) has argued that patterns of aggressive behavior may be adaptive for human beings. Aggression for Wilson is a mixture of behaviors directed toward different threats or concerns in the environment (Schellenberg, 1996). In higher animals, cultural forms may substitute for aggressive behaviors, but only as an evolutionary adaptation. Wilson's scheme plays down the reciprocal cultural influence on evolutionary processes. Within this scheme, one may come to view the human development of language as an evolutionary adaptation because it allows us to resolve conflicts that emerge in social life with recourse to words, rather than violence. Consider Pinker's (2000) point:

> In all cultures, social interactions are mediated by persuasion and argument. How a choice is framed plays a large role in determining which alternative people choose. Thus there could easily have been selection for any edge in the ability to frame an offer so that it appears to present maximal benefit and minimal cost to the negotiating partner, and in the ability to see through such attempts and to formulate attractive counterproposals (Pinker, 2000, pg., 380).

Within this perspective, even inheritances that many would consider among the most sociocultural in nature, such as the unique linguistic system of a cultural group, can be viewed in terms of a response to evolutionary pressures.

Existential Theories of Conflict

Like evolutionary biology, existential philosophy also concerns itself with understanding the basic conditions and meanings of human existence. One significant concern in this tradition is the relationship between an individual and the social world, not in terms of relational processes *per se*, but what these relational processes mean as a

contextual ground for human existence (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Various phenomena, such as anaclitic depression, indicate that human beings require the supportive reassurance of companionship and community to survive and flourish (Pollio, 1982). Thus, the relationships we have with others are significant to core existential issues such as our own and other's personal and social identities, the meaning of life and other matters of ultimate concern.

Sartre: The Dilemma of the Social World

The existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre avows a cynical view of the social world, casting interdependence in a tense and ironic role. The following monologue delivered by Garcin, a male character in Sartre's play *No Exit* (1945/1989), sums up this view. Garcin is speaking of two women, Inez and Estelle, trapped eternally with him in a windowless room in Hell:

> Only two of you? I thought there were many; many more . . . . So this is Hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is—other people! (pg. 47).

In *No Exit*, each character finds interminable meaninglessness in a triangle of lust and hatred. Spending eternity together in a room in Hell, without windows or mirrors, Garcin, Inez and Estelle each look to another to see his or her self reflected and affirmed, only to find that the object of their desire is indifferent, even hateful. Suicide or murder is no option as all already are dead. So there they are, eternally seeking what they can neither have nor give—connection, affirmation and meaning.

Suffering for these three is in recognizing that the one they desire desires another. Inez is a lesbian whom Garcin can never impress as she views him as a coward. Inez consequently desires the other woman, Estelle. Estelle, however, is a callously self-centered socialite, who wants from Garcin the self-affirming affections of a man—any man will do, and Garcin is all there is. Garcin recognizes the callousness and superficiality of Estelle's desire, and that if Estelle were not present, Inez would have no choice but to love him.

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As social beings, Garcin, Inez and Estelle each need the other to affirm his or her self-value by consenting to consummate a one-sided desire. Each needs to be cared for and acknowledged by the other. Even so, with opposed agendas and desires, each individual refuses to give in to the other because to give in means to give one's self to the other. In the act of affirming another, the affirmer gives up his or her sense of self.

What Sartre (1945/1989) seems to be indicating by this irresolvable dilemma is that human beings both have no choice but to be interdependent and, at the same time, to exist as an object in another's schemes and plots. From this dark, and somewhat paranoid, perspective social life is persistently diminishing one's possibilities for being. A person is destined to exist as an object of another's judgments, desires, and manipulations; and in turn to play the objectifier, judger, desirer, and manipulator; in human interaction, for Sartre, we all dehumanize each other. This perspective directly opposes what we have found in the philosophies of the phenomenologist Levinas (1969) and of the existentialist Buber (1924/1987; 1951/1999).

Buber: Social Conflict and the Possibility of Meaning

When compared to Sartre (1945/1989), Buber presents a more evenhanded assessment of this fundamental problem of the social world in his book *I and Thou* (1924/1987) and in the essay *"Distance and Relation"* (1951/1999). Although *I and Thou* is twenty-one years the predecessor of Sartre's *No Exit*, one may read the following passage as a response to the position Sartre takes:

> But you believe then in the existence of a paradise in the earliest days of mankind?— even if it was a hell—and certainly that time to which I can go back in historical thought was full of fury and anguish and torment and cruelty—at any rate it was not unreal .... The relational experiences of man in earliest days were certainly not tame and pleasant. But rather force exercised on being that is really lived than shadowy solicitude for faceless numbers! From the former a way leads to God, from the latter only one to nothingness (Buber, 1924/1987, pg. 24).

Unlike Garcin, Inez and Estelle, human beings do not only find themselves thrown into a self-destructive situation of irreconcilable difference, objectification, and manipulation; we are also the creators and beneficiaries of our face-to-face conflicts.

One may argue, as Buber (1924/1987) does, that it is in conflict with others that we become open to the possibilities to create, as well as to lose, our sense of identity. The outcome for us depends on the attitude we take with respect to our interdependent situation and what we do within it. Buber recognizes the tension Sartre (1945/1989) elaborates in *No Exit*, but frames Sartre's problem in a more intricate way, holding out the possibility that there is always something more meaningful to be found in the conflicts of human life. It is in conflict with others that we may find a way leading to God, to insight and understanding, a path to more authentic relationships. Face-to-face conflict has the power to create and transform as well as to destroy the meanings, beliefs and relationships that serve as an essential ground for our experiences in human life.

Buber (1951/1999) views the fundamental face-to-face condition of social life as exhibiting an ultimate transformative and spiritual possibility. In face-to-face disputes different perspectives are given concrete form and the transformative possibilities of human interaction may emerge if disputants accept an attitude of openness toward each other, refusing to see the other as an object to be manipulated. In acknowledging the other's difference and seeking to influence or be influenced by the other, possibilities for new meanings come into existence. As Buber states:

> The desire to influence the other … does not mean the effort to change the other, to inject one's own 'rightness' into him; but it means the effort to let that which is recognized as right, as just, as true … through one's influence take seed and grow in the form suited to individuation (pg. 13).

Social conflict in Buber's sense is, at its best, a creative act taking place between two or more individuals who approach some issue from different perspectives and, at its worst, a dogged forcing of one's own perspective on others, as in propaganda.

Both evolutionist and existentialist theories address the basic conditions of human life in relation to social processes. The evolutionist tends to view social relations in terms of competition for resources and selective pressures for survival in the natural environment. The existentialist addresses these issues as they emerge as meaningful problems in the face-to-face situation of conflict. The existentialist opens the possibility

for conflict, or any human dialogue, to eradicate life or to be a source of transcendent meaning in life.

Constructivism, Dialogue and Social Conflict

While existential philosophy seeks to describe the conditions of human existence, social constructivism seeks to understand how human beings co-create and maintain meaning as they interact against the ground of an inherited sociohistorical context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; McNamee & Gergen, 1999). A related philosophy, hermeneutic phenomenology, may be used to describe the social meanings that individuals draw on and create to make sense of their life experiences in dialogue with others in the social world (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Two philosophers, Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Levinas (1969), are particularly significant in bringing together the perspectives of constructivism and phenomenology. While these philosophers acknowledge their ties to existentialist philosophy they focus on describing the meaning of human experience as it emerges in dialogue.

According to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the interdependent situation of the social world is one in which we never completely control the processes and outcomes of conflict, as the meanings and outcomes of conflict are co-constituted. The meaning of a conflict emerges in the interactions of two or more individuals at a particular place and time. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) has so aptly stated concerning the co-constitution of meaning in dialogue:

> [T]here is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator (354).

According to this view, a conflict is a type of 'shared operation' enacted in an interdependent relationship. It is reasonable then to understand Merleau-Ponty (1962) in light of Buber's (1924/1987) existentialism more so than Sartre's (1945/1989). The meanings that emerge in conflict escape the direct agendas and strategies of the parties involved; the meaning, process and outcome of conflict are co-constituted in the face-to-

face situation. Thus, while individuals may be parties to a conflict, dialogical *acts of conflicting* can fundamentally shape the lives of those so engaged, creating new meanings and new patterns of interaction beyond anything initially intended:

> [T]he objection which my interlocutor raises to what I say draws from me thoughts which I had no idea I possessed, so that at the same time that I lend him thoughts, he reciprocates by making me think too. It is only retrospectively, when I have withdrawn from the dialogue and am recalling it that I am able to reintegrate it into my life and make of it an episode in my private history, and that the other recedes into his absence, or, in so far as he remains present for me, [his presence] is felt as a threat (354).

Like Buber (1951/1999) and Levinas (1969), Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that *the other* is particularly salient in face-to-face conflict when we recognize the other exists as a standpoint, or perspective, different from our own. In recognizing the other is different from us, we are both frustrated and challenged in taking up the present situation in a different way and in reforming our autobiographical history to account for our changed perspective and our changed self-understanding. Buber, who takes a position in accord with Merleau-Ponty, and counterpoint to Sartre, maintains that while social life has always been "full of fury and anguish," the other option, an escape into the niceties and deceptions of "shadowy solicitude," may lead us to meaningless relationships with others.

For Levinas (1969) the other is represented concretely as a face we experience in the social world and that elicits from us moral concern. For Buber (1924) the presence of the other represents the possibility of a relation that can fundamentally transform our understanding of the meaning of our existence. For Sartre (1945/1989) (like Goffman, 1967) the presence of the other defines an instrumental social situation in which duplicity limits our own possibilities for freedom and meaningful existence. And, for Merleau-Ponty (1962), the presence of the other is that of a dialogical partner that offers to us the possibility of understanding perspectives different from our own.

In light of Merleau-Ponty's position, it is interesting to note that in a phenomenological study of the meaning of the experience of other people, Nowell and Pollio (1991; as reported in Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) identified nine situations

in which participants reported being aware of others. Three of these situations clearly deal with situations of conflict and/or potential conflict: "feeling judged (and judging) others," "threatening situations," and "when people are irritating" (pg. 142). It would seem that the findings of this atheoretical study support the position that conflict is a central mode of human relating through which an awareness of others emerges.

Conflict in Social Psychological Theory

Social psychology has as its central concern reciprocal relationships between individual psychological processes and processes of the social world. Slawski (1981) makes the case that within the quantitative traditions of American social psychology there are three major types of theories: (1) structure and change, (2) behaviorist, and (3) congruency theories. Structure and change theories focus on dynamic patterns of social interaction, such as those in situations of bargaining or negotiations. Behaviorist theories take as their point of emphasis predicting and controlling human behavior under various social and environmental conditions. This approach has been primarily applied in conflict simulation in which very subtle changes in the contingencies impinging on individuals or groups in conflict can be studied. Congruency theories take as their primary focus the cognitions of individuals pertaining to other people or groups as well as to general aspects of the social world.

These theories are tested in situations that emphasize the observer's position *vis-à-vis* other people (study participants) and thus apply the epistemological perspective of rationalism. It is interesting to note a parallel here between Nowell and Pollio's (1991) findings concerning the human experience of other people and the social psychological theories enumerated by Slawski (1981). Nowell and Pollio (1991) identified three general themes in the everyday awareness of other people: relationship (structure and change theories), utility/benefit (behaviorist theories) and comparisons (congruency theories). Each of these theories and their parallel in the phenomenology of social observation will be discussed in turn.

When participants in the Nowell and Pollio (1991) study described their awareness of relationships to other people they described subthemes of proximity, synchrony and connection. Proximity concerns the social distance between one's self and the other person: for example, is the other person experienced as a family member, a neighbor or a colleague from work, a stranger, etc. Each of these relationships indicates gradations of social distance. The subthemes concerning synchrony and connection address an awareness of whether one's own and another's actions and emotions coincide, and that one feels a deep interpersonal meaning that is shared by the other. A positive interpretation of relationship emphasizes the benefits of relational interdependence, whereas a negative interpretation emphasizes social distance, being 'out of sync' with, and alienation from, others. The relationship theme seems closely related with interdependence theories such as those developed by Deutsch (1973) concerning conflict climates (i.e., as relational *Gestalten*) and others such as the human relations school of social/organizational psychology.

Theories Emphasizing Relationship Dynamics

With the early work of Follett (1940), researchers in the relational tradition were interested in identifying conflict-handling strategies consistently used by parties acting within organizational contexts. Among the most influential theories developed was the "dual concerns" model (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Dual concerns presents conflict-handling strategies, basically communicative strategies, in terms of two core dimensions: concern for self (assertiveness) and concern for others (cooperativeness) (Blake & Mouton, 1964; cf. Thomas, 1976). These strategies can be represented in terms of a two dimensional Cartesian space, thereby providing a graphical representation of the dynamics of conflict-handling strategies during conflict episodes (Van de Vliert, 1997). In the following section we will discuss the basic conflict-handling strategies investigated in this literature. Then, we will address two critiques of the traditional version of this approach that remain within its general theoretical purview (i.e., Sternberg & Dobson, 1987; Davis, Capobianco, & Kraus, 2004).

A conflict-handling strategy that is high in concern for self, yet low in concern for the other is called competing or forcing. The forcing strategy relates to strategies in other conflict-handling schemes labeled as domination (Follett, 1940), competition (Deutsch, 1973), control (Putnam & Wilson, 1982), or contending (Pruitt, 1983). It tends not to be effective for long-term conflict resolution as forcing fails to consider the needs of the other party and thus escalates conflict if the 'losing' party later seeks compensation for his or her loss (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001). A person adopting a forcing strategy approaches the conflict relation with the attitude of: "I don't care what you want; you will do what I want or else." Usually this occurs when the dominating party perceives little positive interdependence, when a significant power disparity exists between parties, or when acting quickly to resolve the conflict is imperative—i.e., when a situation turns violent (Rahim, Buntzman, & White, 1999).

A conflict-handling scheme that is low in concern for self and high in concern for other is called obliging within Blake and Mouton's (1964) and Thomas's (1976) scheme. Obliging is a cooperative strategy within Deutsch's (1973) scheme and relates to aspects of suppression in Follett's (1940) because it suppresses self-interest. By suppressing self-interest, only a temporary resolution to conflict may be found. Within Putnam and Wilson's (1982) scheme, obliging would be a non-confrontational strategy and, for Pruitt (1983), a yielding one. It has also been referred to as appeasement and is a strategy often used to maintain the integrity of a relationship in a conflict situation (Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2001). A person using this strategy is approaching conflict in terms of: "I want what is best for you; what will make you happy?" Here, the relationship between parties is more important than the conflict issue.

In Blake and Mouton's (1964), Thomas's (1976) and Follett's (1940) scheme, a strategy that is low in concern for other (uncooperativeness) and low in concern for self (unassertiveness) is called avoiding. Avoidance has also been referred to as flight or leaving-the-field (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001), non-confrontation (Putnam & Wilson, 1982), or inaction (Pruitt, 1983). Rahim and Magner (1995) use the vernacular

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examples of passing-the-buck, sidestepping, or 'see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil' to describe the motivation for parties using this strategy.

While avoidance is sometimes used to withdraw from a conflict situation, it can also escalate the conflict if the other party perceives high interdependence and expects a response. Under situations of high interdependence and limited time to resolve a conflict, avoidance presents a threat and may be interpreted as covert-aggression (Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000). A person using this strategy is in a sense saying something to the effect of "keep me out of it" or "screw you, you are not worth a response" or "I am taking time to consider this." Generally, this is a strategy in which communication is absent, so the motives of the other party remain unknown—this may either escalate a preexisting conflict or make a potential conflict a non-issue.

Empirical research suggests that these three conflict-handling styles tend to have generally negative effects on social relationships. This is because they do not facilitate long-lasting and mutually satisfying resolutions (Rahim, Buntzman, & White, 1999; Rahim & Magner, 1995). In these types of relational situations we revisit Sartre's (1945/1989) dilemma concerning how much of one's self-interest should be compromised in one's relationships with others. Forcing, obliging and avoidance each presuppose incompatible agendas between the conflicting parties and tend to emerge in situations in which one party's gains correspond to another party's losses.

Many researchers, however, believe that almost all conflicts in organizational settings have a solution with which both parties will be satisfied. Janssen and Veenstra (1999) indicate that highly interdependent parties often have relational qualities of open-mindedness that lead them to be better informed of each other's positions, to hold each other in higher regard, and to work toward solutions that are mutually beneficial. In this type of situation, it is mutually beneficial for the parties to consciously maintain a relational attitude of synchrony and connection.

In accord with this possibility, Blake and Mouton (1964) and Thomas (1976) identify two strategies that take into account both a position of assertiveness—concern for self—and cooperativeness—concern for other. The strategy that exhibits middle-

level concern for self and middle-level concern for other is compromising (Follett, 1940; Blake & Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1976). Compromising is a cooperative strategy in Deutsch's (1973) scheme, parallels a solution-orientation in Putnam and Wilson (1982) and problem-solving in Pruitt (1983). Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2001) refer to it as "horse-trading" or "splitting the difference." A person adopting this strategy is saying: "I'm willing to give a little to get a little." The problem with this strategy is that it is vulnerable to power disparities and may be used by a more powerful party to dominate the interaction (Rahim, Buntzman, & White, 1999).

The final, and what is considered the ideal strategy, is one defined by high assertiveness or concern for self, and high cooperativeness, concern for other. Rahim and Magner (1999) refer to this strategy as cooperative-integrative, Blake and Mouton (1964) and Thomas (1976) as collaborating, Follett (1940) as integration, Putnam and Wilson (1982) as solution-oriented, and Pruitt (1983) as problem-solving. This strategy is defined by parties working together to reach a mutually satisfying solution. The disadvantage to this approach is that it is time consuming and may be inappropriate for situations in which no win-win solution is possible or when a quick decision must be made (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001). A person using this strategy adopts the attitude: "There is a resolution to this conflict that will meet both of our needs, we just need to work to create it."

Sternberg and Dobson (1987) take issue with the conflict-handling styles approach and note that contemporary human relations studies use hypothetical conflict scenarios developed *a priori* by the researcher and concern conflicts in structured (i.e., organizational) social settings. They note a trend in the research that points to a discrepancy between what people imagine they would do in response to hypothetical scenarios, and what they actually do in conflicts with friends, family members, and other individuals. Participants have a tendency to imagine that they are fairer and more cooperative in conflict situations than when observations are taken by external raters (Sternberg & Dobson, 1987). Due to this discrepancy between belief and behavior, Sternberg and Dobson propose a novel approach to understanding conflict-handling that

focuses on self-reported conflict behaviors and that connects behavioral preferences to their consequences for ongoing relationships. These preferences, they argue, tend to be far more consistent between hypothetical and real-life conflicts and are related strongly to the way in which a person perceives a conflict situation.

In developing a list of conflict behaviors, Sternberg and Dobson (1987) had participants write brief descriptions of real life conflicts and how these conflicts were resolved. The particular behaviors that the investigators derived from these accounts include putting financial pressure on the other party, using violence or threats, waiting things out, lowering demands on the other, apologizing or negotiating a solution, among others. This typology focuses on specific behaviors, rather than a general classification of styles.

Davis, Capobianco, and Kraus (2004) also offer a model similar to Sternberg and Dobson's (1987) except they derive their conflict-handling behaviors from those enumerated in professional and lay literatures on conflict resolution. These researchers take issue with Blake and Mouton's (1964) dual concerns model because of inherent dynamism within conflict situations. In terms of conflict behaviors, the shifts make sense; within the context of the human relations approach, however, such shifts seem illogical or contradictory. For example, a particularly effective conflict strategy is to initially present one's objectives strongly, and then slowly become more cooperative as the relationship develops and negotiation continues. To combine behaviors of forcing/dominating with cooperation seems an odd contradiction in the abstract, but makes perfect sense as a strategy in face-to-face conflict.

Theories Emphasizing Congruency in Self-Other Comparisons

The second major theme articulated in Nowell and Pollio (1991) concerns participants being aware of comparing themselves to others. Comparison is significant in conflict since recognized differences in beliefs, values or goals often contribute to escalating or de-escalating a conflict (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003). Recognition of difference is also a central aspect of ethnic, religious, cultural or other identity-group

based conflicts. In fact, an us/them mindset often permeates intergroup conflict, with group schemas forming the basis of comparison (Bargal, 2004). With respect to comparisons based on similarity, however, it has been noted that when disputants recognize a common ground it represents a significant step toward mutual problem-solving and integrative solution-seeking (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). These issues fall within the purview of what Slawski (1981) has classified as congruency theories.

Within the context of conflict interactions there are two basic communicative phases (Thomas, 1976). In one phase—differentiation—the parties escalate the conflict and attempt to understand each other's positions, to strategize concerning the other's position, and to emphasize differences between positions. Conflicts go through multiple stages of increasing differentiation as different needs, positions, and strategies come into play. In the integration phase that follows, parties begin to resolve the conflict by emphasizing commonalities, seeking different options for solutions, and moving toward a solution. If communication breaks down in this phase, it may serve to again initiate differentiation (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001).

Gallo and Smith (1999) describe this process as a transactional cycle. This cycle includes an assessment by both parties of the other's overt behaviors, but also an awareness of individual experiences of the self and inferences about the other's experience. So while this perspective looks toward relational dynamics, such dynamics are explained in terms of an interplay of overt and covert processes and information exchanges. These assessments concern social information that is assessed with respect to differences and similarities between self and other. The movement from differentiation to integration then is one of seeking congruity between one's own internal and external experience as well as between one's self and the other party. It is important to note that deception and information control may be key aspects of strategy in an information exchange context.

In line with the approach of congruency theory, Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) have identified five 'distorted' beliefs that individuals and cultural groups may endorse to increase the potential for engagement in nonrealistic conflicts, i.e., conflicts that do not

have an integrative solution as a goal, but instead destruction of the opposing party. The first of these is the belief in one's own (or one's group's) superiority to others. At the individual level, superiority beliefs serve to establish a "sense of specialness, deservingness, and entitlement" (pg. 184). In its more negative manifestations, superiority can cut a person off from meaningful interactions with others because of a tendency toward judging them in a negative way. At the group level, this belief may manifest in the group believing itself to be morally superior, chosen, entitled and/or destined to a special role in the world—a belief that cross-cuts many cultural groups and that may intensify intercultural and religious conflicts into "no negotiation, no compromise" situations (Payne, 1995). A belief in superiority seems to be addressing the question of 'how am *I* or *we* different from other *I's* and/or *we's*?' It addresses the question of identity and of the boundary between self and other to establish the meaning of having a particular identity. It may also create the situation of aggressively defending this identity against perceived opposition and/or loss.

A second belief concerns perceived unjust treatment at the hands of others. For the individual, this belief comes from the feeling of being mistreated by some specified or non-specified other people or group. At the group level, this type of belief can become particularly dangerous if it articulates grievances at another group, which may have deep and at times legitimate historical roots. In one sense, such beliefs may be positive because they increase solidarity within a group; they can also be negative because they direct hostility against another group without taking into account changes that may have occurred over time. It is the tension and resentment emerging from these types of beliefs that may lead to genocidal violence and religious wars with incentives varying from protection and safety to those of revenge. For individuals and groups, a belief that the world is, or should be, just and fair is important for satisfactory interactions with others and for assessing conflict processes and resolutions. The violation of an individual's or group's belief in a just world may elicit intense emotions and destructive actions.

Vulnerability is a third "dangerous" belief Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) enumerate. The belief that one's group is vulnerable centers on the feeling of being

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constantly threatened by dangers from outside. This type of belief may lead individuals to act more aggressively than a situation may call for simply because they perceive a threat as present or as greater than it may be. For the group that holds this belief, it can consolidate aggression toward outsiders perceived to be a threat and lead in-group members to proactively attack representatives of that group.

A fourth belief, distrust, leads the individual to expect others are intending to do harm. At the group level, distrust can become what Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) refer to as "collective paranoia." This belief may lead groups to interpret the actions of other groups as having malicious intent. The authors also note that this may create a cycle of distrust that can make interpersonal and intergroup conflicts extremely complicated to resolve.

The final of these beliefs concerns helplessness. This belief at the individual level speaks to feelings of efficacy in actions producing useful outcomes. At the group level, this belief can be associated with feelings of "powerlessness and dependency" (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003, pg. 187), which inevitably fosters feelings of resentment and anger in both individuals and groups.

While existing at the level of private beliefs and interpretations, each of these beliefs may increase the probability of a task or process oriented conflict becoming person- and/or emotion-oriented. This shift may escalate the violent aspects of a conflict and lead to an intractable spiral of escalation and distrust. The major threat that emerges in such a situation is that it can result in the destruction of one or both of the conflicting parties as neither is willing to seek a solution (Coser, 1956; Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003).

Perceptions of difference and all that it entails may contribute to creating situations of nonrealistic conflict. Nonrealistic conflicts—such as those about issues of racial or religious identity—are of significant concern to conflict researchers since these often prove extraordinarily destructive and long-standing. Consider the events of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey, the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Europe, the Serbian-Croatian conflict, as well as the recent Tutsi Genocide by Rwandan Hutus as examples of the negative outcomes of *nonrealistic* conflict. When individuals or groups create

impermeable physical or cognitive boundaries between themselves and others, the situation can quickly become one in which nonrealistic conflict erupts. The ways in which individuals in conflict come to understand each other's social meaning and objectives can have significant effects on the developing conflict dialogue.

Theories Emphasizing Rational Assessments of Utility/Benefit

The third theme reported by Nowell and Pollio (1991) concerns an awareness of whether another benefits oneself. Evaluating benefit comprises calculations of utility as well as feelings of satisfaction and annoyance. This theme speaks to the value-exchange schemas that make intelligible many types of social relationships in the contemporary world (cf. Fiske, 1992). When others are viewed as not benefiting the self, the potential for conflict is increased; as a corollary, when others are viewed as benefiting the self, the potential for conflict diminishes so long as the relationship involves reciprocity (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003).

Value-exchanges are a central mode for understanding social relations, an emphasis that highlights a rationalistic bias—the root word 'ratio' indicating numeric calculation (Websters International 2nd Edition, 1955). Particularly distinct to this view is that the social world consists of interactions between otherwise autonomous individuals, each seeking to maximize his or her own claim on scarce resources, whether or not this claim is to the detriment of others (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). The rational actor— *homo economicus*—perceives and assesses conflict with an eye toward utilitarian calculations of gains and losses, costs and benefits, strategic power moves and manipulations (Miller & Bersoff, 1992). Western understanding thus tends toward viewing relationships and social conflict in the context of an economic understanding of value, exchange and competition.

From this perspective, themes of equity and equality in the distribution of valuable resources within social groups speak to the significance of power, social rank and identity in conflict relationships. Fiske (1992) has explored basic relational templates, which he views as cognitive schemes used in "seeking, making, sustaining,

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repairing, adjusting, judging, construing and sanctioning relationships" (pg. 689). The first relational model, communal sharing, views each member within a relation as equivalent based on some shared characteristic. The focus here is on commonalities, rather than differences. Equivalences, however, may change and some individuals may move in or out of the core social group. Under changing conditions, value systems dictating how people should be treated may change with changes in communal roles and social identities. *Property* exchange in this relation is fluid and open as all valuables are owned by the group and each person contributes to and shares in the pooled resources.

Authority ranking is a second relational model (Fiske, 1992). This model structures relationships hierarchically and makes relative power central to the interaction. The relationship often centers on issues of control for the authority figure and of protection and care for subordinates. Within this model, those who are in higher status are accorded more positive characteristics, the higher-ranked being seen as 'better' than their subordinates. Superiors have freer access to resources but, in return for this access, are responsible for protecting subordinates. Resources tend to be distributed unequally, with authority figures receiving larger allocations.

The third model—equality-matching—focuses on relational balance, turn-taking and one-to-one distribution of resources. In other words, what one person does to or for you, you can and should do to or for them (Gouldner, 1960). The focus here concerns social norms of reciprocity, egalitarian motives and ideas of having one's actions reciprocated by the other.

The fourth model—market pricing—bases relations on "cost-benefit ratios and rational calculations of efficiency or expected utility" (Fiske, 1992, pg. 692). This relational model may be considered as extending on equality matching. The concern is an exchange of *equal value* between parties, rather than turn-taking or relational balance. The market-pricing approach to social relations supports an idea of "investing" in a relationship with an expectation of equivalent return. Contributions to the mutual resources of the relationship are given a value, and it is this value that is considered in assessing equivalency. Western culture tends toward authority-ranking and market-

pricing models in the public sphere, and toward equality matching and communal sharing in the private sphere.

Both the experimental gaming and social exchange (a.k.a. cognitive exchange) approaches emphasize utilitarian (cf. Bentham, 1789/1996), rational-interest (cf. Smith, 1759/2000) and/or market pricing (cf. Fiske, 1992) perspectives regarding conflict behaviors. The central aspects of these approaches are that conflict involves (1) interdependent parties (2) in situations where there is a possibility of reward or cost for each party (Rapoport, 1960). According to this perspective, conflict behaviors can be described and predicted on the assumption that each party acts to maximize its own benefits and minimize its costs. In interdependent situations, considerations beyond immediate benefit often enter the decision process, such as those intended to maintain an emotionally fulfilling relationship (cf. Deutsch, 1973). Essentially, both experimental gaming and social exchange are rooted in microeconomic theories of human behavior, with experimental gaming serving as an experimental operationalization of social exchange theory (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001).

According to the assumption of rational self-interest, parties are viewed as being in conflict when one party perceives the other as a cause of an unsatisfactory ratio of cost to benefit. In other words, the other party is viewed as interfering with the motive to maximize one's own benefit. These rewards and costs can be thought of in terms of resources of actual value, such as money, or of perceived value, such as esteem, love, information, etc. The less interdependent the relationship between the parties in conflict, the more likely they will be to pursue their own agenda without concern for the other's outcomes; with increasing interdependence, however, parties will attempt to reach outcomes that meet the needs of both (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001).

The origins of an experimental gaming approach are often attributed to Von Neumann and Morgenstern's (1947) mathematical decision theory—which involves estimating the probabilities of different decisions with respect to various cost-benefit conditions. Later social scientists, such as Thibaut and Kelly (1959), developed the condition of an interdependent opponent within decision theory mathematics. This

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allowed researchers to utilize the mathematical techniques of decision theory in the context of conflict research (Schellenberg, 1996). Four basic assumptions guide this approach: (1) outcomes result from the choices and actions of both parties (i.e., interdependence), (2) outcomes can be represented in terms of number (i.e., quantification), (3) parties can anticipate each possible outcome relative to each possible action (i.e., exhaustiveness), and (4) each party seeks to maximize its own interests (Rapoport, 1960).

While quantification and exhaustiveness pose the most serious problems when applying this approach in everyday life, the assumptions do allow researches to study controlled conflict situations through laboratory experimentation. Schellenberg (1996) has noted that many general principles of game theory can be recognized in everyday life, particularly when parties interact strategically. As strategies guide conflict behaviors, an understanding of what parties do and what the outcomes of their actions may be is extraordinarily important both within and outside the laboratory context. Kelly and Thibaut (1978) note a similar parallel in that many early conflict behaviors in the differentiation phase may be interpreted as parties testing each other to discover the parameters of the conflict situation and whether they should opt for cooperative or competitive strategies. This is in accord with what was suggested in the demand-testing and power-balancing phases addressed in stage theories of conflict (discussed by Morley & Stevenson, 1977; Pondy, 1967; Rummel, 1976).

Three types of games are in common use: matrix games, negotiation games, and coalition games. Matrix games are the simplest form. Negotiation games often involve participants negotiating a legal case, the price of some item, or some similar scenario. Coalition games involve participants forming groups to develop an advantage over some opponent. Games are composed of a limited set of available options and various mutually-determined consequences or pay-offs associated with the rational choices of each player (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001).

Six basic characteristics define games (Schellenberg, 1996). The first consideration is how many parties are involved in the conflict—two-person, or dyadic,

games are the most simple; *n*-person games increase the number of players and the complexity of mathematics involved in representing the possible outcome matrix for the game.

A second consideration is the number of choices available to the parties. In the simplest form of the game, the researcher is dealing with two parties who have two choices—to cooperate with each other or not. The outcomes for this type of game are represented in a 2x2 matrix and are referred to as a "2-by-2" game.

Third, is the nature of the utilities or resources in dispute. It is necessary for the approach to work that resources hold the same, or very similar, value for each player. Often, time or money is used as the resource in contention as these are assumed to have equivalent meaning to players. Some researchers, such as Rapoport (1960), developed a rank order method for assessing possible outcomes, rather than attaching a particular value to the resource.

Fourth is the type of conflict-of-interest built into the game scenario. Zero-sum games create an oppositional situation in which one party's losses are exactly equivalent to the other party's gains, with losses and gains in a perfect negative correlation. In games of pure-cooperation, each party's outcomes are equivalent—which leads to no opposition and no conflict. All other games are called mixed-motive because parties are motivated to both cooperate and compete to maximize outcomes.

The fifth consideration concerns whether or not the game has a point of equilibrium. Equilibrium is related to the degree of interdependence in the consequences of the choices made by the parties playing the game—that is, the effects that each of their choices will have on their mutual outcomes. The final consideration is the context of the game. Contextual considerations include the completeness of the information available to parties, whether or not they can communicate with each other before making choices, and whether or not agreements between the parties can be enforced (Schellenberg, 1996).

One famous example of an experimental game is the Prisoner's Dilemma Game (Luce & Riaffa, 1957; cf. Smith, 1987). In the Prisoner's Dilemma, participants are given a scenario in which they have been arrested for a crime and have been separated

from their accomplice. They are interrogated about the hypothetical crime and are given two possible choices: (1) not to confess or (2) to confess. If one party confesses and the other does not, then the party that does not confess gets a maximum prison sentence and the confessing party goes free. If both parties do not confess, they both get minimum sentences. If both parties confess, they both get medium length sentences. If a participant decides based on his or her own interests, the tendency will be to confess—as confession will yield either no sentence or a medium-length sentence. If a participant decides based on their interdependent interests as accomplices, the tendency will be to not confess as this will yield a minimal sentence for both participants, given that the other participant also takes into consideration their mutual interests (Pruitt & Kimmel, 1977; Smith, 1987). A consistent finding in this scenario is that participants tend to fall into a consistent pattern of responding—either cooperative or competitive based on the first few moves of the game, as the reciprocity norm for the relationship becomes established (Platt, 1973).

Braver and Rohrer (1978) found that within the experimental paradigm of the Prisoner's Dilemma Game, cooperation typically occurs less than 30% of the time, but when strategies such as tit-for-tat (1-to-1 reciprocity) are utilized, cooperation can increase to up to 50%. They also found that when individuals observe another individual playing the PDG, they learn more effective responding at a quicker rate than when directly involved in the game. This finding suggests that when a participant is not directly involved in conflict there is less ego-involvement when the other party fails to reciprocate and less concern about issues of face and reputation. Direct involvement in the conflict situation leads to a narrowed focus for the actor and less effective responding.

Another famous conflict simulation is the Trucking Game developed by Deutsch and Krauss (1960) to study the effects of threat on bargaining between parties with directly conflicting interests. In this game, each participant is put in charge of a trucking company and participants play through a series of trials in which they choose between two routes between a start and a finish point. The shortest route is only a single lane, and participants must share this route to minimize the amount of time it takes to make their

way between the two points. If one participant's truck makes it to this lane first and the other truck also enters the lane, either one must yield to the other and then reverse out of the lane. If the lane is cleared one must wait for the other to pass, or he or she can block the lane and force the other to yield, which may result in a standoff. The other option is to take an alternate route that takes more time to complete, and results in a lower payoff.

Deutsch and Krauss (1960) added a complication to this scenario to test for the effect of threat by installing a gate that can block the short route and may be operated by one or both participants. This addition results in three conditions of threat: no threat, unilateral threat, and bilateral threat. Deutsch and Krauss found that bilateral threat conditions decreased payoffs for both players as well as increased the time it took for the players to complete their trials. The unilateral threat condition was found to have a negative effect on payoffs and time to complete task. Only in the no threat condition did participants yield maximum profits. By utilizing this game structure, the researchers were able to use an experimental game to operationalize one of the main aspects of power in conflict relations—the ability to coerce an opponent using threat and to have the ability to follow through on the threat.

Economic exchange and game theory models of self-other relationships in situations of conflict are primarily based on calculations of utility or benefit. The social circumstances from which these understandings come to us develop in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries and form the basis of rationalist and utilitarian philosophies. This model of social relations in conflict is powerful for developing experimental analogs for social conflict, but does not seem to allow us to address its human meaning.

Conflict and the Perspective of Human Experience

This section offers a significant shift from the perspective of looking at conflict as the observer-scientist studies it in experimental situations to that of understanding the human meaning of conflict for individuals. While at this point one may be tempted to apply a utility model to Goffman's (1959) understanding of face as a type of *social*

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currency that can be gained, saved or lost, we should return for a moment to the earlier discussion of face.

Face is our ability to claim a particular role *vis-à-vis* others within a particular interaction, and have the other accept our claim. In that sense it is not a commodity, but a claim to social meaning within a role relationship. Pollio (1982) notes the etymological root for 'person' is 'persona,' a word that means 'mask' and that derives from Greek theatre. The metaphors of face and persona speak to the socially intelligible image we present to others when we enact roles together in public life. Together, we maintain each other's sense of identity, predictability, morality, reputation and so on, with the understanding that others will do the same for us, i.e., reciprocate. What is at stake here is how we create and maintain human meaning in an *exchange* of dialogue, rather than how we exchange value, engaging in instrumental relations and calculating our social behavior with an eye toward maximizing utility. As Levinas (1969) noted, *face* does not and cannot exist for us as a commodity to be possessed and consumed, as the concreteness of another's face in the social world is the basis of our moral conscience and our social meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 1934).

Whether what we maintain is a constructed reality or complicit illusion, the expectation that it will be jointly maintained is an undeniable rule of social life. Recent theorists seek an alternative to the rational actor or exchange-relation understanding of social interaction. McNamee and Gergen (1999) argue that it is in face-to-face interactions with others that we come to understand the social reality of conflict and when we accept a shared responsibility for what comes of our interaction, we find a social world we have together created and that we jointly can maintain or change. Often, however, everyday experience proves an extraordinarily complicated venture.

Exchange, Reciprocity and Social Identity

Many conflicts emerge in situations when personal expectations go unfulfilled, particularly when tied to esteem, identity or emotional concerns. Hawthorne (1989) has referred to the experience of a violation of relational expectations as a *breach*, and Rowe,

Halling, Davies, Leifer, Powers, and van Bronkhurst (1989) as an *injury*. An expectation that underlies much of social interaction is the belief that *a person helps and does not hurt those who have helped them*. Gouldner (1960) argues that a reciprocity norm is the unstated expectation whose violation or fulfillment is significant in escalating or de-escalating conflict (cf. Osgood, 1966).

A conflict may escalate when one party makes a conciliatory gesture and the other does not respond in kind. By not responding to a good faith gesture, the party who initially made gesture may feel maligned and hence justified in forcing reciprocity (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001). Forced reciprocity, or compensation, includes interpersonal themes of "getting even and/or balancing the scales," "teaching the other a lesson," or "saving face and/or getting back one's respect" and is an all too familiar human experience (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). The violation is one that breaks the pattern of reciprocity assumed to constitute good faith in social relationships that serve as an existential ground stabilizing our personal and social identities.

Hawthorne's (1989) breach is defined as a dramatic and harmful change in the quality of an interpersonal relationship. Hawthorne gives some examples: a polite social relationship suddenly disrupted by a rude comment, a fiancée breaking an engagement, a person expressing anger at God. In a phenomenological study of reparation—the act of repairing broken relationships—the breach served as the ground that made meaningful any attempts at repair. There are three themes define the breach: a change in self, other or the relationship; attributions of responsibility; and feeling urgency to respond and emotional distress. Each one will be discussed in turn.

In Hawthorne's (1989) study, many participants reported that after a breach, they became aware of a significant change having taken place in their understanding of self, the other person, and/or their relationship. This theme of change specifies an experience of time that splits events into a time 'before' the breach, when the relationship was one of friends, lovers, etc., and 'after' the breach, when the self and other take on roles of victim and injurer/perpetrator. Often this split in time defines a particular moment in which

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irreparable harm was inflicted by an injurer/perpetrator on the narrator of the account who takes on the perspective of victim. This split into two roles, and two perspectives, indicates a break in time and an interpersonal break, a social distance or barrier emerging subsequent to the breach. This theme speaks to relational intimacy becoming a rift, and a relationship moving from one of connection to one of distance and alienation.

A phenomenological study of forgiveness indicated that a social injury of this type elicits a need to reestablish the self outside the context of the relationship that was damaged (Rowe et al., 1989). An individual may be able to come to terms with the injury but still feel a sense of resentment if the perpetrator/injurer has not apologized. In this period 'after' the breach, many victims wish for reconciliation and believe that the responsible party could one day be different thus making reconciliation possible. Many report ruminating on the injury, feeling hurt and angry and wondering what the implications of the injury are in their larger life context. Over time, this initial interpretation concerning the injurer's intent is questioned and draws in for the victim an issue of his or her own culpability for the injury. Often the victim seeks to understand the rationale behind injurer's behavior before he or she is able to forgive the transgression.

Hawthorne's (1989) theme of change is further supported by Rowe et al. (1989) in terms of the experience of a "disruption to the wholeness or integrity of one's life" (pg. 239). Rowe et al. add that participants alter their imagined future in that what had been anticipated within the relationship that has now been lost. A future disrupted by the relational injury is felt to be an injury to the self. It is an injury of an existential sort and the person's future-orientation is dramatically altered after the breach. In accord with this experience, the psychoanalyst Adler (1998) maintains that an individual's experienced sense of meaning and self-value comes out of his or her orientation toward an imagined future. When a person's imagined future is no longer tenable, he or she is forced to reevaluate who and what they are, and where they are going—this can prove extraordinarily distressing. As close relationships serve to establish a sense of coherence and continuity for personal identity, a significant disruption in a close relationship—due

to a break-up or a death—may parallel a disruption in one's sense of self and in one's anticipated future (McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

One notable aspect to these accounts is that they are often narrated from the victim's perspective (cf. Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2004; Zhang, 2004). This pattern of narration was noted across cultural contexts and concerned situations in which the events made a distressing challenge to the self. With a dramatic change in a relationship brought about by a violation of expectations, trust and security both in the victim's experience of self and in the relationship are undermined. The perpetrator, however, may not even realize that a transgression has occurred (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). Narrative perspective is highly significant in understanding the meaning of different accounts of the same social event, as the victim and perpetrator narrate in vastly different ways what are ostensibly the same circumstances (Kellett & Dalton, 2001). Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) conclude that "[v]ictims and perpetrators may be understanding things differently, but they do not seem to acknowledge that they understand them differently" (pg. 1000).

This difference in perspective may be understood in terms of social roles adopted and transformed in situations that move from injury and breach, to amends-making and forgiveness. When someone has injured us we expect that he or she will come to understand it from our perspective. Without this understanding, how can he or she honestly acknowledge the wrongdoing and make amends? The differences in narrative structure that Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) describe may relate to social scripts and the accompanying interpretations of events defining the roles of victim and perpetrator. This interpretation of victim and perpetrator narratives seems to accord with Goffman's (1951) study of the challenge to self-understanding presented to the victim of a confidence game.

Goffman (1951) found that when a person's sense of self had been violated by being victimized in a confidence game, the person suffered a distressing loss of self-worth and felt at risk for losing positive social identity. The social role of victim would normally offer a moral high-ground for the *mark* to adopt socially *vis-à-vis* the

perpetrator, except for some unusual characteristics of the confidence game. A confidence game often makes its "victim" complicit in his or her own victimization. Often this criminal-mark relationship calls for complicity in some violation of morality or of an esteemed social principle. This leaves the victim in a threatening position of others potentially seeing him or her as stupid (for being manipulated), greedy and/or deserving of victimization. The threat to self presented in the aftermath of a confidence game intensifies the potential for revenge-seeking by victims. In fact, revenge often seems the only recourse available to the victim to maintain a sense of esteem.

Revenge presents a serious threat to the criminal; thus a common practice allows the mark to regain face. An authority figure, or another person the victim respects, allows the mark to reestablish a sense of social identity by playing down the mark's complicity in the confidence game. Goffman (1951) points out that the process of "cooling a mark out" emerges in many areas of social life. Events such as calling-off an engagement, informing a spouse of one's intent to divorce, or asking a colleague for a resignation require techniques of 'cooling.' Cooling, he claims, is a protective social activity allowing an individual to adjust to events that have dramatically altered his or her self-understanding and social identity.

In other situations, cultural beliefs and practices may contribute to the dichotomization of social roles into victim and perpetrator subsequent to injury. In a study of inter-generational conflict in the People's Republic of China, Zhang (2004) notes that the norm of filial piety is associated with an authoritarian moralism in which young people are obliged to respect and obey elders, and elders are obligated to practice "tough love." The rejection of filial piety by the young and the elder's obligation to practice tough love leaves the elder in a position of being perceived as the instigator of conflict as he or she feels expected to enter into a punishing role. Further, adoption of the victim role may confer greater social power among the victim's peers.

In Xie, Swift, Cairns and Cairns's (2004) study of middle-school students' narrative accounts of aggression, most accounts assign responsibility to another person and tend to diminish the narrator's culpability. Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman's

(1990) also found that victim narratives tend to emphasize the long-term consequences of the harm committed against them and that victims often explain that the perpetrator did not care that his or her actions caused so much emotional pain. Perpetrator accounts tended to isolate the transgressive event in time and to explain its causes in terms of external influences, situational factors and to portray the victim as overreacting to a minor provocation (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990).

It is arguable that the social role of victim confers a sense of moral superiority. Understanding one's self as the victim, however, can intensify conflict and complicate resolution by locating responsibility in the other party. We noted earlier Eidelson and Eidelson's (2003) contention that superiority beliefs may serve to establish a "sense of specialness, deservingness, and entitlement" and that this has the effect of disrupting meaningful interactions between disputants, as the other (the *perpetrator*) is disallowed a voice (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003, pg. 184). This type of belief can escalate conflicts into "no negotiation, no compromise" situations (Payne, 1995). A belief in superiority seems to accentuate perceived differences and to establish an interpersonal boundary between the self (victim) and other (perpetrator) and this situation is made worse when both parties perceive themselves the victim—which often seems the case.

Responding to the Shock of Violated Norms

The victim role introduces a paradoxical set of social and cognitive effects that allow a destabilized self to find or develop a sense of stability after a breach. The role of victim mixes a sense of moral righteousness and entitlement with a simultaneous sense of social vulnerability and helplessness. In the criminal world, norms of reciprocity are frequently violated when resources are obtained under the pretense of a relationship and the criminal has no intent of reciprocating (Goffman, 1951). By being conned in the relationship, "the mark is a person who has compromised himself, in his own eyes if not in the eyes of others" (pg. 452).

The failure of the criminal/injurer/perpetrator to reciprocate, when this action is expected, is a demeaning social experience. Not having lost a sense of anger and

righteousness, yet being denied the benefits of the victim role, the mark is left feeling extraordinarily vulnerable to further social attacks and censure. Vulnerability centers on a feeling of threat. In feeling threatened a person will tend to engage in more defensive behaviors, even in response to a perceived threat that is not present or is of a lesser degree than experienced (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). While a group holding this belief can consolidate to protect itself against threats, an individual has no such recourse except by appropriating the victim role. A person may also come to feel helpless in this situation. As Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) note, a sense of helplessness often relates to feelings of powerlessness and loss of control. For some, this may intensify an experience of anger, especially since most social circumstances disallow forced reciprocation (Thomas, 2003).

In a grounded theory study of intractable conflict situations, Horton-Deutsch and Horton (2003) report that the initial stages of a conflict often carry an inchoate feeling that something is wrong; the individual feels "shunned, frustrated, demoralized, and 'put in their place'" and may express safety concerns, but is not sure what to make of the relational situation (Horton-Deutsch & Horton, 2003, pg. 188). An individual will often try out various problem-solving strategies to ameliorate the emerging conflict situation. Here, there is heavy reliance on previous experience with conflicts and often a failure to recognize the unique aspects of the intractable situation.

In an intractable conflict, however, no strategies bring about a reestablishment of relational norms. The victim begins to question his or her own social competence and ability to make sense of what is happening, i.e., his or her sense of efficacy is challenged and he or she feels helpless, powerless and vulnerable. One participant describes: "She was impossible. Nothing worked. It was like I was beating my head against a brick wall. I just couldn't do anything to get through to this person" (Horton-Deutsch & Horton, 2003, pg. 190).

A violation of expected relational norms leads to a powerful social need to assign responsibility for the transgression. Within Western culture, with its emphasis on subjective agency, the interpersonal actions of individuals are perceived to originate in the mind of the individual (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Victim and perpetrator roles

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allow for assignment of responsibility and hence specify the social actor and the social act needed for reparation (Hawthorne, 1989). From the perspective of Hawthorne's (1989) participants, for example, a breached relationship necessarily entails the social roles of injurer/perpetrator and victim. Participants sometimes describe a desire to attribute responsibility for the breach to him or her self; more often this blame is leveled at the other person (Hawthorne, 1989; Rowe et al., 1989).

It has been argued that individual rather than relational attributions of responsibility are philosophically problematical from the social constructivist perspective (e.g., McNamee & Gergen, 1999); however, it is an attribution that nonetheless makes sense to participants in how they experience a breach. For most participants in Hawthorne's (1989/1997) study of reparation, the act of repairing a relationship is made possible by the injurer/perpetrator accepting and acknowledging responsibility for the breach. In other words, the perpetrator must acknowledge and affirm the perspective of the victim in order to be redeemed and thereby repair the breach.

In the Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) study, qualitative differences between victim and perpetrator accounts related to the perceived comprehensibility of the transgression and its effect on victims' lives—both when written from the victim and perpetrator's perspectives. Accounts written from the victim perspective tended to emphasize the immorality and incomprehensibility of the perpetrator's transgression, and that it took a long time before the they were able to fully express anger at the perpetrator—with this anger often expressed with respect to multiple transgressions—and that the event has had significant and lasting negative consequences. Perpetrators, however, tended to portray the transgression as understandable given the situation—often out of his or her control—and to deny any long-term consequences for the victim. The entire transaction of meaning appears to center on the victim and the meaning of this perspective.

It seems that in both perpetrator and victim accounts, narrators do make a claim that the other has treated them unjustly and thus it seems that both victim and perpetrator cast themselves as victims and perpetrators of sorts. They do this since they feel singled

out and are seeking to right what they perceive as wrong—whether the 'wrong' is an injurious act or an 'overreaction' to something that really was not the perpetrator's fault. A correlate belief that emerges from experiencing one's self to have been treated unjustly by others is that of distrust (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). Distrust leads to an expectation of further harm and may lead one to interpret others' actions as being more hostile than intended. When parties come to distrust one another it sets up a recursive lack of trust that may make the conflict intractable.

Emotional Experiences in Conflict: Frustration and Anger

It has long been recognized that among the more salient phenomena of conflict are experiences of frustration and anger. Frustration and anger, in a rationalistic culture, are an indication of a loss of control over one's self and one's situation (Thomas, 2003). Emotional responses to social conflict, including frustration, anger and aggression have been considerably researched in psychology (cf. Fromm, 1973; and the 1941 special issue of *Psychological Review, 48*, including papers by Hartman, Maslow and others). The unusual character of anger in a conflict experience is captured in Lorenz's (1966) description, discussed by Fromm in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973):

> A shiver runs down the back and … along the outside of both arms. One soars elated, above all the ties of everyday life, one is ready to abandon all for the call of what, in the moment of this specific emotion, seems to be a sacred duty. All obstacles in its path become unimportant; the instinctive inhibitions against hurting or killing one's fellows lose, unfortunately, much of their power . . . . As a Ukrainian proverb says: "When the banner is unfurled, all reason is in the trumpet" (Lorenz, 1966 as in Fromm, 1973, pg. 25).

When anger is taken to an extreme, individuals may be absorbed by the immediate concerns of conflict, losing sight of ordinary life—an experience Lorenz (1966) has called *militant enthusiasm*. When "all reason is in the trumpet," the destructive potential of social conflict is palpable. Individuals abandon the rules, beliefs, and concerns structuring social life and maintaining civil relations. In breaking away from modes of civil social interaction, conflict has the potential to be among the most

destructive forces in society (Deutsch, 1973). In individual lives as well, conflict may serve as a major source of stress and upheaval (Frone, 2000).

Understanding the experience of anger is an important aspect of face-to-face conflict. While anger between conflicting parties is often observable in terms of overtly hostile words and actions, covert anger may also be present in 'cold' conflicts, reflecting a build-up of long-term resentment between the disputants (Sandra Thomas, personal communication, April 2006). Phenomenological studies of male and female experiences of anger have been conducted by Thomas, Smucker, and Droppleman (1998) and Thomas (2003). Comparing the findings of these studies, Thomas (2003) notes that men often detach themselves from the emotional experience of anger and from the person, object or situation that has elicited anger, and tend to discuss the experience in abstract and generic terms. Women, however, often specify the person, object, or situation that has made them angry and seek relationship-oriented ways to talk about and/or express anger. Thomas believes that these differences are likely due to differences in the socialization of men and women—men having been inculcated with a mechanistically-oriented worldview and women, a relationally-oriented worldview. Thomas also notes that men tend to report isolating themselves from others when angry, trying to work through their feelings alone. For men, there is often a fear that anger will become uncontrollable if they remain in the anger-eliciting situation and that this will lead to physical aggression.

Unlike other problem-solving situations, seeking a resolution to intractable conflict will never provide a sense of closure for the individual. Lack of closure leaves the individual with a feeling of urgently needing to complete that which is incomplete (cf. Dunker, 1945; Pollio, 1982). Adopting the stance of victim as a way of repairing one's social identity is a step toward resolving the conflict experience for the self, although the person often feels a powerful need to resolve the conflict with the other. One's sense of social competence and efficacy hinges on being able to have some effect in the situation. Hawthorne's (1989) theme of urgency is primarily emotional, referring to feelings of agitation and anger. Urgency serves to worsen the experience of breach by introducing anger and hostility or a sense of sadness and loss that may compel actions to make

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amends to lessen emotional pain. Frustration and anger tend to be among the most disconcerting aspects of experiences of social conflict.

It seems that a sense of urgency, as reported in Hawthorne's (1989) study, and its relation to experiences of agitation and anger are perhaps different for men and women (as in Thomas, 2003); however, the force of urgency to seek to make amends or come to terms with the breach is clear in experiences of reparation. Coming to terms with the breach is described in terms of *retaliating* against the injurer, maintaining distance from the injurer, a.k.a. '*retaining*', or setting about *repairing* the relationship. Retaliation, as an impulsive and hostile act, tends to intensify the breach and further damage the relationship. One participant reports a justification for retaliation: "I want to hurt you 'cause I'm hurt" (see Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, pg. 211). In retaliation, the focus is on avenging oneself and there is little concern for the future consequences of escalation.

Retaining is the act of keeping interpersonal distance from the injurer because the situation is perceived as intractable or one may still feel hurt. In retaining, the passage of time typically is reported to lessen emotional pain; however, a few participants reported that not addressing the breach increased emotional pain and stress. The third and final response concerns repairing the relationship. Often making apologies and shifting focus to making amends in the relationship bring this about. Hawthorne (1989) reports that repairing is never an impulsive action, like retaliating or retaining can be, and occurs only after a significant 'cooling off' period.

In response to a violated expectation or breached relationship, one possible response is that of retaliation and aggression. Since violated expectations challenge one's sense of self and one's sense of the future, Goffman (1951) notes that the blow-off has the effect of shocking the victim. A victim in shock may act impulsively and aggressively to retaliate against the criminal who perpetrated the confidence game. Goffman describes 'cooling the mark out' as a social process that allows the mark to regain a sense of self, and thus lessen the threat of revenge. A *cooler* is a person usually known to the mark and is often an authority figure. The cooler may allow the mark to

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express his or her anger about the situation, to 'blow his [or her] top.' Often, the cooler persuades the mark that the situation could have happened to anyone and that it does not indicate anything negative about the mark. Cooling the mark out brings the victim from an experience of shock to an active engagement in recreating his or her social identity. Thus, 'cooling' lessens the threat of violence.

Often violence emerges because victims do not perceive an alternative means to regain a sense of self or respect from others after a breach. Violence is a means of establishing physical control over a threat. In some social groups, however, the ability to handle one's self well in a violent situation is a point of prestige, being tied to notions of sexual stereotypes, social respect and deference. In these social groups, the expression of violence is a tolerated if not accepted behavioral norm (Benson & Archer, 2002).

Another way that violated or breached relationships are responded to is by the individual walking away from the relationship. In Horton-Deutsch and Horton (2003) exit was the only viable strategy for individuals caught in an intractable conflict, and it allowed them to reassert control over their lives in the absence of the conflict. Issues of regaining power and control in situations of breach is important for diminishing anger and other negative emotional experiences surrounding the conflict.

Regaining and/or Maintaining Power and Control

In Thomas's (2003) phenomenological investigation of anger, asserting or regaining power and control were significant themes for both men and women. For women, the experience of anger is often connected to a feeling of being powerless to bring about reciprocity in a relationship. For men, the experience surrounds a feeling of having lost control in a situation that is 'wrong' or 'unfair.' When men feel controlled both by the situation and their anger, they often report exiting to regain control. Thomas (2003) discusses the theme of control in relation to a mechanistic worldview that emphasizes being able to do something to "fix the situation."

When a situation is not reparable, participants in Horton-Deutsch and Horton's (2003) study report exiting the situation to reassert control and regain emotional and

cognitive equilibrium, "freeing themselves of the burden" of the intractable situation (Horton-Deutsch & Horton, 2003, pg. 190). Participants report feeling empowered by choosing to exit and beginning to anticipate a new future for themselves: "It's time to put this behind me and move on" (pg. 191). Many participants in Horton-Deutsch and Horton (2003) reported developing strategies for managing social stress, such as setting boundaries and making self-protective rules: "I will never lie but never share more of myself than is necessary" (pg. 191). In regaining cognitive and emotional control, they no longer "buy into" what the other person thinks or says about them.

Acts of Forgiving and Letting Go

Reparation—the act of repairing relationships— is a central activity in resolving social conflict. While Hawthorne (1989) focused on the experience of reparation, he found that when interviewing participants many would detail the particular transgression or offense that led to the need for reparation. One significant consequence of conflict is that it can both damage our connection to others and make possible the renewal and strengthening of formerly broken connections. Processes of reparation and forgiveness allow conflicts to pass into new periods of relational harmony.

The philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958) has argued that making and accepting apologies is a fundamental social activity for maintaining cohesion in social groups as it helps to maintain a future-orientation in the group by erasing past transgressions. Others have noted that forgiving, and having an ability to forgive, is beneficial to individual well-being and thus is an important concern in social and health psychology (cf. Lawler, Younger, Piferi, Jobe, Edmondson, & Jones, 2005).

Compared with Hawthorne's study, the Rowe et al. (1989) study of the human meaning of forgiveness tends to assume *a priori* a theme of breach in the question asked of participants: "Can you tell us about the time during an important relationship *when something happened* such that forgiving the other became an issue for you?" (Italics mine). Rowe et al. describe forgiveness as: "a process that begins when one person perceives oneself as harmed by another and ends in a psychological, if not face-to-face,

reconciliation with the one who was perceived as harmful" (pg. 239). This definition highlights two key themes that emerged in Hawthorne's study of reparation: *responsibility* is present in perceiving oneself to be harmed by another, *urgency* is suggested in the possibility of psychological and/or face-to-face reconciliation.

When the injurer/perpetrator's behavior has been construed in such a way as to seem reasonable, the individual is better able to "let go" of their hurt, although still tending to experience pangs of anger and pain (Rowe et al., 1989). Participants reported that the experience of forgiveness finally 'came as a gift' and appeared 'like a revelation,' suddenly freeing them of the all-too-familiar hurt and anger they had been harboring toward the injurer. A participant describes this culminating experience of forgiveness:

> I knew at last that home was where I was. The past was no longer menacing . . . the future was no longer foreboding . . . . I was no longer adrift in a sea of chaos but at the helm in a world that welcomed me. I felt joy (pg. 243).

Once forgiveness has come, anger and hurt no longer are directed at the injurer/perpetrator. Instead, one's personal pain is understood in the context of "pain shared with other human beings" as one experiences a renewed connection to the world of others, and a feeling that the injury has taken on a deeper, more profound, meaning in the scheme of one's life (Rowe et al., 1989, pg. 242). What seems so unusual about this account of forgiveness is that it is *not a conscious act*, but something that emerges from the situation of injury, violation or breach. It is primarily a private experience to have forgiven someone, rather than a public acceptance of an apology and amends-making.

The Perpetrator's Perspective and the Problem of Evil

Most available research on forgiveness, reparation, or interpersonal anger is based on accounts narrated from the victim's perspective. In Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) accounts written from the perpetrator's perspective were sought, but these typically detailed minor transgressions when compared to those detailed in accounts written from the victim's perspective. Qualitative studies need to be conducted

concerning the perpetrator's perspective in situations of transgression or conflict that are based on non-clinical and non-incarcerated populations.

Some psychological research addresses the perspective of the perpetrator, but often this concerns extreme violations of moral order, i.e., what would be considered in some contexts as 'evil.' Psychologists have located evil in individuals, in the social world, in behavior, in language—basically, nowhere and everywhere. One aspect of human evil is clear, however: we become aware of it in harmful acts (Staub, 2004) that demean, dehumanize, destroy, or kill innocent people (Zimbardo, 2004). Magnitude, duration, and repetition of the act, and choice and responsibility on the part of perpetrators and bystanders are definitional factors that seem open to debate. Waller (2002) sees the perpetrator as having made a choice. Zimbardo (2004) and Staub (2004) claim that the choice may not always be apparent or, from the perspective of the perpetrator, may seem limited. Babic (2004) complicates the issue by pointing out that many perpetrators actually have chosen to act in a way that seems morally good to them and is justifiable within their particular ideological system. Each perspective on choice or intent would beg the question of accountability.

In Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990), perpetrators described situations in which they angered someone. In these accounts, they acknowledge committing an act that injured or breached a relationship but often attribute their actions to situational or other external circumstances. This pattern of attribution is found in other, more extreme, accounts of the perpetrator's perspective, such as in the trial testimony of Nazi war criminal Eichmann commented on by Arendt (1964). Eichmann viewed himself as diligently "following orders" and, in an extraordinary rationalization, claimed he was "helping" European Jews by overseeing the logistics of deportation to Palestine before death camps began operating in Europe.

Arendt (1964) makes what was and still remains a controversial claim: Eichmann's humanity was lost in a system that seemed to indefinitely defer ordinary moral accountability and humane responsibility. It was the Nazi government that he believed was the locus of his actions. Arendt agreed: in some ways it was, in other ways,

it certainly was not. The case Arendt makes is that Eichmann is no different from many other people in the highly mechanized and bureaucratic modern world—both within and outside the Nazi state. Any hierarchical system can strip personal autonomy and accountability. When one acquiesces to making oneself an instrument in the service of an institution, and puts aside one's own moral sense, one may become dehumanized and separated from the effects of one's actions (Todorov, 1996).

In the context of everyday life, then, this separation is what the perpetrator seems to face—a blindness to the effects of his or her actions on others. If, as Ricoeur (1967) has argued, the fundamental experience that connects human beings to the sacred is a sense of our own fault, then any system that dispels that sense of fault diminishes moral accountability and diminishes the meaning of all actions—good or bad, moral or immoral. This loss can result in an orientation toward others much as we see in Eichmann. The question then becomes: is there really a perpetrator's perspective?

Take, for instance, the case of ideology and its contribution to acts of "evil." To believe strongly in an ideal to the point that one is willing to kill or die for it can lead to extraordinary evil being committed by otherwise "normal" individuals. Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo (2002) studied police torturers/interrogators in Brazil who were assigned the task of extracting confessions from individuals believed to be "enemies of the state." Surprisingly, the torturers tended not to have sadistic personalities, as one might expect, but instead were disciplined and socially perceptive individuals.

The torturers were individuals who could extract a confession with little overt violence because they understood their victim's fears and weaknesses. The characteristics that tended to make these individuals unique were their sense of pride in their "profession," a very strong national security ideology, and a clearly defined enemy against which to fight (e.g., communists). The Brazilian torturers truly feel themselves to be doing a job that is both necessary and heroic. As Arendt (1964) said of Eichmann, the Nazi war criminal: "there were, and still are, so many like him . . . terribly and terrifyingly normal" (174).

Zimbardo (2004) believes that such sanctioned violence is particularly relevant to considerations of evil because it uses the attribution of 'evil' to dehumanize out-groups and to alleviate moral culpability for acts of violence directed toward these groups. Sanctioned violence is particularly insidious because it is instigated by the very situations in which human beings find social and moral identity. Violence can be sanctioned in overt ways, such as a politician making a declaration of war, and in covert ways, such as the violence we find presented in cartoons, on the news, in sports, popular fiction, cinema, and so on (Bargal, 2004).

A significant question to ask concerning sanctioned violence, and other acts that breach relationships, concerns the ways in which an individual is able to short-circuit normal moral concern and moral anxiety with regard to behaviors that "violate . . . personal standards" (Rosenhan & Seligman, 1996). A first consideration in this regard is that most people see themselves as good and will interpret their actions in order to fit that presupposition, a phenomenon Tsang (2002) referred to as moral rationalization. In moral rationalization, an individual will either selectively remember acceptable aspects of their immoral behavior or will shift their moral frame of reference to make their behavior justifiable. Baumeister and Vohs (2004) describe this common phenomenon: "Ironically, many who have perpetrated what history has come to condemn as some of the worst excesses regarded themselves as trying their best to do something good and noble" (pg. 85).

An ethnographic study of pub fights in Northern England observed male-male aggression in the context of Friday and Saturday "nights out" (Benson & Archer, 2002). The researchers observed that younger men (under 21) were particularly likely to threaten or act violently toward other men in order to "have a laff" (to be entertained) and/or to cultivate "tough" or "hard" reputation among pub patrons. Informants often described their reasons for fighting as a response to another male transgressing against them, that is, "taking the piss" on their reputation or transgressing some significant social norm. Incidents considered transgressing a social norm are inappropriate glances at girlfriends, "getting off with" a girlfriend or a woman the individual likes, spilling a drink (one's own

or another's), "giving someone the eye," or "sizing up" an opponent by bumping or pushing into them. Other reasons for violence concern men who are "asking for it" because they are perceived to be "bloody puffs" or "fucking queers," or they have "questioned a woman's honour." Violence may be one way that an individual gains social power in the environment of the pub; thus in many instances the justification for violence is contrived.

One of the more interesting findings of the Benson and Archer (2002) study, and is particularly relevant here, is that men will often give what seem to be virtuous or heroic justifications for aggressive behavior such as "protecting women's honour." What is ironic about this is that many female informants reported feeling irritated with men who do not understand that she is capable of defending herself. While young males often engage in physical violence because they believe that being "tough" will increase their status among other males and will make them more desirable to females, the investigators reported that only very young women (mid- to late-teens) found this behavior appealing. A female participant reported that: "most women think men who fight are pathetic brainless louts … lads fighting can scare women, because one day they may receive a fist themselves" (pg. 18).

Alcohol consumption also serves to rationalize Benson and Archer's (2003) male informants' aggressive behavior. An 18-year-old male:

> On a Saturday night out in Halifax I stumbled around a nightclub after consuming a large amount of alcohol and bumped into a stool which was occupied by another male of similar age and build to me. Upon bumping into his stool I noticed that he stood up straight with his shoulders thrust forward and his eyes wide open and fixed on mine. In an immediate response I copied the opponent's actions. He responded by asking, "Watch the fuck where you're going." I quickly said "Fuck off!" We both then backed off not taking our eyes off each other. The situation had been ended verbally and both parties seemed reasonably satisfied (pg. 18).

When fights end, informants often report that they were too "pissed [drunk]" to remember what had happened. Most fights are not an issue for the winner, except sometimes, younger males who have lost will seek revenge outside of the pub setting. Occasionally regret is expressed after a fight when a fighter feels that he was "out of

order" and wishes he had "given 'em a bit more." While actual physical violence tends to be rare even in the pub setting, stories concerning fights tend to circulate and be retold frequently. Others present for the retelling are often complicit in supporting the teller's version of events.

Grade schools are another social environment rife with conflict. In a narrative study of aggression among middle school children, Xie, Swift, Cairns, and Cairns (2004) asked students to write an account of a recent conflict that they participated in or had witnessed. The most common form of aggression reported by Xie et al.'s participants was social aggression, accounting for approximately 80% of the conflicts reported. Social aggression—which utilizes tactics such as gossip and spreading rumors—allows a perpetrator to maintain anonymity thus lowering the risk of retaliation. Students with greater popularity tended to use far more social aggression than less popular students, and tended to be better insulated from a social attack. This insulation is highlighted in the following account:

> Cara found a rumor was going around … When asked about the person who did it, Cara replied: 'They never did find out, … they said that Jenny said it, and Jenny said that Diane said it … but then Jenny said that Amy said it, then Amy said that Angie said, and Angie said that Amy said, and Amy said that Jenny said it, so we never did find out who said it… (Xie et al., 2004, pg. 218).

Being insulated socially allows some individuals to instigate conflict, yet remain on the periphery. Xie et al. quote one participant: "…people, they like to see a good fight and you know, they just like to see a fight and they'll say like, he talked about your mother and all stuff like that …" (pg. 218). When a perpetrator is identifiable, conflicts tended to escalate to direct verbal or physical aggression when the victim retaliated. Physical aggression was noted as having the highest rate of response to provocation (48% of cases).

What seems most interesting about the perpetrator's perspective is that social complicity often allows the perpetrator to operate. Agreeing to go along with the tall tales of a fight, or refusing to 'rat out' a peer, are perfectly normal and often acceptable social behaviors. It is in this way that social complicity also serves to make situations in

which one becomes aware of having the perpetrator's perspective rare indeed. So often relationships are breached in ways that tend to divorce the perpetrator from the consequences of his or her actions. In Zhang's narrative study of intergenerational conflicts in the People's Republic of China, cultural conditions create a situation in which the young and old are brought into conflict in such a way that both young and old can adopt easily the perspective of victim.

As in the construction of the victim and perpetrator's perspectives, our direct awareness of others in the social world and how they respond to us is one basis for understanding ourselves (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Conflicts with others are a salient aspect of our everyday awareness and often present significant challenges to the ways we see ourselves and want others to see us. Conflict seems unavoidable. As the psychoanalyst Horney (1937) put it: human experiences in the world of others consist of movements *toward others* in harmonious co-existence, movements *away from others* in independence, indifference and anonymity, and movements *against others* in opposition and strife. Everyday social life is constituted in these constantly negotiated movements of self in relation to others (Woehrle & Coy, 2000). While harmonious co-existence with colleagues, friends and family or occasions of silent anonymity in the company of strangers are significant aspects of how we live among others, moving against others, or being moved against by others, produce salient social phenomena for understanding the nature and possibilities of creation, destruction and recreation of meaning in the face-to-face social world (Coser, 1956). In conflict, we are all, at some time, cast in the role of victim or perpetrator.

Concluding Remarks

The social roles we adopt in situations of face-to-face conflict have a particular resonance with the sometimes-divisive and individualistic tradition of Western culture. Since the 16th century, Western culture has developed around the idea of social life as an interaction between what McNamee and Gergen (1999) call subjective agencies. Subjective agency reflects the idea that the individual is solely responsible for initiating

actions in his or her world and this is the basic understanding that leads to blame, culpability, and other negative attributions to the internal processes of other individuals in situations of conflict. Another consequence of the belief in subjective agency is that an individual is more likely to view others with whom he or she is in conflict as intentionally interfering with his or her aims, a belief that has the power to frustrate the individual and lead to violent actions to remove opposition.

Social life in this view becomes a conglomerate of independent beings each pursuing disparate, incompatible and self-serving agendas—much like what we find portrayed in Sartre's (1945/1989) Hell. Subjective agency is the construct that fundamentally underlies Spencer's "survival of the fittest," *laissez faire* economics, the criminal justice system, and much of social scientific, political and religious discourse and philosophy. These views often may be reflected in how we think and talk about our experiences in the social world. According to McNamee and Gergen (1999) the idea of subjective agency taken to its extreme is the centerpiece of the 'me-first culture of narcissism' in which "public life has given way to privatized, claustrophobic, and defensive modes of living" (pg. 9). Subjective agency, they believe, is what lies at the core of ineffective (i.e., non-relational) ways of dealing with social conflict.

McNamee and Gergen (1999), however, see a way out: we may consciously adopt an alternative view of human social life that is in accord with that articulated by Buber (1924) and Merleau-Ponty (1962). If the locus of social action is seen in relations, rather than between self-contained subjectivities, we have taken a significant step toward exploring the possibilities of our shared roles in constructing a social world. The basic idea they argue is that social relations are fundamentally interdependent (what they call conjoint) and that no social action could mean anything without reference to a shared symbolic system that renders actions within it intelligible. This understanding of social life leads McNamee and Gergen to an understanding of the self as a nexus of past and present relationships that, together with other selves, create future relationships that recursively become part of the self. In other words, no matter what we believe about our own subjective agency, we can never escape the socially-derived core of who and what

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we are and of the social world we create together. As the authors sum up: "…every conflict within a relationship bears the contribution of still other relations in which interlocutors are (or have been) enmeshed" (pg. 14).

For the existentialists, phenomenologists and social constructivists discussed, the human being has no option but to live life in relation to others; however, it is an open matter as to whether our interactions in the social world draw us into living a more authentic existence or impedes finding substantive meaning in life. Taken as a whole, it seems that the processes and outcomes of conflict are a matter of how conflict is experienced and enacted, the specific issues under dispute, and its emergent meaning for individuals as they relate in dialogue with one another (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). As John Dewey noted:

> Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheeplike passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving. . . . Conflict is a *sine qua non* of reflection and ingenuity (Dewey, 1930, pg. 300, qtd in Coser, 1962, pg. 178).

In light of what Buber (1924/1987), Merleau-Ponty (1962), McNamee and Gergen (1999), Dewey (1930) and others maintain, the analytic distinctions often made in the literature between internal and social conflicts, etc. (e.g., Barki & Hardwick, 2001) may not be useful when examining conflict from the perspective of the experiencing person face-to-face in a dialogical situation of conflict. Existential and phenomenological philosophy have little problem in failing to distinguish between the internal (subjective) and external (objective) world as these are often inseparable in experience. In other words, rationality and reflection allow us to create an objective world apart from subjective agency in ongoing human experiencing. From this perspective, all forms of conflict have an aspect of meaning inseparable from the ways they are enacted the immediate face-to-face relation of the everyday social world.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

There seems to be a single starting point for psychology...: the world as we find it, naively and uncritically....The whole development of [scientific knowledge] must begin with a naïve picture of the world. This origin is necessary because there is no other basis from which science can arise.

Wolfgang Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology*, 1947/1992, pg. 3

Acts or events are all intrinsically complex, composed of interconnected activities with continuously changing patterns. They are all like incidents in the plot of a novel or drama. They are literally the incidents of a life.

Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses*, 1942/1970, pg. 233

To look at the symbolic dimensions of social action—art, religion, ideology, science, law, morality, common sense—is not to turn away from the existential dilemmas of life for some empyrean realm of de-emotionalized forms; it is to plunge into the midst of them. The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said.

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973, pg. 30

Dialogical accounts of life experiences of face-to-face conflict produced during open-ended interviews serve as the basis for this investigation. As Pepper (1942/1970) notes, participant accounts of the incidents of a life are intrinsically complex and interconnected; understanding these accounts requires an awareness of how similar experiences are manifest in an interpreter's life. This personal awareness serves as the basis for anything that can be said scientifically about conflict phenomena (Kohler, 1947/1992). Psychological science has often viewed the life experiences of the investigator in terms of an inherent tension between everyday experiences in social life and reflected, expert understanding of the social world (Hunt, 2005). In Pepper's and Kohler's views, however, expert understanding of the social world invariably derives

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from the social world as we live it and necessarily informs the meaning of that lived world.

In social psychology, investigators seem to follow concerns emerging both from their everyday social experience and from problems emerging within the formal knowledge of their discipline. There is no reason to place one type of understanding in a position superior to another: each allows us to address different aspects of social life. Thus, in order to understand the meaning of conflict experience, I have adopted an attitude toward social psychology that locates basic data within the immediacy and flow of meaning-making concerning everyday social experience. Because of its situated nature, the basis for social psychological knowledge is always experientially present and changing. Whatever we may say of the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of others in conflict, we also must say of our own attitudes, beliefs and behaviors as investigators and participants in a cultural world. This means that knowing is always *knowing from some standpoint* and that emerging knowledge serves recursively to change an investigator's interpretive stance throughout an investigation as he or she closes in on a description of the phenomenon of interest (Gadamer, 1960). Thus, the act of knowing about face-to-face conflict, whether its source is immediate experience or rigorous scientific analysis and inference, is always a situated act of knowing.

When researchers adhere to a natural science methodology, however, they tend to downplay the ways in which acts of knowing are personal, socially-situated and fluid. Natural science methodology emphasizes objectivity and epistemological distance between the observer and the phenomenon observed. The result is to structure acts of observation in such a way as to describe the laws and patterns that govern social life apart from particular situations. The meaning of the social world, however, does not seem to follow transcendent natural laws like those we find in the natural sciences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Geertz, 1973; Shweder, 1991). The meaning of human experience is always already contextual. Social research as practiced must always work with incomplete and changing knowledge concerning an historical and social world that is also in a persistent state of change; all social scientific knowledge of human experience is

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contingent on, and only makes sense of itself within, the context of the social world it seeks to understand.

Our experience of the social world is a phenomenon that is created and maintained by the actions, beliefs and dialogues of individuals who, traditionally, share physical proximity and language (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This proximity entails shared practices as well as a shared language that provides a way to justify, maintain and create the goings-on of everyday life (Shweder, 1991). In other words, what we do, what we think about what we do, and what we say about what we do defines the human meaning of our ongoing presence in a shared social world (Geertz, 1973). Social psychology, when it focuses on social experience, is a reflection in which the Western social world has come to examine and understand itself. Thus, the results of this investigation will tell us something about how a particular people at a particular time make sense of conflict in their everyday lives.

Does this mean that a decontextualized scientific understanding of social conflict is purposeless or nonsensical? The answer is certainly *no*. At the most general level, the methodological perspectives and ends toward which social psychologists work are diverse. This diversity is essential to address the social world in its present meaningful possibilities. Social psychologists seek to 'understand, identify, explain, explore, describe, compare, predict, and/or analyze' the phenomena of the social world as these relate to individual psychological processes—that is, they seek to 'arrange the complexities' of social reality as it emerges for us in the intersubjective situation of being with other human beings (Mantzoukas, 2004). As objective quantitative scientists (or rigorous qualitative researchers) we are analysts and creators of social meaning.

The investigative questions emerging from our experiences and the research that flows from these questions have substantive effects in that they influence our own and others' personal and social lives. We create a meaningful social world as we seek to understand, predict and/or describe our experiences of it. In developing a scientific understanding of the social world, the picture that emerges through experimentation or other forms of investigation exists as a possibility for what the social world could mean;

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one possibility among many others (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, an investigator's beliefs, assumptions, life experiences, methodological choices and so on are significant in shaping the findings of social psychological investigations. The social world exists both in our naïve, immediate, uncritical experience and in our reflected, rational, discipline-specific understanding of it. Both perspectives are significant to a fuller, in-depth understanding of social conflict.

Our everyday understanding of the social world derives from participation and interaction with others in an ongoing dialogue as well as in a meaningful exchange of knowledge, feelings or resources. Social psychology always must return to the domain of concrete human interaction as a source of knowledge. The nature of the psychological experience of social reality does not allow for personal or professional understanding without involving oneself in everyday interaction: we are always already participating in a shared world of attitudes, beliefs, meanings and actions that are our social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Thus the method used here is dialogical; the corpus of data on which the investigation is based consists of open-ended, depth interviews with participants about personal life experiences of conflicts between themselves and other people.

Two types of concerns, personal and professional, motivate my interest in face-to-face conflict. Conflict has permeated many aspects of my life and has often proven a confusing and complicated experience. More often than not, conflict in close relationships has brought about significant change in my understandings of others and myself. For something so personally significant, I have never really felt that I do it "well"—sometimes overreacting and other times underreacting or avoiding it altogether. The second concern is professional: I believe that face-to-face conflict is of particular relevance to the social sciences because it is the domain of social interactions through which the status quo is called into question and possibilities for new meaning enter the intersubjective reality of the social world (cf. McNamee & Gergen, 1999; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Simmel, 1908/1955). To understand the experience of face-to-face conflict is to understand the meanings that emerge for individuals within situations of great openness

and possibility and/or of great destructiveness and constraint. Conflict can serve as the basis for some of the most significant events of an individual's life and of social history.

Methodology: Epistemology and Ontology

Hawthorne (1989) distinguishes between method and methodology and views this distinction as having relevance for any rigorous investigation of the social world. Methods are particular procedures used in the creation and/or discovery of the findings of an investigation. A careful description of method allows readers and other researchers to understand how an investigator has reached his or her conclusions. This type of description is a common practice within any scientific narrative.

Methodology provides the theoretical basis and justification for the methods an investigator has chosen to use. It provides a context for understanding what ontological and epistemological point-of-view an investigator has assumed when engaging in the research process. In traditional psychological science, methodology is addressed only in theoretical treatises on method. Ontological assumptions relate to a philosophical view of the fundamental nature of what exists; it is an answer the question, 'what *is* it?' The ontology assumed here concerns the human social world and our experience of it. Epistemological assumptions relate to beliefs about how we arrive at knowledge about existence and what counts as a valid understanding of it. Here, the epistemology focuses on how human beings in part inherit and in part create the meaning of the social world as they live it. I believe that the social sciences arrive at knowledge of the social world by understanding the meanings that emerge for individuals in the context of their everyday social experience and that investigators participate in both eliciting and creating this meaning.

Post-Positivism and Approximate Truths

To understand what makes this approach different, we need to address some of the familiar post-positivist methodology present in social psychological research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) post-positivism posits that social reality exists

as a "real" reality that can be apprehended as existing independently of the investigator. It is a reality, however, that can only be known in a probabilistic and imperfect way. For the post-positivist, there is a "truth" to be known when one assumes an objective perspective toward the phenomena of the social world and arrives at approximations of this "truth" by utilizing rigorous experimentation, hypothesis testing, and particularly the principle of falsification of hypotheses (Druckman, 2005). In other words, a rigorous application of scientific method can bring about true, but incomplete, understandings of the causes, processes, and consequences of the social world (Maxwell & Delaney, 2000).

The principle of falsification of hypotheses is a central tenet within this perspective. It implies one can have true knowledge that a hypothesis is *incorrect*—that is, one can rule out certain possibilities for understanding—but one can only partially know what is correct. A further implication is a productive scientific theory must be formulated in terms of potentially falsifiable hypotheses (Maxwell & Delaney, 2000). For the post-positivist, all knowledge is tentative and concerns a world that exists apart from the observer/scientist. The intent of this methodology is to develop an increasingly abstract understanding of the laws that govern causal relationships within social reality and to correct our naïve understandings of the social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As such, this methodology tends to assume a mechanistic metaphor for social reality since experimental manipulation of a variable (or set of variables) is assumed to have some effect on another variable(s) by way of explainable processes and interrelationships (Pepper, 1942/1970).

Social Constructivism and Existentialism

Social constructivism and existentialism serve as the epistemological and ontological bases for this investigation. While these philosophical perspectives utilize somewhat different assumptions, both challenge and share claims made by the post-positivist perspective. Primary among the assumptions that challenge post-positivism is that the social world emerges from, and is created by, the everyday interactions of social agents/actors of which the investigator is one (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The

investigator is viewed as a contributor to a broader domain of cultural and social meanings and is engaged in a transaction with concrete other persons always already situated in a social world.

From these principles, one can conclude that human beings exist in social reality as meaningful persons interacting in ways that make sense to them within the context of a shared social world (Van Manen, 1990). This social world is for human experience every bit as real and consequential as the natural world, except it represents a human construction built of, and around, the basic conditions of human life. Social reality would not exist were it not for the concrete reality of our own presence *vis-à-vis* others (Levinas, 1969).

The ethos (what a people do) and worldview (what a people think about what they do) of any social system is relative when compared to any other social system, yet it is internally coherent and makes sense from the insider's perspective (Geertz, 1973). In a universal sense, a particular cultural and social world represents one possibility among other possibilities for human social life. There is thus no absolute set of laws governing social reality in the same way there is an absolute force of gravity in the natural world.

The cultural psychologist, Shweder (1991), argues that human social realities are internally coherent constructions that allow individuals and social groups to make sense of an existence that consists of a set of universal human concerns. *Universalism without the uniformity* is Shweder's aphorism when it comes to understanding the nature of human social reality. He maintains social realities are relative constructions that emerge as attempts to make sense of universal human concerns. In this sense, persons and cultures 'make each other up' in that a person is given boundary, form and meaning within his or her ongoing interactions with other human beings who share a similar set of understandings concerning the purposes and meanings of life.

Examples of these central concerns are: What does it mean to die and what do we do when people die? What happens after I (or you) die? When I live among others, I have to put aside my needs for the needs of others; under what conditions is it appropriate for me to serve my own self-interest at the expense of another? How do I go about

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growing up, growing old? I need food, sleep and shelter; how do I go about procuring these things? How do I go about engaging in sexual relationships with other human beings and what do I do when children result? These are among many existential concerns that define the basic conditions of human life when living among others. Our social reality is a specific resolution to these concerns and we justify our resolutions by way of shared beliefs and practices. It is all too easy to forget that cultures and social realities are composed of historical beliefs and practices that have been inherited from predecessors as well as created in the ongoing processes of dialogue and negotiation that emerge in everyday interactions with others in response to existential concerns basic to all human beings.

For this investigation, it is assumed that face-to-face conflict is a social process that emerges out of the existential sense making of individuals in an ongoing relationship with each other. When we find ourselves in situations in which our own and another's interests and goals do not coincide, conflict allows us to reach some conclusion that produces change in the immediate relationship and in social reality more generally. Conflict is a process by which we negotiate meanings and practices—in a sense addressing alternate possibilities for living together and arriving at new practices and beliefs that serve to change our social world.

Conflict is also structured by a preexisting social reality. Thus, the findings of this investigation are to be understood as particular to the context of the 21st century American cultural world. Even though three participants find their cultural roots in other social realities—urban southern India, Portugal, and Polynesia—the research was conducted within the American social world and within the linguistic and conceptual system of American-English. In short, I assume that the social reality of face-to-face conflict consists of a pre-existing set of beliefs and practices, and ongoing choices and responses, enacted in a present social situation that is existentially significant and phenomenologically real for us.

The epistemological assumptions that guide the methods utilized in this investigation also represent a cultural and historical choice that the investigator, the

participants, and interpreters/readers, make with respect to the social reality of the phenomenon of face-to-face conflict. How we come to know the experience of social conflict emerges from the set of possibilities that perhaps define what the phenomenon may consist of apart from any particular perspective we take toward it.

It is on this point that my ontology coincides with that of post-positivism. As argued, face-to-face conflict is a fundamental existential phenomenon that emerges in our social lives when we encounter others. Levinas (1969) maintains that the concrete presence of another human being makes demands on us for concern, care, respect and consideration, etc., and thus the presence of the other is fundamental condition of human social life across social realities. However, particular beliefs and practices that obtain across social realities may be vastly different and hence the meanings of social conflict across social realities may be vastly different. What we are concerned with here is how individuals within a particular social reality come to experience and make meaningful their concrete life experiences of face-to-face conflict. These particular acts of sense-making represent a possible way to make sense of face-to-face conflict when it is considered in a cross-cultural context.

Knowing is Knowing What is Possible

According to the ontological theory described above, basic existential issues define the conditions of human life and motivate social groups to develop and maintain meaningful understandings that provide structure and coherence to lived experience. Berger and Luckmann (1966) have argued that what remains when we seek to go behind this "zone of lucidity," represented by social reality, "is a background of darkness" (pg. 44). There is no absolute explanation for anything we encounter in our own social world and across worlds, only different ways of describing and making sense of the basic conditions of human existence. Consider for a moment the spiral image below (Figure 3.1), drawn from Katz's *Psychological Atlas* (1949).

How might an existential and social constructivist approach concretely translate into the way we interpret and understand a phenomenon, such as the spiral in Figure 3.1?

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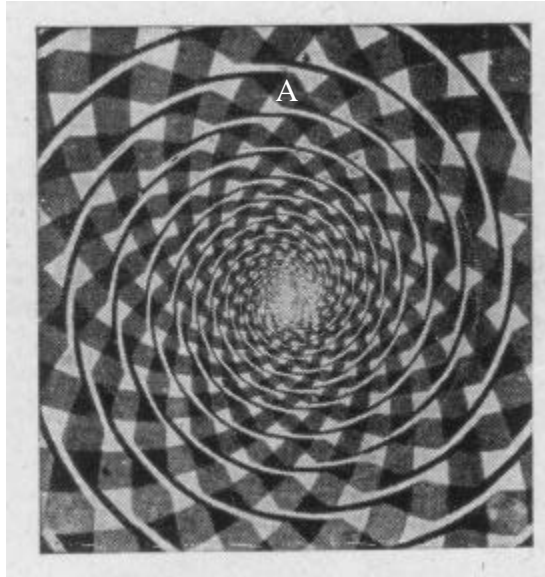
Figure 3.1: Gestalt Spiral Image from Katz (1949)

From our first-person perspective, what we immediately perceive is a spiral form, with lines that move from the periphery inward, meeting at a hazy point at the center of the image. However, if we take a pointer and place it on the 'A' between two of the major lines producing the figure and we trace the space-between-the-lines around the image, we find that we end up where we had begun: at point 'A'. Our initial percept—an apparent spiral—would lead us to anticipate that the pointer would move toward the center of spiral and away from point 'A'. We are met, however, with evidence contrary to our expectation.

The immediate experience we have of a spiral and the reflected experimental knowledge we have of concentric circles seem to leave us with an epistemological dilemma. For the post-positivist, the epistemological question is which of these

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understandings represents *true* knowledge of Figure 3.1? Do we interpret the image as a spiral—as we did given our initial impression of it—or do we interpret the image as a creative use of Gestalt principles leading us to perceive the image one way (a spiral) when *in fact* it is another (a set of semi-concentric circles). From the perspective of critical rationality, the spiral image is an *illusion* and the set of concentric circles is the *true* interpretation of the image.

From the perspective of constructivism, however, both understandings count as valid knowledge of Figure 3.1, and represent possibilities for human understanding and are significant in any description of how we come to make this phenomenon meaningful. What is *true* is what we can agree on as observers of the phenomenon engaged in dialogue about it. Thus, Figure 3.1 may be further understood as an example to make a point about epistemology. The phenomenon, and more broadly the conditions of human life, are polymorphic and thus provide us with many simultaneous possibilities for understanding. It is from these possibilities that we select for ourselves and negotiate with each other what we come to know as Figure 3.1 or any phenomenon of experience (Pollio, 1982). It is for this reason that *truth* or *falsehood* is not the issue for constructivist interpretations. Here, describing what is possible for our understanding of the experience of face-to-face conflict, as it exists in social reality, is the purpose of interpretation—regardless of issues concerning what might be termed the *real reality* of social conflict.

Social realities present us with possibilities for experience and understanding. Methodologically speaking, the greater the number of meaningful possibilities that we describe when exploring a phenomenon of human experience, the greater the depth of our description and understanding of it. From this perspective, the scientific veracity of our experience of human social reality is not in question. The central concern is an honest and faithful description of how we apprehend our experience of that reality and come to reflect on and describe it. The social world is a reality-for-us that we selectively construct from possibilities encountered in everyday interactions with other concrete persons. Knowledge of the experience of face-to-face conflict is thus constituted here in

a thick description of what is possible for participants in these conflicts. It is not only an elaboration of causal relationships and universal facts about conflict as an abstract social scientific concept, but a description of the consistent features of conflicts as experienced and described.

Existential-Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method

As it is located within the qualitative and linguistically oriented traditions of social sciences, hermeneutic phenomenology may be viewed—alongside grounded theory, narrative analysis, ethnography, and case studies—as an approach involving "[investigators'] stories about [participants'] stories" (Bruner, 1986, pg. 10). The focus in this tradition is on describing core meanings that emerge in participant descriptions of life experiences with some phenomenon as it appeared to them. The etymological derivation of phenomenology is from the Greek *phainoemn* (appearance) and *logos* (reason/meaning). Phenomenology is a method that focuses on describing the lived world as it appears to us, the world as it exists as a meaningful given for everyday awareness (Gearing, 2004).

As Hein and Austin (2001) maintain, there is not a single method that can be defined as *phenomenological*; instead the term designates a focus on the structure of meanings articulated in experiential accounts of research participants. As grounded theory seeks to derive an experience-near theory of some phenomenon; narrative analysis, an account of the structure of the stories people tell about their life experiences; ethnography, an account of some cultural practice or belief; or a case study, an in-depth description of a particular event, person or experience; phenomenology focuses on the consistencies of meaning that emerge across diverse situations in which individuals have experienced some phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2005). The focus in phenomenology is on experience, not on the distribution of some effect in a population. Phenomenology thus occupies an interpretive space between the generality of nomothetic experimental methods and the particularity of case studies.

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While two main forms of phenomenology coexist today—eidetic-transcendental phenomenology and existential-hermeneutic phenomenology—the earliest form was described as 'intentional analysis' by its developer, Edmund Husserl (1913/1931), and tends to be more closely associated with the contemporary eidetic-transcendental approach (Hein & Austin, 2001; Wertz, 2005). Its fundamental concept is that of intentionality, which speaks to the fact that all contents of consciousness have some meaning for us; that is, consciousness is always directed toward some thing that is meaningful for the individual (James, 1890/1950; Hein & Austin, 2001). Husserl (1913/1931; 1954/1970) sought to develop a method for doing philosophy that grounded itself in the immediacy of lived experience and to describe the essential structures of the meaning of phenomena as these meanings reveal themselves to human consciousness. This early form of eidetic-transcendental phenomenology focused on the concreteness of the objects of our experience and their correlate meanings in human experience (Van Manen, 1990). It is a method that tends toward abstraction and finds relevance in the structural forms of mathematics more than in the everyday flow of human existence.

In its most general form, as Van den Berg (1955) summarizes, "phenomenology is a science of examples." Its method is fundamentally comparative: a thematic description develops as an investigator compares a variety of examples of some phenomenon to uncover that which is consistent across the examples. These consistencies are understood as central features defining what a phenomenon means for human consciousness situated within a particular social reality. For Husserl (1954/1970), all knowledge must be derived first from our experience of "the things themselves" before we can move to theorizing and other scientific activities concerning them.

Existential-hermeneutic phenomenology differs in a few fundamental ways. In phenomenological philosophy, a distinction is often made between unreflected and reflected consciousness. Unreflected consciousness is our immediate and "simple presence to what [we are] doing" (Van Manen, 1990, pg. 38). Reflected consciousness concerns the rational sense-making activities we engage in concerning our unreflected experience as it becomes an object of consciousness. In seeking out spoken or written

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expressions of unreflected experience, hermeneutic phenomenological research operates at the level of reflected meanings that emerge in descriptions of what is initially unreflected experience (Van Manen, 1990). As Hawthorne (1989) notes, hermeneutic phenomenology may be defined as the study of the processes of coming reflectively to understand the life world of our immediate experience; thus, hermeneutic phenomenology tends to be interpretive in nature.

It is important to emphasize the central role of language and other culturally-inherited understandings in how we make sense of the world of experience. Another individual's experience, as we can come to know it, is mediated by intersubjective understandings (words, concepts, historical events, etc.) that are the basis for any coherent dialogue to take place (Gadamer, 1960). So while linguistic expressions of experience are in some senses *second-order* representations of direct, unreflected experience, they are the only means we have to share another's experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Polkinghorne (1989), Thomas and Pollio (2002), and Halling (2002) all maintain that phenomenology offers three primary benefits to psychology. First, it allows us to understand what an experience is like as it is lived within the context of human lives. For care-providers—clinicians, nurses, social workers, etc.—such knowledge is indispensable for understanding and working with clients. Second, phenomenological findings can help us to understand complex constructs and research findings from the traditional disciplines as these are manifest in human experience. It allows us an alternative way to make sense of often-abstract experimental results and to explore their human meaning. Third, phenomenology affords insight into the particulars of human experience that focus applied researchers and policymakers on the situated nature of real world research problems as they emerge in the everyday life of study participants. As Polkinghorne (2005) states: "Experience has vertical depth, and methods of data gathering, such as short-answer questionnaires with Likert scales that only gather surface information, are inadequate to capture the fullness and richness of experience" (pg. 138). The depth of the

phenomenological method exists as a complement to the breadth of other methods of scientific study.

Thomas and Pollio (2002) have argued for the inclusion of phenomenology as a method in the social sciences on the following grounds. Many quantitative studies, while providing statistically significant results, only explain a small amount of variance in terms of the highly abstracted variables under investigation. Many times an operational definition of a phenomenon comes to substitute in subsequent studies for the phenomenon under investigation, as it is meaningful in human experience. This practice in psychological research can complicate the process of comparing results across studies to the experience to which they originally refer. The whole process of conducting and understanding quantitative research requires a high level of technical sophistication and the complexity of results makes their application to everyday life difficult.

Like any other investigative approach in the social sciences, phenomenology has its shortcomings (Hawthorne, 1989; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). First, investigators must be careful to consider the ways in which their biases and presuppositions influence data collection and interpretation. Second, there is no way to test the accuracy of phenomenological findings except by comparing them to one's own life experiences and to additional experiential accounts. Third, the quality of interpretation is limited by the skills of the reader of the interview texts and to the quality of the present set of data. Fourth, there is no orthodox hermeneutic procedure, so the researcher is often left to adapt methods to his or her own needs when examining and interpreting results. Finally, there are problems with a participant seeking to provide for an investigator what he or she believes the investigator wants to discover.

Phenomenological psychologists have attempted deal with these problems and to develop an approach that may be applied in psychological research with sufficient rigor. Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997), Thomas and Pollio (2002) and Pollio, Graves and Arfken (2005) all describe the general process of applied hermeneutic-phenomenological research as developed at the University of Tennessee:

1. The researcher focuses the particular topic of interest and develops an open-ended question designed not to bias the interview dialogue in any particular way and to focus participants on life experiences.

2. An interviewer who is trained in open-ended interviewing methods interviews the investigator before the actual study begins. This "bracketing interview" elicits the investigator's account of his or her own life experiences with the phenomenon of interest and allows the investigator to respond to his or her own research question. This interview is transcribed, read, and interpreted by an interpretive group. The investigator is made aware of particular biases and assumptions he or she brings to the research situation and how these biases and assumptions may potentially interfere with the open-ended interviewing process.

3. Participants are interviewed in an open-ended dialogical situation where the investigator seeks to gather a variety of rich, descriptive accounts of participants' life experiences with a particular phenomenon. The interviewer seeks not to lead participants to any particular description but to allow it to emerge from the particular life experiences and perspectives of the participants.

4. Interview recordings are transcribed, in whole or part, by the investigator and represent a first interpretive engagement with the dialogue produced in the interviewing situation. Some investigators will clear these texts of extraneous pauses, placeholders, and other paralinguistic communication considered irrelevant to the research question.

5. Transcribed interviews are then read in an interpretive group of 10 to 15 readers and tentative themes proposed to describe the phenomenon. Usually three to four interviews from a particular investigation are read in the group context.

6. The investigator continues to interpret the remaining interviews independently and seeks to develop a thematic structure. This structure and its supporting evidence are then presented to an interpretive group and to study participants. Concerns, disagreements and other problems are discussed and the proposed thematic structure is modified in ways necessary to convey the structure of

meanings defining the phenomenon under investigation. The focus here is on developing agreement between all who are familiar with the interview texts and to develop a description that accounts for thematic possibilities in experiential accounts provided by participants.

7. Once a thematic structure has been developed and sufficient agreement among investigator, interpretive group and participants has been reached, the thematic structure and its supporting evidence are presented to the research community at large.

As Hawthorne (1989) noted, these procedures seek to maintain "fidelity" to the phenomenon of interest while avoiding artificial methodological constraints and to reveal the phenomenon to us in a way that is "plausible and illuminating" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, pg. 11). The focus is on eliciting from diverse accounts of situated experiences a thick, rich description of the meaningful pattern by which the phenomenon reveals itself (Gadamer, 1960; Geertz, 1973). The fidelity Hawthorne speaks about concerns issues of agreement among participants, interpreters, and the investigator as to the fit of the described experience with that of the text and of their own life experiences. The use of an interpretive group assists the investigator in highlighting the biases and assumptions he or she brings to the situation of interviewing and interpretation.

Evaluation of Phenomenological Studies

In the methodological literature, a debate has emerged concerning the evaluative criteria by which to judge the rigor of qualitative research. Oftentimes, qualitative studies are judged by standards developed to assess quantitative research. This approach is fraught with problems as each approach has different motives and results. The traditional means of evaluating quantitative research is in terms of the falsifiability of hypotheses, reliability, validity, and generalizability. Phenomenological research is often criticized because it does not subject a hypothesis to empirical testing and attempts to progress without proposing any theory concerning the phenomenon of interest. From the perspective of phenomenology, hypotheses derive from *a priori* theories and often serve

as biases that need to be put aside—or at least made explicit—as they may affect the radically empirical perspective phenomenology requires.

Reliability in quantitative research refers to the likelihood of getting the same results if an experiment were repeated with a different sample drawn from the same population. In phenomenology, each case is "an additional example" of a phenomenon and thus is incorporated into a developing thematic description. Therefore, the more relevant concept for phenomenology is that of saturation. Saturation refers to the point at which additional and diverse cases are assessed and are found to add no new insight to the thematic description of a phenomenon.

Validity commonly refers to a correspondence between experimental findings and the patterns one observes in the world (Maxwell & Delaney, 2000). Phenomenological research stays as close to the phenomenon of interest as possible: participants' accounts of their own life experiences. The issue, then, for phenomenology is to provide evidence for the thematic structure and to stay as close as possible to phenomena as they reveal themselves in everyday human experience.

The final issue of generalizability concerns the distribution of some phenomenon in a population. The intent in quantitative approaches is to develop law-like understandings of the social world. As Thomas and Pollio (2002) have pointed out phenomenological descriptions of experience function much like case generalizations in law, ethics, or medicine and thus are tentative statements; "deciding the applicability of findings is ultimately in the hands of the reader" (pg. 42).

Morrow (2005) and Josselson (2004) have argued for alternative criteria with which to evaluate phenomenological, and more generally qualitative, research. They feel that to evaluate qualitative research on the basis of extrinsic criteria—that is, criteria drawn from a quantitative perspective—is methodologically flawed. The respective approaches involved—qualitative and quantitative—utilize different epistemological and ontological assumptions and thus require different criteria of evaluation. Morrow (2005) proposes the following criteria for qualitative studies:

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1. *Disclosure*: Does the author disclose his or her own personal biases, values, as well as methodological assumptions that could potentially bias the research and thus take the position of owning his or her perspective?
2. *Situated Description*: Is the group of participants adequately described and situated in terms of a brief autobiographical statement and the particular events they chose to discuss?
3. *Examples*: Are the findings grounded in examples that come directly from accounts provided by participants?
4. *Credibility*: Was the credibility of the research checked by presentation to an interpretive group or by returning to participants for evaluation of tentative findings?
5. *Coherence*: Are relationships among themes and categories coherent? Does the description of the phenomenon make sense to the reader(s)?
6. *Fairness*: Was the investigator fair in providing evidence from across the experiential accounts of participants, rather than focusing on a few accounts for evidence?
7. *Dependability*: Are the results dependable; i.e., was a systematic process described and followed during the investigative process?
8. *Triangulation and Saturation*: Are the results triangulated; was the analysis based on a sufficiently large number and diverse set of experiences to indicate that the thematic possibilities are saturated?

The above listed criteria are not merely *parallel criteria of evaluation* but offer a clear means of evaluating phenomenological (and other qualitative) research studies.

Methods Used in this Investigation

The particular focus of this investigation is to develop a thematic description of the meanings that emerge in participant accounts of their life experiences of face-to-face, or interpersonal, conflict. Since the focus is on describing experience as interpreted from

dialogue-based accounts of experience, the appropriate method is that of hermeneutic phenomenology. To implement this approach the following steps were used.

Question/Directive Statement Development

According to investigative procedures described by Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997), Thomas and Pollio (2002) and Pollio, Graves, & Arfken (2005) and discussed above, the first step in a phenomenological study is to develop an interviewing question relevant to the experience under investigation. The interviewing procedure used in this study is open-ended and begins with a single question (or directive statement) that meets the following criteria:

1. *Clarity and Specificity*: The question uses clear, everyday language to specify a particular personal experience and to focus participants on providing an account of their own life experience.
2. *Parsimony*: The question contains no extraneous information that could bias how a participant responds.
3. *Openness to Dialogue*: The question allows for an open dialogue between the participant and investigator, with the participant in the *expert position* of determining the topics and meanings to be discussed.

The particular statement that began these interviews was: "Please describe a situation (or situations) in which you experienced a conflict between yourself and another person." This question was discussed with various members of the University of Tennessee Center for Applied Phenomenological Research and was deemed to fit the criteria of clarity and specificity, parsimony and openness to dialogue. Technical terms, such as 'face-to-face,' were excluded as these had the potential of biasing accounts to specific one-time conflicts and of excluding on-going relational conflicts that consist of multiple face-to-face episodes. The term 'interpersonal' conflict was excluded because of the potential for mistaking this technical term for that of '*intra*personal' conflict.

Very few participants asked what the investigator meant by the word 'conflict;' many did ask if it was okay to discuss conflicts that involved more individuals than

themselves and another person. This question was asked at the beginning of almost all interviews, and participants all provided accounts that involved additional real or imagined persons beyond the immediate dyad. It would seem that face-to-face conflict tends to emerge within a network of situated relationships.

The Bracketing Interview and Dialogical Interviewing

The next stage in this type of study is to make explicit the presuppositions and biases the investigator brings to the research situation. This is accomplished on the basis of a bracketing interview in which the investigator is asked to discuss his or her own life experiences with the phenomenon of interest. Bracketing and open-ended interviewing are perhaps the defining features of data collection in a hermeneutic phenomenological study.

For the approach being used here, I participated in a bracketing interview concerning my own life experiences of conflict. A colleague trained in this particular interviewing technique conducted this interview, which took place at my apartment. Likely due to the preexisting friendship between the interviewer and myself, I was very disclosing in this interview and he was also able to elicit for the record any background information necessary to make sense of the events I discussed.

Theoretically, bracketing takes place in two parts: (1) a suspension of the natural scientific attitude toward the phenomenon of interest together with a refocusing on the immediacy of life experiences, and (2) an engagement in free imaginative variation to explore all the possible situations in which the phenomenon has been experienced (Wertz, 2005). The experiences recounted concerned various conflicts that had taken place during a five-year romantic relationship the investigator had in his early to mid-twenties and the specific conflicts that ended the relationship. Also discussed were conflicts between the investigator and various members of his family. A sample paragraph of this interview follows. 'I' is the interviewer and 'P' is the participant. The narrative picks up after the respondent has discussed issues of personal boundaries and

the invasiveness of a person toward whom he felt a great deal of anger. The respondent has used the metaphor of a line to connote this boundary.

> I: *he really crossed a line with you.*
>
> P: he had, yeah, for sure he had crossed a line with me.
>
> I: *you couldn't count on him to even know what that line is*
>
> P: yeah, because I don't think the dude had a boundary; he had obviously broken any sort of boundary that he should have had with her, and she was in a vulnerable kind of state emotionally because of all this shit going on with her daughter and with her ex-husband and all of this kind of thing, and so he basically took advantage of that and just created more chaos for everybody in some sort of self gratifying ego kind of thing, which that just really made me angry with him
>
> I: *you wanted him to understand your importance* [R: yeah] *by being there*
>
> P: I wanted him to acknowledge my importance by getting the fuck out *[I: right]* is what I wanted
>
> I: *and you also wanted her to* [R: to acknowledge my importance by getting him the fuck out] *right.*
>
> P: yeah *[I: right]* yeah *[I: right].*

By engaging in this interview before conducting the subsequent interviews that compose the corpus of this investigation, I realized the potential emotional intensity that could be elicited by recalling conflictual events and the potential significance these events have for the participant. The bracketing interview made me more sensitive to my participants' perspectives and the feelings they may be having while being interviewed. As a result, I tried to adopt a nonjudgmental attitude of personal and professional openness to what participants talked about in their own interviews and to allow them an open forum in which to express themselves in any way they felt necessary to communicate the personal meaning of conflict experiences.

In the sense described above, the investigator's personal experiences with conflict, combined with the bracketing interview, did enter into the dialogue with study participants. At times, participants would seek reassurance and the investigator would on rare occasion disclose a personal fact to reassure the participant. Often this was done

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after an interview was completed; in a couple instances, the investigator went off record to respond to a question posed by participants. It was made clear, however, that the purpose of the interview was to elicit the participant's experience apart from whatever the investigator may think or feel.

As Wertz (2005) has noted, bracketing is a matter of "abstaining from incorporating natural scientific theories, explanations, hypotheses, and conceptualizations of the subject matter into the research process" (pg. 168). Bracketing procedures do not ask us to put aside empathy, concern, and a desire for open and genuine dialogue with our research participants—the ultimate sign of respect and empathy is to be as open as possible to the personal experiences and meanings participants bring to the situation of dialogue. Once participants understood that I was interested in obtaining a detailed account of their own life experiences of conflict, occasional procedural "mistakes" tended to be self-correcting, with the participant either affirming or negating my summary or interpretation. The following is an example from the interview with A^2 who discussed various recurring conflicts within her first marriage of 22 years:

> *I: Do you feel okay talking about this?*
>
> P: Yeah, this is pretty much now an old story, he's completely finished and I feel nothing for him, so nothing is going to
>
> *I: So **it doesn't upset you** to talk about it?*
>
> P: No, because I lived it and lived with it for 22 years *[I: yeah]* and so basically the last 8 years I was living with him only because of the children, but with him there is absolutely nothing, so when I talk about it, nothing happens, it's like …

The open-ended interviewing process itself is in many ways self-correcting of the biases and assumptions the investigator may have allowed to slip into the dialogue. In the above example, the investigator overstepped the boundaries of phenomenological interviewing to suggest that the respondent might feel upset about the events described; the respondent corrected that assumption.

The basic principle of open-ended or dialogical interviewing is to follow as closely as possible the account being provided by research participants and to facilitate

them in providing a thick, rich, in-depth account of their experience (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1994). The typical approach is to ask an opening question that allows the maximal variability in possible responses concerning the situations in which a participant has experienced a particular phenomenon and then to ask follow-up questions to focus the participant on the experience being discussed and on the particular meanings that emerge in that concrete experience (Wertz, 2005). Occasionally a participant will move to talking about experience on more abstract levels. These reflections are also important as they capture social and cultural beliefs and practices (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1994); the primary emphasis of a phenomenological interview, however, is always on participants' accounts of concrete experiences (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

One way to help focus participants on the experiential level is to ask questions such as "what happened next?" or to repeat a salient word or words from the last few sentences the participant has spoken. One should carefully use language that the participant has first used in the interview and not introduce extraneous terms and concepts into the dialogue. One way to accomplish this is to put oneself in the position of needing the permission of the participant to discuss a concept, word, idea, or statement. Once the participant mentions some word or idea, permission is granted to follow-up on what he or she has said. This interviewing heuristic is particularly useful when a participant seems to have reached a conclusion in his or her dialogue as we see below when the participant Jo asks me, "…does that answer your question?" the investigator picks up on an earlier discussion in which Jo had talked about being accused of being manipulative while in a situation that she feels was contrived to entrap her for an attack by three individuals (an ex-boyfriend, a best friend, and the ex-boyfriend's current girlfriend):

> P: I never wanted to like take affection away from her or anything, I was just, you know just hanging out with this guy I hadn't seen in like forever, and she was all like insane about it, and I don't know, but yes, does that answer your question?

> I: what about in terms of them seeing you as manipulative?

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P: It feels like the pot calling the kettle black, like because they, like [my ex-boyfriend] especially, [my ex-boyfriend's current girlfriend] is pretty manipulative in that she tells people what she wants them to know, and [my ex-boyfriend] is manipulative in that he is pretty good at figuring people out really fast, and then [my best friend] is manipulative in that she can set up situations that she wants and so like the three of them together and then me sitting there and they're calling me manipulative, and I'm just like "okay" that's fine, I'm glad that you think that I have this power and stuff, but I don't feel like I do and I don't feel like I've used it for sadistic means like they are, um, but, it's not like an honoring, it's like an accusation *[I: yeah]* whereas they themselves are the thing that they are accusing me of being, like currently, like as they are saying it, it is just irony

I: but you didn't point out the irony? [Jo had earlier mentioned that she had very little to say during the conflict and let her accusers do the talking].

P: no, I, uh uh, no because they were really excited about what they had to say and I was not so excited about what I had to say and so I just let them talk.

As I used a dialogical interviewing method, my personal experiences with conflict are potentially significant to the outcome of this investigation. For this reason, I needed to be careful not to introduce my own biases and assumptions into the dialogue; however, I also needed to remain as open and present to the dialogue as possible and to the accounts being provided. Open dialogue in a non-therapeutic relationship is a transactional exchange, particularly if it concerns emotionally significant experiences and this required some disclosure and empathic concern from me.

As Hein and Austin (2001) point out, there is no completely bracketed investigator; bracketing is an ongoing and imperfect process. The best an investigator can do is to disclose events in the research process that could be considered potential breaches of protocol. It is necessary to bring one's own experiences to bear when seeking to understand another's experience; one needs to remain persistently aware of this fact and one's own "effective history" (meanings and biases that derive from past experiences) when conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research (Gadamer, 1960). Bringing an investigator to an awareness of his or her own biases and prejudgments is the primary purpose of bracketing procedures in hermeneutic phenomenology. Rather than putting these biases and prejudgments completely out of consideration (as Husserl, 1954/1970, initially advocated), they may be used to make sense of how one is coming to

an understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Hawthorne, 1989). The purpose of a dialogical interview is to create, together with a participant, an account of human experience that is 'complex in structure, extensive in scope, and/or subtle in features' and that includes information that otherwise would not be disclosed in a written account (Wertz, 2005).

Selection of Participants

Within the context this investigation, the intent is not to make a generalized statement concerning the distribution of some phenomenon in a population. Rather, the phenomenological researcher selects a variety of accounts of situations in which individuals have experienced the relevant phenomenon. The point to this approach is to maximize the variety and variability of the accounts and then to seek patterns in that variability. As Polkinghorne (2005) notes, selection is often a matter of deciding what exemplars of a phenomenon contribute furthering our understanding, i.e., phenomenological investigators seek 'information-rich cases':

> Selection of sources of qualitative data is analogous to the selection of sentences in a study of grammar. If the question is about the essential aspects or properties of a sentence, one initially selects a variety of sentences (pg. 140).

In seeking out a variety of exemplars, selection continues until the investigator feels that additional cases do not seem to contribute additional insight into the meaning of a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

With these objectives in mind, Thomas and Pollio (2002) enumerate the following criteria for selecting participants for a phenomenological study:

1. The participant must have had the experience.
2. The participant must be willing and able to describe the experience.
3. The confidentiality of the participant must be protected.

In open-ended interviewing studies within the phenomenological tradition, the typical practice is to interview 8-12 participants to achieve sufficient variability in the experiential accounts provided. Sometimes investigations include as few as 3

participants or as many as 20 (cf. Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1994). If an investigator is using written accounts rather than open-ended, depth interviews, the number of participants can be as high as 100. It is important to remember that the point behind participant selection is to maximize variation in experiential accounts and to reach thematic saturation; not to generalize from a sample to a population. Thus, the number of participants in phenomenological studies tends to be smaller than in many quantitative/experimental studies.

Description of Participants

Eleven individuals participated in this investigation. Participants tended to come from middle-class backgrounds, to be female and of sufficiently diverse sexual orientations, ethnic identifications, political beliefs, etc., to provide a variety of accounts of face-to-face conflict. Before each interview, participants read a disclosure and participant's rights statement concerning the research project and were asked a few demographic questions; they also were asked to pick a pseudonym for themselves. The following is a brief biographical description of each of the participants:

1. A^2 is a female aged 41-45 who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in chemistry from a large university in India. She is currently an employee of the University, but was introduced to the investigator by a family member. She has had a first marriage, which lasted 22 years, and is recently divorced. She was interviewed at her home.

2. Aqua Lad is a male aged 22-25 who graduated from college with an interdisciplinary Bachelor's degree. He is a political activist for gay rights, nuclear non-proliferation and death penalty cases, and is currently residing in a large city in California. He openly identifies as a gay man and gives public presentations about political activism/political issues at universities and in other settings. He grew up in a medium-sized city in the Southeastern United States. He has never been married. He was interviewed at his home.

3. Christen is a female aged 18-21. She is currently a student at the University and has declared a psychology major. She grew up in a small city on the periphery of a mid-sized city in the Southeastern United States. She was recruited from a psychology class at the University and given extra credit for participation. She has never been married. She was interviewed at the Center for Applied Phenomenological Research.

4. Holly is a female aged 18-21. She is currently an undergraduate student and is considering architecture/interior design as a major. Her previous educational experience was at a small private school in the Southeastern United States. She has an avocational interest in acting/drama. She was recruited from a psychology class and was given extra credit for participating. She has never been married. She was interviewed at the University Center at the University.

5. Jeff is a male aged 18-21. He is currently an undergraduate student at the University and is undecided on a major. His earliest education was in small private schools; his high school education was in a large public school environment in a mid-sized city in the Southeastern United States. He has an avocational interest in popular culture, politics and philosophy. He was recruited from a psychology class at the University and was given extra credit for participation. He has never been married. He was interviewed at the Center for Applied Phenomenological Research.

6. Jo is a female aged 18-21 who was recruited through a colleague of the investigator. She attended high school in the Southeastern United States and is currently a student at the University. She has an avocational interest in religious philosophy and spirituality and is considering psychology as a major. She has never been married. She was interviewed at the Center for Applied Phenomenological Research.

7. Ma'a is a female aged 26-30. She is currently a student at the University, majoring in social work. She self-identifies as a lesbian and has had one long-term (5+ year) relationship, which recently broke up. She has avocational

interests in spirituality and mysticism. Her cultural background is Polynesian-American and she grew up in a large midwestern city in the United States. She has never been married. She was interviewed at a local park.

8. Malachi Murmur is a male aged 26-30. He is a graduate student in the social sciences. He grew up in a small city on the periphery of a mid-sized Southeastern city and was educated in public schools. He has never been married. He was interviewed at his home.

9. Missy is a female aged 18-21. She is currently a student at the University and has declared a psychology major and is planning to enter the counseling profession to work with children. She grew up and attended school in a mid-sized Southeastern city. She was recruited from psychology class at the University and was given extra credit for participation. She has never been married. She was interviewed at the Center for Applied Phenomenological Research.

10. Orlando is a female aged 26-30. She is currently a graduate student in business and was initially introduced to the investigator through a colleague. She is a native of a large city in Portugal and plans to return home after completing her graduate education. She has never been married. She was interviewed in a private area of a local restaurant.

11. Sanford is a male aged 26-30 who is currently pursuing a degree in psychology and criminal justice. He is interested in a career in law enforcement and plans to return home—a large city in the Midwestern United States—upon graduation. He has never been married. He was interviewed at the Center for Applied Phenomenological Research.

Each description is intended to give a context for the accounts provided by the participants in the next chapter. Each participant has experienced face-to-face conflict within the unique circumstances of his or her life as well as within the cultural context of the contemporary United States, except for two: Orlando and A^2. Orlando recounted conflicts that occurred with family members and other individuals in her hometown in Portugal and A^2 recounted conflicts that occurred within the context of a marriage that

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took place in India. At the time of the interview, both participants had been in the United States for an extended period and both interviews were conducted in English, even though the participants' native languages are Portuguese and Hindi, respectively. Occasional Britishisms were present in their speech, reflecting early training in British English, although these phrases and words did not lead to interpretive problems. Demographic information for the participants is summarized in Table 3.1 on the following page.

Initial Interpretive Procedures: Data Handling & Transcription

Open-ended interviews lasting from 30 minutes to 3.5 hours were conducted in a variety of settings conducive to the dialogical approach used in this investigation, i.e., private, comfortable environments. The average interview length was 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded using a SONY digital recorder (ICD SX-25), which comes with a proprietary transcription software. Recorded interviews were downloaded to the investigator's password protected laptop computer and were backed up on a password protected USB memory stick and an external hard drive. The interviewer's bracketing interview and three other interviews were transcribed at different points in the research process to be read by the Interpretive Group at the Center for Applied Phenomenological Research at the University of Tennessee. During transcription, unnecessary placeholders and non-significant pauses were deleted from the transcripts. The transcribed dialogue was punctuated with ellipses to indicate pauses. Breaks in the transcribed text were made at points at which a change in speaker occurred.

Interviews that were not read by the Interpretive Group were interpreted by the investigator in light of the contributions and conclusions of group readers. These interviews were notated and analyzed in a different way than transcripts prepared for group reading. To prepare these data for thematizing, each interview was listened to multiple times (3 to 4 times on average) by the investigator to refamiliarize him with the interview. Using SONY software, sound files were divided according to meaningful segments of dialogue. Careful notes were taken concerning the content of these

Table 3.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic Characteristics		Number of Participants (N = 11)
Gender		
	Male	4
	Female	7
Age		
	18-21	4
	22-25	1
	26-30	5
	31-35	0
	36-40	0
	41-45	1
Education		
	Post-Graduate	3
	College Completed	1
	Some College	7
Occupation/ Occupational Interest		
	Higher Education, Administrative	1
	Architecture / Interior Design	1
	Counseling / Social Work	2
	Law Enforcement	1
	Organizational Consulting	1
	Political Activism	1
	Psychology-Related Career	3
	Undecided	1

segments; these consist of a brief notation indicating the time signature of a particular piece of dialogue and a summary of content and any thematic notes the investigator felt should be included. These procedures were used to prepare auditory files for transcription and interpretation. Each interview required approximately 6 to 8 hours from the initial interview to preparation of the sound file for interpretation and transcription. The following is an excerpt from the investigator's data notes taken on his interview with Ma'a:

Time marker, note on dialogue content (note on impressions)

5:37, inner conflict ends in interpersonal conflict (internal/external)
5:57, starting a new relationship (situation/threatening)
6:29, hard to put self out there (vulnerability/self)
6:39, scary to put self out there (scary/vulnerability)
6:50, protecting myself from what? (self-protection/threat)
6:57, wounds heal (play down threat)
7:11, not like turmoil for the rest of my life (play down threat)
7:43, pattern; I put myself out there, then run (pattern/frustration with self)

Using data notes and the SONY software, I was able at any time to return to any point in the recorded dialogue to assess surrounding dialogue for contextual meaning and to transcribe relevant portions of text for final interpretation. This procedure kept me as close to the original recorded dialogue as possible without losing context, voice inflection, pauses, and other paralinguistic communication in the initial assessment and interpretation of the interview dialogue. This procedure has only recently become possible due to technological developments in digital recording and transcription software.

An advantage to this procedure is that it saves time; as initial interpretation is ongoingly taking place during the development of data notes. Furthermore, it keeps the investigator closer to the original situation of dialogue as initially recorded. This is a combination of data preparation procedures utilized in Dapkus (1985), who extensively focused on thematization of auditory recordings in her interpretative process, and Hawthorne's (1989) procedure of data clearing, which consists of removing from a

transcribed text any information unrelated to the theme being articulated within the text. This approach is also similar to that used in the coding procedures of many grounded theory investigations (Creswell, 1998).

The Theoretical Basis for the Interpretive Process

Within any hermeneutic phenomenological study, how conclusions were derived is of significance in checking the credibility and coherence of the results. Two types of procedures were used; first, interpretive groups at the University of Tennessee Center for Applied Phenomenological Research and at the Nursing College assisted in group-interpretation of transcribed interview texts. Second, the investigator interpreted interview dialogues with systematic analysis of auditory recordings. While hermeneutic procedures have typically had as their central problem the interpretation of literary texts, the social sciences have extended the notion of *text* to include audio and/or visual recordings, field notes, transcripts, etc., as well as traditional literature. The process of coming to an understanding is similar across different forms of media. Perhaps the most central fact in any act of interpretation is the ongoing interaction between oneself and the text one is seeking to understanding.

When one begins to read, one understands only a fragment of a text and so one's immediate understanding is rooted in large part in one's preexisting understandings (Gadamer, 1960). As reading and interpreting progress, however, the text becomes a greater and greater force in the dialogue—as one comes to understand the part(s) in terms of an emerging whole—and this movement between part and whole results in an understanding at the point where the possibilities for meaning in a text meet with the possibilities for understanding on the part of the interpreter. The process of interpretation is circular: a constant movement between understanding a part of a text and understanding its meaning within the emerging whole of the text (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1994). There is not a single best way to understand a text; instead, there are possibilities for meaning that resonate differently with readers at different points in their own lives and across different historical periods. When a text is read and discussed by an

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interpretive group intersubjective agreement among the readers emerges concerning a viable understanding of the text.

What does it mean to understand a text? Two major hermeneutic theorists in the 20th-century, Gadamer (1960) and Derrida (1967), posed different, yet at times similar, answers to this question. The work most commonly associated with Gadamer is *Truth and Method* (1960) and with Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967). Each of the works presents the author's central statement of his theory of interpretation. The fundamental question these authors address is how does an interpreter come to an understanding of a text, conversation, artwork, etc., and what does he or she do when he or she does not understand. The question is an old one, first found in problems of coming to understand and render interpretations of Biblical texts or legal texts written centuries, if not millennia, before their interpreter's reading.

Thomas and Pollio (2002) describe the process of coming to an understanding of a text by first making a distinction between acts of interpretation and acts of inference. Interpretation, they note, is a process of going between one's own life experiences and those recounted in the text. The etymological roots of 'inter' (between) and 'pruet' (to go) highlight this meaning: 'to go between.' On the other hand, the root of 'in' (in) and 'fere' (to carry or bring) indicate that inference requires us to introduce a theory, hypothesis, or some other external sense-making heuristic to our acts of understanding. It is a similar distinction to that made first by the philosopher Ricoeur (1970) and recounted by Josselson (2004) between a hermeneutic approach that seeks to restore to a text its immediate meaning and a hermeneutic approach of demystification that seeks out a secret or hidden meaning in a text. A deconstructive or psychoanalytic approach—such as that articulated by Derrida or Freud—is one of demystification. The interpretive approach advocated by Gadamer (1960)—of great relevance here—is a hermeneutics of restoration; that is, it is a problem of bringing meaning to the manifest content of a text and describing the structure of that presently revealed meaning (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Gadamer (1960) is of primary importance in 20th century philosophy of science for presenting a reasonable challenge to the idea that knowledge of *Truth* could be

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brought about through an exacting application of scientific *method*. He argued that even scientific understanding requires interpretation; thus, we find ourselves always already a part of the equation of understanding, no matter how rigorously objective and method-driven we try to be. The fundamental assumptions grounding Gadamer's analysis are as follows (cf. Gadamer, 1960; Moran, 2000):

1. We encounter and live a world in and through language. By this, he means that the language we speak and its cultural history give us a perspective, or a "horizon," that limits (and structures) what (and how) we can understand.

2. Some perspective is necessary for any act of understanding.

3. Meaning is present when two or more perspectives come together in a transaction or dialogue; that is, when horizons meet.

4. Truth emerges as a cumulative meaning within any dialogical event. In other words, truth is a result of accumulating possibilities for understanding.

5. Truth requires finitude: when something can no longer be encountered in dialogue, it no longer exists for us as a relevant locus of understanding.

Gadamer argued that no text or event has a *for-all-time* (true) meaning that is knowable by a human being. Understanding for him relies on biases, presuppositions and prejudgments. Thus, Gadamer took issue with Husserl's (1954/1970) strict bracketing procedure, as this procedure asks an interpreter to put aside one's perspective to assume a transcendental perspective—a perspective Gadamer believes to be impossible. We always and already have a situated worldview that comes out of our cultural history and life experiences. He called this our "historically-effected consciousness" and saw it as an essential aspect to any act of understanding and knowing. While not always immediately present to awareness, Western consciousness derives from particular languages as well as historical, religious and philosophical beliefs. All of these and many more aspects and events of the social and historical worlds serve as the ground or context within which we make sense of what we encounter in our lives. The point for Gadamer was to be as aware and as disclosing of these historical contexts as possible when engaged in interpreting.

Interpretive Procedures Used in this Investigation

The corpus of data interpreted consist of two forms. The first form is a transcribed interview text and the second, annotated notes written to accompany partitioned digital interview recordings. For reasons of confidentiality, transcribed interviews were the form of data interpreted by the Interpretive Group at the Center for Applied Phenomenological Research and in the Nursing College at the University of Tennessee. These groups were made up of approximately 10 to 15 University faculty, graduate students and other members of the professional community. All readers were asked to sign a confidentiality statement for each of the transcripts read by the group.

During group readings, one member is assigned to read aloud the part of the investigator and another, the part of the participant. Transcripts are read line by line and the reading is stopped at various times by group members who wished to comment on a particular portion of the text, propose a theme, etc. This process of reading aloud and stopping to discuss at various points divides a text into units that are meaningful for the group. Each of these units is thematized in the process and as reading progresses themes that come up repeatedly are noted and discussed.

The primary advantage to group interpretation is that it involves a diversity of perspectives and styles of reading from the group members. It is one aspect of the phenomenological method that ensures the rigor of the investigative process. In group reading, a section of text may elicit three or four different interpretations, but often there is a great deal of commonality among interpretations. This commonality indicates the presence of a theme or a particular pattern in the text that readers have noticed. At times when there is little agreement, group discussion will ensue, or agreement will be reached to hold the possible interpretations in abeyance until further evidence can be brought to bear as the reading continues. The group functions in a democratic fashion with a leader who facilitates discussion and who moves the group along if they become mired in discussing a topic not directly relevant to the topic or text at hand. A single rule obtains for interpretations posed to the group: the interpreter must show where in the text he or she is deriving an interpretation. This rule serves to keep interpretive group members

focused on the text and on evaluating the evidence—usually a section of text—for the theme or meaningful pattern being proposed. When reading as a group, readers recognize each other's presuppositions and prejudgments when these interact with evidence-based interpretation.

Within the context of group readings, a few interesting phenomena were noted by the investigator and the group. First, the group tended to view participant stories in an initially unfavorable light—as if participants were narrating accounts in such a way as to make themselves out to be the "good guy" and the other, those with whom they were in conflict, the "bad guys." As reading progressed, the group tended to side more and more with the participants' accounts and to view the participant in a more favorable light. While it is presently unclear what this type of interpretive reaction may indicate about how interpreters go about understanding accounts of conflict, it was a notable phenomenon. Second, one of the accounts concerned an event that had been in the local news a number of years back and with which some of the group members were familiar. The sections of the interview with this participant that were recognizable as related to this event and that might potentially identify the participant were excluded from analysis in order to protect the confidentiality of all persons involved. As Josselson (2004) warns: the ethics of disclosure of the evidence on which conclusions are based in a qualitative study does not supersede a participant's right to privacy, especially in small communities in which the participant may be identified and suffer negative consequences.

After my bracketing interview was read in the interpretive group, three other transcripts were read and annotated by group members. The remaining interviews were interpreted by the investigator. After all interviews had been interpreted individually, the investigator compared preliminary themes across interviews to assess consistent meanings that emerged in participant accounts. Once a consistent set of thematic patterns had been derived from interview transcripts, investigator notes, and digital recordings of the interviews, exemplary segments of text were chosen to provide examples of each theme. This thematic structure and its supporting evidence were presented to an interpretive group meeting in the Nursing College—who were not present for the initial

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readings at the Center for Applied Phenomenological Research. The proposed thematic structure and its supporting evidence were discussed and various proposals and suggestions made as to which quotations best support themes and what to name the themes.

After the investigator took into account the input of the interpretive group, the proposed thematic structure and evidence were then presented to participants in the study to elicit their input. The four participants the researcher was able to solicit to discuss the thematic structure provided supportive commentary and helpful suggestions. These suggestions were taken into account in naming and modifying the investigator's initial thematic descriptions.

Thematic Analysis

One central feature of phenomenological research is that the results are organized and presented with respect to a structure of interrelated themes derived from research interviews. Van Manen (1990) describes themes in terms of an interpreter's experience "of focus, of meaning, of point" within the unfolding narrative of the participants' accounts (pg. 87). Themes serve as a form of simplifying the complexities of the text, connecting together events in meaningful ways for human consciousness; they are "like knots in the webs of our experience" (Van Manen, 1990, pg. 90). A theme allows the investigator to convey what is essential to make an experience what it is for the experiencer, and the particular structure of themes present in an experience is what distinguishes that experience from other types of experiences. In other words, themes are consistent elements of a narrative that emerge from variation present in the ways in which a participant describes some experience of a phenomenon; they are 'structural invariants' (Ihde, 1983). For instance, one participant may experience face-to-face conflict with drivers on a mall road and another with an ex-husband during a divorce; what both accounts have in common (that which is invariant across accounts) is a thematic structure that gives meaningful definition to the human experience of face-to-face conflict. As Thomas and Pollio (2002) put it: themes are "experiential patterns exhibited in diverse

situations" (pg. 37). Themes emerge from three sources: the participants' meanings, the investigator's meanings, and the intersubjective meanings shared by participants, the investigator, and the various interpreters of the experiential accounts (Hein & Austin, 2001).

While the actual process of reading and interpreting always has some element of ambiguity, Wertz (2005), Hein and Austin (2001), and Hawthorne (1989) all sought to provide a general description of what is involved in deriving a thematic structure from experiential narratives. The following enumerates a combination of their approaches:

1. *Immersion*: Read entire transcript or listen to entire interview multiple times to gain a sense of the whole.

2. *Situated Structural Description*: Demarcate shifts in meaning within the text.

3. *Situated Reflection*: Reflect on each unit of meaning to derive insights from its original context.

4. *General Structural Description:* Shift focus to reading across texts for what they have in common.

5. *General Thematic Description:* Synthesize and distill the general description using the words of participants to convey the essential meaning that defines each theme.

6. *Thematic Interconnections:* Look at interconnections among themes and describe salient relationships.

7. *Analysis of the Ground:* Interpret the various accounts for what is implied as an essential condition for the experiences recounted to have taken place. This meaning serves as the context that makes possible the experience of some phenomenon. Often, the ground reflect deeper cultural meanings "conveyed through the language of participants" (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1994, pg. 432).

8. *Checking Structure Against Original Interview Recordings:* Once the description has been developed, the themes and their supporting evidence is checked against the original interview record.

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Evaluating the Evidence

Perhaps the most fundamental requirement of hermeneutic phenomenology is that each theme is evidenced by the words of participants themselves. This is accomplished when the investigator provides quoted text in which the theme being discussed is present and which provides illustration and nuance to the meaning of the theme. This returns the reader to the source texts from which all conclusions are derived and reasserts the primacy of description: "A good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollected by lived experience—is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, pg. 27). The point of providing direct quotation is to allow the reader an opportunity to form "insights that bring [him or her] in more direct contact with the world" as it was lived and then retrospectively described by participants (Van Manen, 1990, pg. 9). Polkinghorne (2005) reminds us that the textual data we provide as evidence in a hermeneutic phenomenological study are a second-order representation of lived experience, not the experience itself. It is indirect evidence. It is a description based on a set of particular events as lived within the contexts of particular lives as these are recounted and given linguistic form in dialogue with the investigator (Mantzoukas, 2004).

CHAPTER IV

HERMENEUTIC ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENTIAL ACCOUNTS

The two sections of the present chapter distill the accounts of life experiences of face-to-face conflict into a general structure of themes. In the first section, the situations in which participants became aware of face-to-face conflict are described. The reader is referred to a first-stage situational and thematic analyses for each interviewee given in Appendices A and B. These appendices describe the preliminary themes derived from each participant's account and provide supporting evidence in the idiomatic language of the participant. Included in Appendix C is a sample interview with participant A^2. These appendices have been included to present the nuance and detail of face-to-face conflict as described by each participant. They are intended to convey the diversity of participant accounts, each participant's unique voice, and the themes noted in each interview.

The second major section of this chapter represents a further analysis of themes and provides a general description of the meaning of face-to-face conflict experiences. It is hoped that this approach to presenting results will clarify precisely what decisions were made in interpreting interview dialogues and what was involved in the part-to-whole interpretive process leading to the final thematic description. The data also make available enough information to allow the reader to explore alternate interpretations and descriptions of face-to-face conflict.

Situations of Face-to-Face Conflict

Appendix A provides a summary of the conflict situations discussed by each participant. This appendix also includes a brief demographic description of the participant and the person(s) involved in the conflict. Please note that in the appendix the persons listed as involved in the conflict(s) are not necessarily primary disputants. The primary disputant(s) is specified under the 'Situations Discussed' in Appendix A and is summarized in Table 4.1 on the following page.

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Table 4.1: Frequency of Primary Disputants in Participant Accounts*

Primary Disputant	Frequency
Spouses / Love-Interests	11
(Best) Friends	10
(Step) Parents	10
Acquaintances (work, school, etc.)	6
Strangers	6
Family of Primary Disputant	3
Friends of Primary Disputant	3
Authority Figures (Non-Familial)	2
Cultural Figures	1
Roommates	1

*Multiparty conflicts were prevalent in the corpus; therefore, the number of primary disputants is greater than the number of situations of conflict summarized in Table 4.2.

The most frequent primary disputants were also the most intimate relationships described by participants: spouses and love-interests, friends and best friends, as well as parents and step-parents. Acquaintances and strangers—i.e., less intimate relational partners—follow. The remaining disputants vary in level of intimacy with participants; interpersonal distance, however, does seem relevant to participant accounts of face-to-face conflict.

Table 4.2 portrays general categories of situations for the experience of face-to-face conflict. These situations are listed by frequency and are a summary of the more specific situations described in Appendix A. The most frequently cited situation concerned having one's self put at risk by another. In this type of situation, participants situations concerned financial, interpersonal as well as health and safety issues. They

Table 4.2: Categories of Primary Situations of Face-to-Face Conflict

Type of Situation	Example	Frequency of Events
Being Put at Risk without Consent	Friend not disclosing driving under the influence (Missy)	9
Differences of Opinion or Belief	Disagreements with audience during lecture over personal political views (Aqua Lad)	7
Family Politics	Conflicts with father's wife, with father as intermediary (Orlando)	7
Love or Dating Problems	Troubles deciding whether to commit to relationship (Ma'a)	7
Physical or Emotional Violence	Fist-fights with high school bully (Jeff)	3
Power or Authority Disputes	Actors not acknowledging participant's expectations in role of director (Holly)	3
Unfair Blame	High school friend blaming participant for friend's father's job loss (Christin)	3
Breaking Promises	Husband disclosing confidential information to participant's boss (A^2)	2
Overreactions to Harmless Actions	Roommate angry about participant missing a class (Christin)	2
Interpersonal Distance in Friendship	Friends pulling away after high school (Missy)	1
Joking Gets Out of Hand	Practical joke results in violence (Jeff)	1
Other takes credit for one's own work	Organizing philanthropic activity; colleague takes credit for work (Holly)	1

also report not being given a choice or giving consent to the risky situation. The second most frequently cited situation—differences of belief or opinion—usually concerns a rift between disputants that emerges from an ideological tension often linked to a challenge to identity, self-esteem, personal morality, etc. The third most frequent situation concerns politics within the participant's family, e.g., family members not living up to role expectations and/or the formation of alignments against the participant within the participant's family. Other situations include love or dating problems, physical or emotional violence, power or authority disputes, unfair blame, broken promises, overreactions to harmless actions, interpersonal distance in friendships, joking getting out of hand, and having another take credit for one's own work.

Table 4.2 also presents an example of the situation and its frequency of occurrence in the corpus. The table presents the diversity of situations on which the following thematic analysis was conducted. It shows sufficient diversity in the corpus to support the description of the general thematic structure, although many of the situations described tend to be those experienced more frequently by younger participants (under 30 years old), as indicated by other phenomenological studies of conflict-related phenomena (Sandra Thomas, personal communication, November 2, 2006).

General Thematic Structure of Face-to-Face Conflict

Hermeneutic analysis of these accounts of conflict produces a structure that consists of three moments—the *Betrayal*, the *Fight*, and the *Aftermath*—all of which emerge against the ground of a *Preexisting Relationship*. The Preexisting Relationship may range from anonymous public relationships—such as a political debate in an online forum, being cut off in traffic, or being treated rudely by a food service worker—to the most intimate of relationships: those between parents and children, best friends, spouses, lovers, etc. The concept of ground derives from the *Gestalt* concept of figure/ground; the figure being what a person is aware of at some time and the ground, the setting or context in which that awareness emerges (Pollio, 1982). The figure/ground relationship is fundamental to awareness and highlights the contextual nature of human experience.

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As used in this context, the concept of moment denotes a center of present awareness. In this sense, it may be thought of as a focus that situates the themes of face-to-face conflict within the ground of a Preexisting Relationship. This term derives from the Latin *'movere'* indicating movement in space or time, and is intended to capture the reciprocal temporal movement of awareness participants exhibit when describing their conflict experiences. The conflict accounts offered do not follow a linear temporal structure, and thus it is inappropriate to apply strict conceptions of narrative, stage or phase to these accounts. Since phenomenological accounts emerge *in media res*, it is up to the interpreter(s) to make sense of the 'before and after' of the experiences described (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). The concept of moment allows the investigator to describe this temporal aspect of face-to-face conflict experiences as described by participants.

Interpretive group and individual hermeneutic analyses of the corpus indicate that experiences of face-to-face conflict emerge in terms of three general *moments* that emerge against a ground of a Preexisting Relationship. The Preexisting Relationship consists of a set of interrelated meanings that structured relational experiences before the conflict episode, when the relationship was in a general state of stability. The meanings associated with this ground consist of (1) an emphasis on similarities between the self and other together with a tolerance for differences, (2) a feeling of having invested time and effort to develop and maintain the relationship, (3) a feeling of safety and trust, (4) an assumed ethos of loyalty, honesty, fairness, equality, reciprocity, sincerity and integrity, and/or (5) the fulfillment of various role expectations that derive from the general cultural and personal understandings of parent-child, friend-friend, boyfriend-girlfriend, co-worker, stranger-stranger, etc., the participant brings to his or her present relationships.

The first moment of the conflict experience consists of a betrayal, violation, or disruption of the preexisting relationship and/or of the participant's expectations about that relationship. This moment has been designated as *Betrayal.* In the moment of Betrayal, participants often focus on six aspects: (1) the issue or problem they view as having changed the preexisting, and otherwise stable, relationship, (2) this issue is described in terms of its severity or seriousness for oneself and/or for the relationship, (3)

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its unfairness or contradiction of idealistic criteria such as being rational, moral, straightforward, honest, etc., in social relationships, (4) feelings of surprise or shock, (5) being hurt and losing trust, and/or (6) a decision to do, or not to do, something about it.

The second moment concerns the immediate conflict episode and has been designated as *Fight*. Within the Fight, participants report being aware of (1) power and control over the flow of the interaction (strategy, manipulation, tactics) and the implications of the outcome (winning or losing) for one's sense of self (efficacy, strength, will-power, etc.), (2) blaming and being blamed by the other, (3) feeling frustrated and confused and being unable to understand or to act in the situation, (4) feeling fear and anger toward the other and/or the situation, and (5) feeling disconnected and different from the other in terms of identity, personality, and/or perspective.

The third moment of the conflict experience is termed *Aftermath*. The themes focal in this moment concern (1) a final assignment of fault or blame (accountability and responsibility), (2) hopes and regrets, (3) recognition of learning and change in oneself, the other, or the relationship and/or (4) deciding on the relationship, that is, (a) whether to return to the same situation without resolving the fundamental betrayal, (b) leaving the relationship, or (c) starting a new relationship with the same person.

The ground and each of the moments have relevant sets of themes representing the shifting focus of the content of the conflict experience. On the following pages, Figure 4.1 portrays the thematic structure of the face-to-face conflict in terms of semi-permeable circles that represent the three moments of the event. Inside these circles each of the relevant themes are listed. The circles representing moments are semi-permeable and overlap to indicate the movement participants make between these different foci and that the various moments do not exist in isolation, but blend with one another in the total experience. Moments are not linear but recursively overlap when described in participant accounts.

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GROUND: THE PREEXISTING RELATIONSHIP

The Issue(s)
or Problem(s)

Control, Power
and Strength

Seriousness of
Issue(s)

Unfairness or
Wrongness

Blaming and
Being Blamed

Frustration and
Confusion

BETRAYAL

FIGHT

Shock and
Surprise

Feeling Hurt
and Losing
Trust

Fear and Anger

Disconnection
and Difference

Deciding
Whether to Act

Accountability
and
Responsibility

Hopes and
Regrets

AFTERMATH

Learning and
Change

Deciding on the
Relationship

**Figure 4.1: Ground, Moments and Themes for the
Experience of Face-to-Face Conflict**

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The Ground: The Preexisting Relationship

The preexisting relationship is the ground or context from which experiences of Betrayal, Fight, and Aftermath emerge. While Betrayal is more centrally relevant to the experience of conflict, it cannot be understood except in terms of the preexisting relationship that has been betrayed. This relationship is one that, while not necessarily stable or secure, was often predictable, fair, and sincere. Participants had built up assumptions about the stability of patterns of interaction within the relationship and derived expectations from more general cultural knowledge of how relationships are enacted.

These understandings shape participant experiences of a relationship with other people and lead to feelings about oneself as loyal to one's relational partner and the relationship. Within the preexisting relationship, participants have built on an assumed level of loyalty, trust, safety and commitment between themselves and their relational partner(s). Sometimes the effort that went into initiating and maintaining the relationship is described with the common cultural metaphors of *committing to*, or personally *investing in*, the relationship although some participants noted that this metaphor in fact cheapens the value of relationships:

> I hate speaking of relationships in terms of investments because it makes it sound like a business. . . .We were building to that commitment. (Ma'a)

Often cultural understandings concern role relationships that govern interactions between relational partners. Cultural assumptions about role relationships become particularly relevant when one is in relation to strangers or in a socially sanctioned relationship such as marriage. Very often participants seemed to assume that the investigator also understood this cultural template. Statements such as 'my so-called friends,' or 'it's not how a marriage should be' indicate that participants' assumed an understanding of their assessments and beliefs concerning role expectations and general cultural norms of loyalty, reciprocity and so on. This ground is often implicit in this corpus of accounts, although it was frequently suggested in the following ways:

You can try to show people that people are basically the same, no matter what the appearances are, or disabilities, or anything like that. I'm not so different from the homeless guy I walked by on the street this morning; I'm not so different from the professor giving a lecture to 500 kids right now; I'm not so different from the guy on academic probation right now because he parties too much; I'm not so different from people fighting in wars on either side. (Jeff)

In my way of coming to terms with myself is to be as truthful and honest with myself and with other people around me. But at the same time, there are things we need to hide. (Sanford)

A^2, who married early, views herself as a newly wed to have been naïve in her beliefs about marriage:

It never occurred to me that a husband and wife could cheat and do [bad things] to each other. I was completely naïve in that way and even now I think it shouldn't happen at all. Then, slowly, I started understanding that this is happening and…I just took it like he was sick, and so it didn't hurt me like it used to in the beginning. I just began to feel that something coming out of his mouth had no value….I just thought marriage is something you couldn't just break and maybe it would be better in time, when the children came, so then he was trying to threaten me that if things were not done [his way], I could leave and stay gone. (A^2)

In many accounts, role expectations were expressed by indicating their opposite:

[My father] doesn't have it in his genes: parenting qualities. So we didn't start off on the right foot—I mean my brother and I and everyone else. He has probably the emotional intelligence of a 12-year-old. He will have impulses; he will fall in love easily, but he won't nurture, he won't keep his own; he won't be a father; so we had problems from a very early part of my life. (Orlando)

I would love to not give a shit what anyone thought of me; I'd love it, but I have to [give a shit]. Everything that I am tells me that I have an obligation to the people who I come into contact with everyday. Even if they don't see that they have an obligation to me. What if everyone went about thinking that they didn't have to be moral? (Jeff)

The point at which these expectations, beliefs and behaviors become most clear is when the relationship is betrayed or is called into question; otherwise, they serve as an implicit context.

The First Moment: Betrayal

Betrayal is the moment at which the conflict experience begins and the preexisting relationship or some aspect of that relationship is broken, violated, or

changed. The label for this moment, while sounding dramatic and severe, does not always indicate an extreme violation of the relationship, e.g., teasing among friends that briefly becomes hurtful. Betrayal, however, does represent a more general change in the preexisting relationship with the perception that this change has become bothersome for the participant. When participants describe the moment of betrayal, they often do so in terms of six thematic meanings: (1) the issue(s) or problem(s), (2) the seriousness of the issue, (3) unfairness or wrongness, (4) shock or surprise, (5) feeling hurt by the other and losing trust, and/or (6) deciding to do, or not do, something about the betrayal.

A constructed general statement from the first-person perspective concerning the moment of betrayal is: *When I feel betrayed I am aware that some issue, action or event has negatively affected our relationship. This issue, action or event came up unexpectedly and was shocking to me. It is wrong and unfair and I feel hurt by it. I feel that my trust in you and in our relationship has been called into question and this may have more or less serious consequences for the future of our relationship. I feel a need to do something about it and have to decide whether or not to act. If I act, or do not act, we could end up in a bigger mess than we had to begin with.*

Betrayal, Theme I: The Issue or Problem

The first aspect of betrayal is what initiated the conflict. Many participants refer to this as the 'issue' or 'issues' they have with their relational partners. Often social norms and beliefs are implied in these descriptions of the problem or act that initiated the conflict:

> I used to have my best friends and they never called me all summer. (Holly)

> I don't consider C. my best friend anymore because she didn't seem sympathetic when we talked or even cared. (Missy)

> She continued to do things that she knew got to me to make me lash out and yell at her or whatever. (Christin)

The implied issue in Holly's quote is that friends should stay in touch with each other and her's did not. For her, this belief makes the conflict salient since it served to

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betray her understanding of the preexisting relationship and the rules that govern that relationship. A similar situation holds for Missy since best friends should be sympathetic and care for each other. For Christin the issue is the antagonistic intent of her relational partner in doing things to make her angry. The theme of issue often centers on an explanation or belief about the causes of the conflict and the specifics of the betrayal. Thus, this theme may be thought of as a grievance the participant has with his or her relational partner:

> She said the things she said were out of anger and I said if you were my friend you'd care how I felt. I felt very angered and betrayed I guess. I was kind of proud of myself that I stood up for myself against three people at the same time….I think I felt betrayed because I felt like they were holding it against me that I was friends with this girl and they started pulling away and saying stuff about me behind my back and you know I'd find out about it and I'm not a very happy person when I find out that stuff and they knew it was bothering me and it was like they didn't care and we were friends for so long and shared so many memories and it seemed like they didn't care. (Missy)

> There was that 'since I gave up so much, there's no way this can end,' so fighting tooth-and-nail, I latched on…. It was like 'if you can't commit to me, then why are you committing to this friendship over here and if you can't commit here why are you going to commit over there?' (Ma'a)

> It was a very emotional thing to have this person that I used to be best friends with, this guy that I used to love and this girl that I hate, all three decide that I was the most terrible being ever. (Jo)

> It was a small private school where everyone knows everyone else's business … most of us had gone Kindergarten through high school, so everyone knew everyone really well. I just remember being like 'wow, this is so weird; why is she upset with me, you know when she said it was okay and then she wasn't okay' and that's why I asked her at the beginning that if she wasn't okay then I wouldn't have wanted to ruin our friendship like that, but I did. (Holly)

Betrayal, Theme II: Seriousness

The second theme is that of seriousness which tends to focus on the degree of change, or the significance of the rift, that has emerged in the relationship. Participants also report assessing the potential severity of the consequences of the issues surrounding the betrayal and specify some issues as small and others as serious, large, or major:

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I've had some serious conflict issues and I've had little ones…. Small issues are issues that you can get over and we'll probably be in the conflict for maybe a day and bigger ones issues are where you don't think that, a lot of times you don't get passed the big issues…. Big issues are either ongoing or they end your relationship. (Christin)

Jeff describes this theme in a somewhat different way:

Just when you begin to lose your mind, when you forget who you are—that's when it stops being a challenge and becomes a fight for survival. I'd rather like to avoid that. (Jeff)

One of the best descriptions of how one may understand the seriousness of the issue(s) is given by Aqua Lad:

She's doing everything in her power not to understand me and even to as far as to hurt me. It is difficult in a powerful kind of way any time anyone tries to treat you that way, but when it's your mother that is a really tricky sort of thing. So that is what when that moment of 'you're absolutely right, I'm sorry' came in, it was like I have borne up under months of being berated and devalued and made fun of and hurt because of what I believe in and what I am doing and at one moment, an unexpected moment…it just happened so suddenly, it was like…this vague but very much present doubt inside of me that maybe everybody else is right and I am wrong about this, and I guess when you are being very public about an unpopular opinion, that sense of doubt and fear you might really be wrong becomes stronger and stronger and more powerful inside of you. And so at that moment when my mother, my guardian, my teacher conceded to me and put that voice inside of me to rest for a short period of time, it was about a lot more to me than my relationship with my mother, it was about everything that I believe and think and do. (Aqua Lad)

For Aqua Lad and for Christin, big or serious issues have the potential to alter radically the nature of a relationship. For Jeff, serious issues can upset one's feelings about oneself and the relationship when it becomes a 'fight for survival.' At times, one can get past big issues as in Aqua Lad's case; other times, the issues are insurmountable and represent an impasse.

Serious issues, such as those pertaining to life or death, elicit strong emotional expressions. This emotion may be represented by changes in the register of the language participants use to discuss the issue(s) they have with the other. Malachi Murmur provides an interesting example:

I got the feeling that this person might try to go, but it was too late for them to be going—rationally—and they went. And so I had to slam on my brakes and hit the horn as I

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avoided colliding with her, but of course if I didn't slam on my brakes it would have been a t-bone and I probably would have killed the bitch. (Malachi Murmur)

Malachi Murmur begins his account referring to the other driver as 'them,' a 'person' and 'her' but as he relays the possible severity of the event—that it could have resulted in the other driver's death if they had 't-boned'—he changes register from ordinary language to refer to the other driver as 'the bitch.'

For Jo, the seriousness of the event concerns the possibility that she could have been severely injured in a dispute that became violent:

> The whole situation although it seems like it stretched on for hours took probably 30 to 45 minutes. The fight was probably no longer than about 3 or 4 minutes, but it seemed like very long time and there was furniture and stuff and things to be bashed against and walls. It was a fight; it was the most traumatic I've experienced as far as personal conflicts are concerned. (Jo)

Betrayal, Theme III: Unfairness and Wrongness

The third theme concerns the unfairness or wrongness of the issue(s). Norms of fairness often concern respectful treatment and relate to loyalty, reciprocity, and mutual care. It can also be seen in terms of the variety of *shoulds* and *should nots* that become salient to the participant in evaluating issue(s) that surround the betrayal.

In discussing her issues with committing to relationships, Ma'a notes that her tendency to run when a relationship moves too quickly:

> I'm trying not to put it [the new relationship] on hold because I realize that it is not fair. (Ma'a)

Other participants note:

> I don't think it is very fair and she was like 'this is the way it's going to be,' end of discussion….This is the first time we've actually worked together, so I didn't really know. She seemed really excited that I was helping her at first and then she kind of, I don't know if she wanted the credit, she didn't think that if I did something wrong would she be blamed for it…. As long as it's done correctly it doesn't matter whose name is on it; but it does bother me that she'd copy word-for-word what I said in my email, add her name to it, or when I asked her to bring the supplies and she not on top of it. If she wanted to take over the job I think she would have brought the supplies, instead of me going out my way and buy supplies myself…it's not very fair. (Holly)

> I realize that when I meet a girl, and I don't always consciously think about it, but when I have that mechanism in me that expects her to screw me over, it's obviously not fair to her….I may already be putting her in the hole so to speak and being very unfair to who she is and what she can offer. (Sanford)

For Malachi Murmur, this awareness of fairness and unfairness is implied as in the statement 'and then it was like I did something wrong' in the following quotation:

> This wasn't something I thought happened in the real world. I thought we were going to get shot if we stopped and tried to talk to the guy, so there was no way I was stopping. So I took off and then it was like I did something wrong. (Malachi Murmur)

Betrayal, Theme IV: Shock and Surprise

The fourth theme is the shock or surprise accompanying the participant's initial awareness of the issue. Shock or surprise often results from the formerly predictable interactions becoming 'unpredictable,' 'slippery' or 'volatile.' Malachi Murmur describes:

> There is a bit of slipperiness to the interaction because you have discovered you're on different, in this different place and it becomes really unpredictable as to what is expected. (Malachi Murmur)

Other participants describe volatility and suddenness:

> On my birthday he called me to say 'get your stuff out of my apartment.' It was painful, but considering my relationship to him—always more a buddy than a father—my attachment to him is volatile to say the least. So it was painful, but I had to learn to cope. (Orlando)

> And all of a sudden, I was being attacked and she had me on the ground. (Jo)

For Holly, the theme of shock ties in with the theme of the seriousness: how being suddenly snubbed by her best friends made her feel devalued as a person and friend:

> My two best friends—I thought we were going to be best friends forever—stopped calling me after graduation. It was huge…. It was really shocking: I felt like I was more a convenience for them, 'oh, she's a friend at school, but once we leave, we're never going to talk to her again.' (Holly)

Ma'a reports being surprised when finding out about her ex-girlfriend's new relationship:

> She left me for a woman who came from an alcoholic home, drugs everywhere…I would never, I mean the mother is crack head, the daughter prides herself on…being able to take

more of these pills than anyone. I would never have thought that she would go for something like that….That was a surprise. (Ma'a)

Sanford notes:

When she [his adoptive mother] left my father, it was very unexpected for me. They were never the type of couple who fought…but basically, she left, and it caught me completely off guard. Any negative feelings I had towards her were solidified that much more. (Sanford)

Betrayal, Theme V: Feeling Hurt and Losing Trust

The fifth theme concerns participants' feelings of being hurt by the betrayal and their feelings of having lost trust in the other and/or in the relationship. Ma'a frames this hurt in terms of the ways she invested in her relationship and the loss she suffered as a result:

I told her that I don't want to invest in this relationship; I just want to be in this relationship. We had many discussions about how couples invest…and it ended up being an investment; well, the feeling of loss is tied in with investment. (Ma'a)

Sanford describes the experience of his adoptive mother leaving his adoptive father and the abandonment issues this event brought up for him:

She doesn't understand how a mother leaving, period, can cause a person strife. She doesn't understand that fully because she figures, oh, she has to go about her life…it's selfish, but we're all selfish…she doesn't get it and there's a good chance she never will. (Sanford)

Orlando notes how her chaotic relationship with her father and violent relationship with an ex-girlfriend left her with a lack of trust:

It was why I shifted completely from stable relationships to 'friends with benefits'—the issues of trust, control, self-doubt about connecting and I would think a lot of times, 'what if I am like [my father]; what if I can be with someone for just a little while and then I get tired or start seeing flaws; what if I am what I don't want to be? (Orlando)

After the betrayal one is left feeling a sense of being hurt by, and of losing a sense of trust in, the other and the relationship.

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Betrayal, Theme VI: Deciding Whether to Act

When participants describe betrayal, they become aware of deciding whether or not to do something about it. When they chose to act, the potential for the first moment of the *fight* is present. Participants note that they try to be calm and reflective in deciding to act in order not to create more conflict than necessary. This is perhaps the most personally difficult decision as openly acknowledging the betrayal creates the possibility of starting a *fight* when there may not have been one in the absence of action. Under such circumstances, blame can be attributed to one's self for the conflict, even if the betrayal is perceived as the fault of the other. The choice not to act, however, does not guarantee peace. If the choice is not to act, the issue(s) may remain un-addressed. If the other party expects a response, a 'cold' conflict may emerge and 'avoidance' may be viewed as a form of passive aggression. Malachi Murmur, Jo, Christin and Holly provide some of the clearest examples:

> They will look kind of startled, but they won't look at who they could have potentially collided with. I don't know if I have done that, but I've certainly notice other people doing it. The only thing I can imagine is that they don't want to acknowledge it. (Malachi Murmur)

> I said 'I don't think I have anything to say to you because it's not going to matter anyway' and she had a bottle of liquor in her hand and she slung it on me. (Jo)

> I think it is immature in the first place for her to ignore, so I am going to be immature. In situations with her she wasn't being mature in the way she was treating me, so I didn't think I needed to be mature with her. (Christin)

> It's frustrating: How am I supposed to know what she is thinking if she doesn't tell me? (Holly)

Jeff describes his reluctance to enter into relational conflict and the personal conflict this brings about for him:

> It creates a really big inner conflict and I'm not the kind of person to just walk up to someone and speak to them about it unless I'm drinking beer or I'm really angry or whatever. (Jeff)

Other participants discussed how they will 'put things on the table' rather than 'let things simmer,' no longer allowing the issue(s) to create havoc for their relationship and their emotional well-being:

> I guess that's the way girls act, but I'm more like 'tell me yes or no' and be really forward and straight. (Holly)

> I'm a person who likes to say it to their face and not like 'I didn't say that' when I really did say something. I'll admit that I said something if I did. (Missy)

The decision to act is summarized well by Sanford, with the addition of much qualification for what he means by 'coming on strong':

> With some things, I have to come on strong right away, and that's the only thing she understands. I hate to be that way, but it's the only way to stop it in its tracks is just immediate aggression, forceful, and I'm not talking about being cruel or calling names, but just saying 'hey, I'm not going to put up with this. I'm dealing with this; this is my thing—give me some space, butt out, leave me alone.' (Sanford)

Holly describes her role as a director for a high school play calling for her to 'put her foot down' and fire some actors who refused to acknowledge her authority:

> I didn't feel bad, I had given the expectations that I had set and to tell you the truth, it needed to be done, because sometimes an example needs to be set for others to follow and I hated that it had to be like that. I wished people would have listened to me the first time, but I definitely, the visual example kind of led the pack for the rest of the people. (Holly)

A^2, who felt she had for 22-years tried to make her marriage work, finally reached a point in which she felt compelled to file for divorce:

> Conflicts just went on the same way, they didn't decrease, but the same things just expanded, and started growing more and more and more to the point where I was just, I couldn't take it any more…. I couldn't take the craziness. (A^2)

On the following page, Figure 4.2 depicts the thematic structure for the moment of betrayal in the experience of face-to-face conflict. It depicts the six themes connected by lines, which emphasize the interrelationships among themes. Themes are not orthogonal, but instead are points-of-emphasis in participant accounts that are contextualized by the ground and the other related themes.
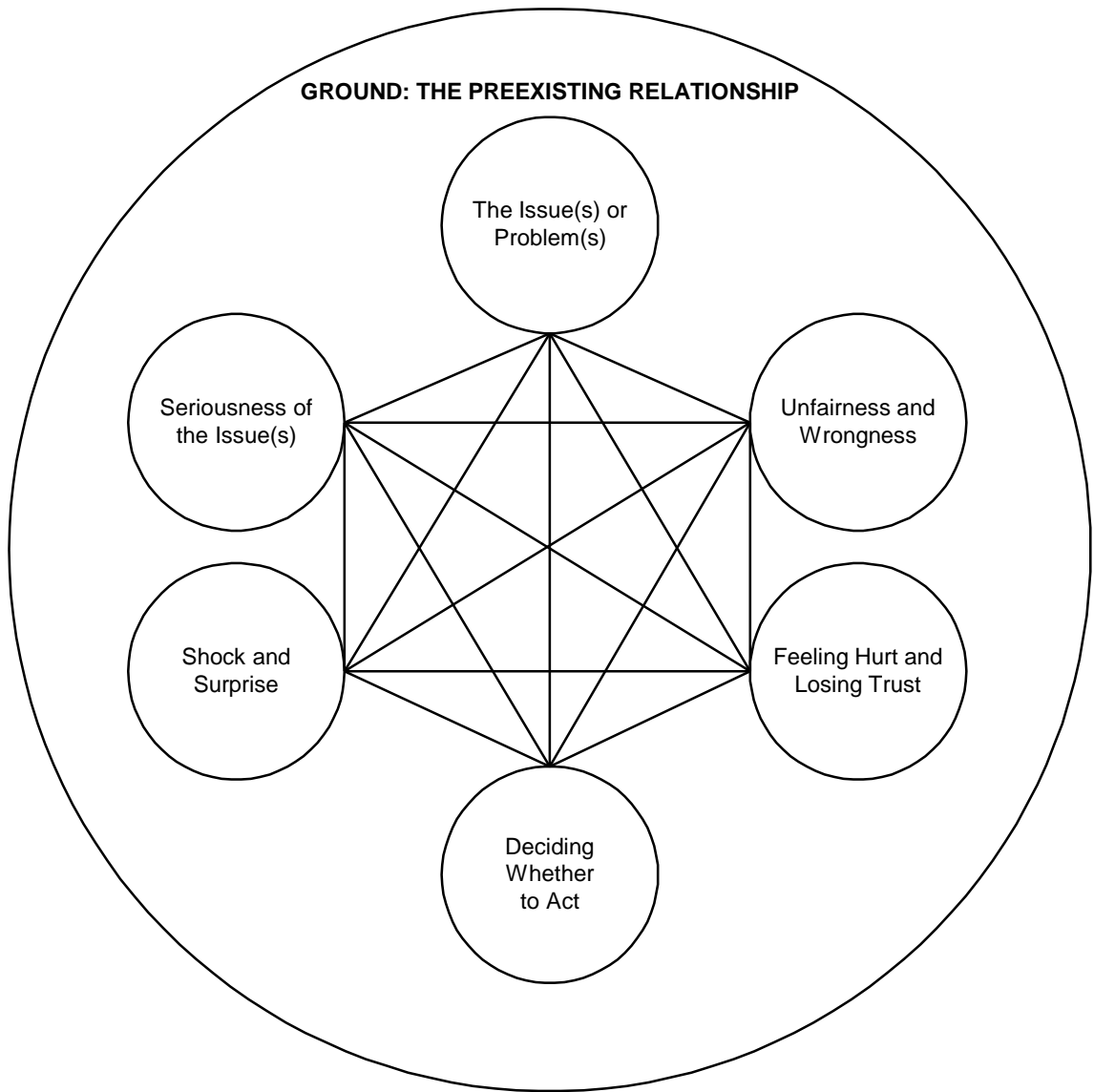
Figure 4.2: Structure of Themes for the Moment of Betrayal

in the Experience of Face-to-Face Conflict

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The Second Moment: The Fight

The experience of the second moment in face-to-face conflict—the *Fight*—emerges in the context of the betrayal of a preexisting relationship. The themes associated with the moment of the *fight* are: (1) control, power, and strength, (2) ambiguity as to who is to blame combined with an awareness of being blamed, (3) frustration, confusion and lack of understanding, (4) fear and anger, and/or (5) a sense of disconnection and difference between one's self and the other in terms of identity, personality or perspective.[1]

From the first person perspective a constructed statement describing this moment of face-to-face conflict may be expressed as follows: *When I fight with you, I am aware of feeling that our relationship has been betrayed by something that either you or I did. I feel a lack of control in the situation and I feel myself to be powerless. I also feel a need to reassert my personal power and winning or losing becomes a strong concern for me. I feel as if you are blaming me for things for which I am not responsible, or only partially responsible. I don't understand why you are engaging me in this way and I don't know what to do. I feel fearful and angry about the situation, as it seems as if you, or the relationship, have become threatening. You, who are supposedly my friend, spouse, parent, etc., seem so different and unfamiliar to me.*

The Fight, Theme I: Control, Power, and Strength

The first theme associated with the moment of present conflict concerns a sense of the situation being out-of-control and/or of being disempowered by the actions and manipulations of the other. As Aqua Lad notes: "It's natural to want to feel like what we're doing is effective. That we are having some impact on the world around us." This theme focuses on one's effectiveness being undermined by the other or the situation.

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[1] The 'Fight' is to be understood in the sense of 'present conflict interaction' rather than in the narrower terms of Rapoport's (1960) definition: as a situation of conflict without rules, that has as its goal the destruction of an opponent.

Feeling powerless presents a challenge that tends to create a desire to reclaim one's personal power and/or control over the situation. Malachi Murmur describes his feelings of powerlessness with drivers on the west side of a certain city in the U.S.:

> Unless I completely altered my course and/or destination and decided to spend the time following this person I couldn't even yell at them from behind or make angry gestures. They're just gone. I feel powerless. (Malachi Murmur)

Participants often express the need to regain a sense of control or to reconcile themselves to a relationship that seems to have gone out of control. At times, participants note that the other may have forced the situation out of control to gain power:

> Her control is very much out of control. The way she controls her reality is very much an out-of-control way. I am a much more controlled personality. I like order. Very important to have structure, some form of structure for me. (Sanford)

Orlando describes a very salient power dynamic while she was having dinner with her father after she had not seen him for three years:

> He cannot emotionally touch me because I have a very thick crust when it comes to him….I had to confront him with a number of situations in which he had failed his children as a parent and he kept denying that failure, he kept denying situations: missing birthdays, being physically aggressive at times, and he tried to deny it….This is not how you deal with me….I was at a point that I would put up with any situation but that. I would walk ten miles if that was required just to not give him the impression that he had me, that he had some power over me. (Orlando)

She also expressed a similar sentiment concerning power dynamics in love relationships:

> Even when people love each other a lot, there is always that sadistic dependency desire where you want the other person to suffer if you leave or something goes wrong. It is about power, it is about self-esteem, it is about ego and that is something I don't give people because I don't have that to give. I don't fall if someone leaves, I don't beg and most of all, I get up and move on with my life. (Orlando)

Participants also point to strategies, manipulations, and tactics used by the other to gain power and force compliance. A^2 describes a manipulative 'guilt-tripping' pattern between herself and her ex-husband:

> He still wanted his way like usual…and he would find different ways to humiliate me or try to make me feel guilty about something that was never there….He was always trying to put a guilt trip on me. (A^2)

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At times, an awareness of power emerges in issues of winning or losing. Jo describes a particularly extreme situation in which she was lured to a friend's home only to be physically attacked by that friend, an ex-boyfriend and the ex-boyfriend's current girlfriend. During the confrontation, which turned violent, Jo was accused of being manipulative and of having influenced these individual's lives in negative ways. She notes:

> The three of them were telling me how I influenced their lives and screwed everything up for them. I found it interesting that they would give me that sort of credit, they would give me that sort of power over them that I really didn't want. (Jo)

In light of being attacked by three people, she notes the irony of being portrayed as the powerful one in the situation, viewing it as a situation specifically created to win, and exercise power over her:

> I think they just wanted to fuck with me as much as possible. I think they had a plan of attack and they were out to win and they did. (Jo)

A less severe example of the connection between one's sense of power, efficacy and the desire to win is found in Christin's account:

> Ignoring is uncomfortable, but I am a very strong-willed person so I'm not going to be the first one to talk and I view that as not necessarily the best way to handle things, but if she is going to come in and start ignoring me first, then I am going to ignore her longer that she ignores me because I feel like I've won. (Christin)

Ma'a describes her situation from the perspective of someone feeling out of control and trying to gain and maintain control within an intimate relationship:

> Because she couldn't commit, I would get more controlling and that continued through…. I felt like there was a wall and I'm persistent and don't like to fail and to get in that relationship I gave up a lot….Since I gave up so much, there is no way this can end…so fighting tooth-and-nail, I latched on and the more I latched on and tried to control. (Ma'a)

She also notes the effect of relinquishing power had on her feelings about herself:

> I've been conditioned over the past five years, even though I feel nurturing is good, anytime I would show my nurturing side, it was always like a weakness. I was weaker because I was emotional, but she liked it. It was twisted. It is hard now for me to say these things about myself that I feel are virtuous, great and beautiful. I'm really trying to find that again. (Ma'a)

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Participants note repeatedly that their sense of personal power is related to their ability to control, at least to some extent, events of the fight. For some the issue is winning, for others not giving in to the other's attempt to overpower them. Still, for others, the theme emerges in an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness and in an inability to act.

The Fight, Theme II: Blaming and Being Blamed

The second theme concerns who is at fault. Participants often expressed a feeling of being blamed for things they did not do, or felt that the other was not accepting responsibility for the situation. The reciprocal leveling of blame between self and other serves to make the interaction feel like a personal attack. For participant A^2, her ex-husband often accused and blamed her for events she felt were not connected to reality. She often was unable to respond to these accusations:

> There was nothing to explain or to argue with him about. He was trying to attack and I had no words because there was no connection to anything….He was telling me that I am having affairs with so many people, even if I just talked to somebody, to him it meant I was having an affair with the guy, or it is a lady, it was like I was talking about him, if it's a man, I'm having an affair. (A^2)

Ma'a also describes her experience of being blamed for problems in a long-term relationship:

> I took the brunt of responsibility for it, which was conditioned over time because if you hear that you're the problem for five years straight and you're working on yourself. Every time a conflict would arise and she'd point the finger at me, I would take that opportunity to look at myself. (Ma'a)

Not only can being blamed and accepting blame present a challenge, it can also be used to justify retribution. Orlando openly acknowledges her fault in one conflict between herself and her father, but notes that he directly threatened her for refusing to attend his wedding to 'The Witch':

> I was the catalyzer of this whole situation. He said 'every action has a consequence and you'll pay for your actions.' (Orlando)

Thus, being in the position to blame the other for the conflict seems to put one in a position of perceived power and may be used to justify actions escalating the conflict or

harming the other person with impunity. This aspect of blame became all too real for Jo when she was physically attacked, and for Aqua Lad in a dispute with his mother and sister:

> It was just a bunch of crazy nonsense and it was 'all my fault.' I was the one that told about it, so it was all my fault. That was one of the things they brought up saying that I destroyed their lives….They were all talking about this stuff that had happened before and they brought it all together and wanted to talk about it all at once and come to this conclusion that I was a terrible person and I needed to be punished. (Jo)

> She told me that I was a disappointment, comparing me to my sister, talking with my sister behind my back and sort of encouraging in my sister a sense of judgment against what I was doing. She was calling me names, she was comparing me to my alcoholic and abusive father. She was finding some really powerful buttons that she knew she could push with me in some very hurtful ways. So it had been a very devaluing experience. (Aqua Lad)

Some participants describe their experience of being at fault or sharing fault with others with whom they are in conflict:

> They just pulled away….There were a couple who were like 'what were you doing, what were you thinking dating him?' and I was like 'it was okay I thought, I definitely asked' and they're like 'of course she's going to say yes; she didn't want to hurt you, but she actually didn't think you were going to.' (Holly)

> We were probably both in the wrong, but she made me feel like it was all my fault what I know it was everyone's fault, including myself. No ownership to what she's done. (Missy)

The Fight, Theme III: Frustration and Confusion

The third theme is one of feeling confused and frustrated by the fact that the participant did not understand what was happening or why the relationship took the direction it did:

> They had stuff that was true, but it wasn't from the perspective that I had, so it didn't seem right at all. And they were saying stuff about how I was as a person and the way my mind works and it didn't make any sense to me because they were wrong. (Jo)

> A lot of times I get really, really frustrated by my lack of ability to do something about the situation, such a retribution or punishment of some sort, just anything to get the person to be aware that what they did was completely fucking idiotic and dangerous. (Malachi Murmur)

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This feeling of frustration and confusion emerges when attempting to discover the reason for the other's behavior. A^2 describes her experience of trying to connect with the other person to better understand why there were problems with communication in the relationship:

> I was sad and asking why our relationship should be like that. If he really wants something, why can't we talk straight, with everything on the table and say whether this is right or wrong and without all this other stuff. So when he was calm … I tried to bring it up and explain to him: why can't we just talk? (A^2)

Jo describes trying to figure out where the three people who attacked her were coming from:

> It makes me wonder about what the point of it is…I was like 'why, why? What was the purpose for that?' and they must have gotten something out of it. They must have enjoyed it or something. (Jo)

Christin relays her sense of frustration:

> It was a very, very frustrating situation because I wanted to handle it in a mature way, but she continued to do things that she probably knew got to me. (Christin)

To deal with his frustration and confusion, Sanford reconciled himself to feeling 'bemused befuddlement' in his relationship with his mother:

> I guess I'm trying find that happy median, where I like that craziness and independence without all the I make all the decisions all the time bullshit with complete lack of self-awareness. It is definitely a trip … it's bemused befuddlement…. If I can continue my status quo without getting completely knocked off course with her craziness. She's a great woman; she's just fucking nuts. (Sanford)

At another place, he describes a deeper frustration in this relationship:

> It seems that she tries to open up what appears on the surface to be a dialogue about an issue, where in truth, she's made up her mind and that's that. I guess the question is why she opens up the dialogue when in fact the decision has been made by her and that's not going to change, because she's the boss. So it's frustrating for me and for my father and step-father trying to talk stuff out and be logical, give our point of view on the issue and it seems all for naught. Why are you even asking us if nothing is going to come from it?….It's pointless. We don't understand it completely. I don't think she understands it. It's pretty fucked up. (Sanford)

The Fight, Theme IV: Fear and Anger

The fourth theme associated with the fight concerns a feeling of fear of the other or of what might happen in an out-of-control situation. There is also some anger about the initial betrayal and subsequent events, such as being blamed. A^2 articulates this theme in the two following statements about the end of her 22-year marriage:

> I was scared of him and I'm scared of this guy in accepting what he is saying, but what he didn't understand was why I am accepting….he would raise his voice and try to make me feel guilty as if I am pretending and trying to act like a saint. (A^2)

> It was very, very scary. I went to the police. I went to a counselor. One of the police, the counselor, or the priest, the second priest that I saw told my relative who knew the priest…. My cousin is a very nice person and that is why the priest could speak to him in confidence, he told him… 'we are usually here to save marriages, but in this case [her husband] is very, very devious, has a very devious mind, so please ask your cousin to leave him as soon as possible. He is going to destroy her.' (A^2)

The theme of fear and anger becomes apparent in the anticipated threat the other poses to the self or to other people the participant cares about:

> She continued to do things that she knew got to me to make me lash out and yell at her or whatever. I never felt like I could do that because of the position it would put my dad in because she would probably go home and tell her dad everything and her dad would come in and talk to my dad about it. I never wanted my dad to have any issue—I never wanted that to affect him. (Christin)

Orlando describes her father's irate personality and her adolescent behavior that modeled his own:

> He is a very irate individual. As an adolescent I started being very much the same way—slamming doors and other—and once my mother told me, and she was very calm about it, you know you are starting to look like your father. At that point I stopped doing the slamming doors and I started being much more aware of my social behavior, of my emotions. (Orlando)

Malachi Murmur describes an experience of anger with a driver who ran a stop sign and then taunted him:

> The guy sort of slowed down, but then released and went right across the intersection right as I was starting to move from my stop sign. I guess I probably got angry and yelled something that to him that was inaudible, probably called him a 'stupid fuck' or something like that and he turned toward me as he crossed the intersection he looked to his left, right at me and did this big open-mouthed head-bobbing kind of laugh like 'ahhh ha ha ha' look what I'm doin' like a little redneck fucking child with a rat tail. I think

that emanated from a sense of embarrassment on his part and he then tried to cover it up by having this big, blatant 'hahaha—I meant to do that, look how funny I am' reaction. I dunno: avoidance. (Malachi Murmur)

Other participants describe the feeling of anger emerging when the other refuses to accept responsibility for their part in the conflict:

They were denying it and that made me really mad. We were in a restaurant and it wasn't pretty….I just wanted to tell her to shut up; it was very annoying (Missy)

Participants also discussed maintaining a sense of control over themselves in order to lessen the effects of anger and fear on their conflict interactions. Ma'a describes her typical manner of responding when conflict becomes 'heated':

I had no reaction, I wasn't fast. Intelligent, yes, but definitely slow on the conflict. The issue will be brought up, and I can focus on it until it gets heated. Then I'll let the other person wail and I'll say nothing for quite a long time. Maybe after a day or two, I'll bring it back up because I've thought about it, had time to process … I like to be sturdy and stable when I talk about things. (Ma'a)

The Fight, Theme V: Disconnection and Difference

The fifth theme concerns an awareness of disconnection (or difference) between the self and the other in terms of identity, personality, and/or perspective in the situation. Participants refer to things seeming 'out of perspective' or 'being on different wavelengths' with one another. Missy describes disconnection in the terms: "This one girl: me and her don't see eye-to-eye." This theme also relates to an evaluation of the rightness or wrongness of one's own and the other's perspective regarding the conflict. At times, there is even an understanding that the conflict may be about two entirely different issues—the respective issues framed by each disputant's perspective—and thus continue because of a disconnection between self and other. Some seek to explain disconnection and difference in terms of intelligence, sex, or some other personal characteristic of the individual(s) with whom they are in conflict. Christin describes the differences between her life circumstances and those of her ex-best friend:

There were a lot of issues with her; I mean her dad didn't have a job and my dad did have a job and I had a lot of friends and she didn't have a lot of friends and I don't want to say jealousy but then I kinda do. I don't view myself as one of those people that everybody

is jealous of me, but I think that probably was the root of things. I had a lot of things in place in my life and she did not. (Christin)

Jo describes difference in terms of the perspectives she and her attackers had on the issues of the conflict:

> I remember pretty accurately what happened. And what they said about me, a lot was not true, but there were some of them that were true, but they were mixed in with so many things that weren't true that it made it all seem out of perspective. Which I guess it was, it was very much out of my perspective because it was theirs. (Jo)

Differences in belief and opinion are viewed as potential causes of increasing conflict, and, as Jeff notes, particularly in cases of intolerance and racism:

> I don't know if it's due to ignorance or irrationality, you can't talk to people like that. It would be wonderful if we could all talk away our problems. It's not that simple; people have opinions because they believe them. (Jeff)

Malachi Murmur ironically derives a sense of pleasure from the fact that he recognizes contradictions in the beliefs and behavior of those whom he views as having beliefs antithetical to his own:

> It is humorous to me that so many Christians are so adamant 'our culture is filthy and all these horrible bad influences' …and 'we need to clean it up' and yet they are running around driving recklessly and cutting people off in traffic and flipping people off and cursing at them and bombing nations. It doesn't seem all that Christ-ee to me….Nonviolence, love, peace, good-driving, they seem to have lost the point somewhere along the line. It is pleasurable to see it verified because a lot of what they are spewing is going against me and/or my beliefs. So to see them behave so hypocritically provides me with a satisfaction because it invalidates all their spewing. (Malachi Murmur)

In another place, Malachi describes a deep sense of frustration with the differences he sees between himself and others:

> I don't think I derive pleasure from the fact that most don't get it because I really don't want people to be as stupid as they are, but they really are stupid. People are stupid for the most part [laughter]. (Malachi Murmur)

He uses the metaphor of being on different wavelengths:

> It has to do with the fact that we are on different wavelengths with that interaction where the problems arise because they are not where I am and they don't have the same understanding and sort of ground to work from. It's a normal state for me: I guess it feels like there's some sort of message was missed somewhere and there's something missing

that is causing us to—it is sort of like gear slippage—it's like the teeth aren't catching where they are supposed to and something is off. (Malachi Murmur)

Sanford describes his experience of being different or disconnected from others because of issues surrounding his sense of abandonment:

It turns one into having a disconnected, aloof, and stoic type personality because if you came into being by being given up, I guess you expect that from every relationship. (Sanford)

He also describes the personal differences he sees between himself and his adoptive mother:

We are two very different people. Personalitywise—how we operate, how we do things. (Sanford)

Missy views differences in terms of the ways that men and women engage in conflict:

Men are more aggressive in making their point verbally, something with their pride, I don't know, girls are more emotional and want to like, I guess guys talk with their head and girls with their heart. (Missy)

Aqua Lad describes a fundamental difference between himself and those he views as his political opponents:

They are more concerned with defending the people they love at all costs no matter what, but don't seem to be so concerned about making sure that justice and fairness are promoted. They are more concerned about right or wrong—my country right or wrong, my family right or wrong. (Aqua Lad)

Figure 4.3 describes the thematic structure for the moment of the fight in the experience of face-to-face conflict. As with Figure 4.2, the lines between themes in Figure 4.3 are meant to emphasize the interrelatedness of the meanings associated with this particular moment of face-to-face conflict.

The Third Moment: Aftermath

The third moment in the experience of face-to-face conflict is the *Aftermath*. The aftermath tends toward a reflective accounting of the events of the *betrayal* and the *fight*. This moment emerges in terms of four themes: (1) accountability and responsibility,
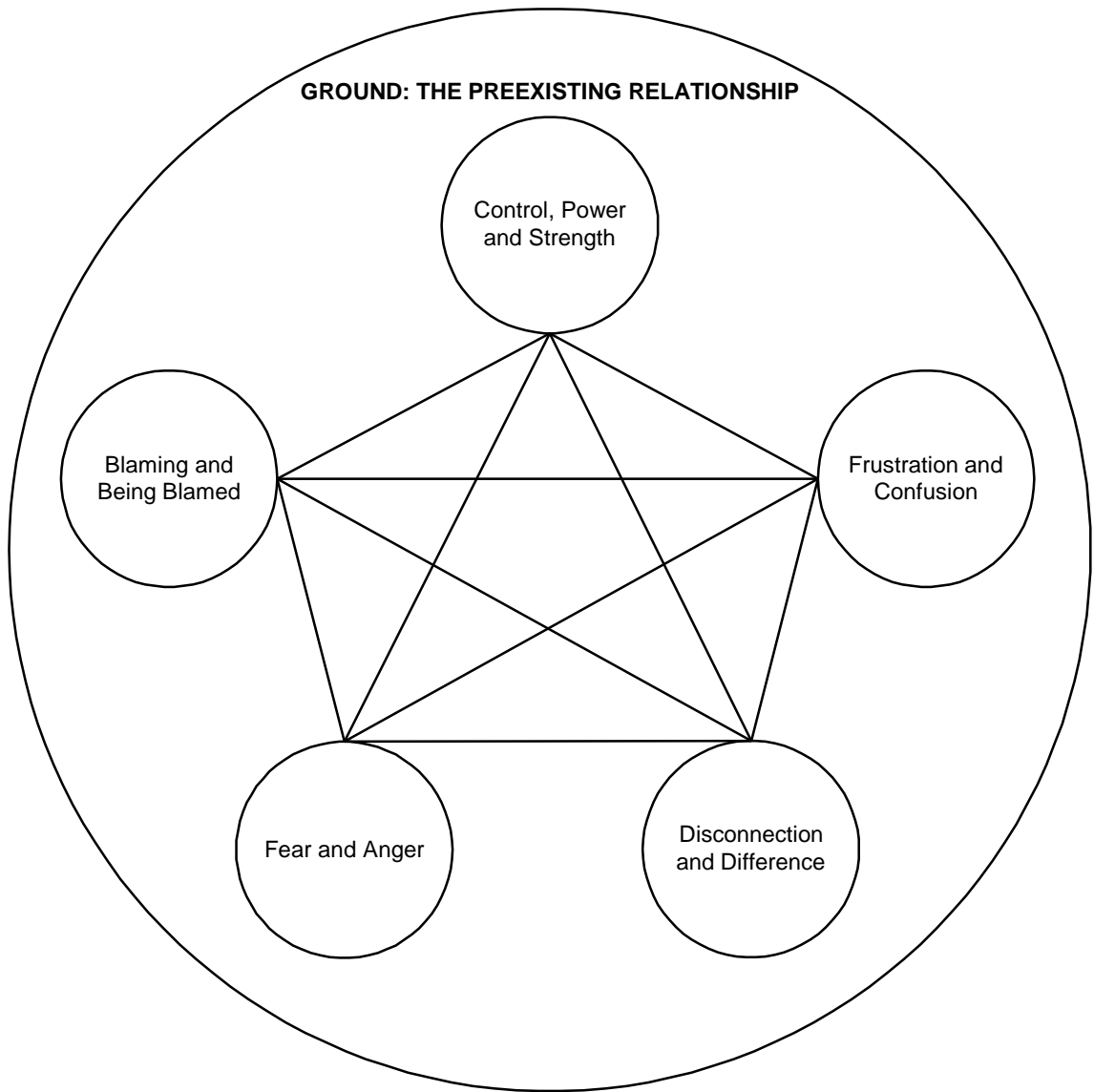
**Figure 4.3: Structure of Themes for the Moment of the Fight
in the Experience of Face-to-Face Conflict**

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(2) hope for the future or regret about things done or said (or not done or said), (3) an awareness of change having (or not having) taken place and (4) deciding what to do with the relationship: (a) begin a new relationship with the same person, (b) leave the present relationship, or (c) maintain the relationship unchanged.

A first-person statement of the themes defining the aftermath is as follows: *After the fight I am aware of needing to make a decision about what to do about the relationship and about the changes this conflict has introduced into the relationship. Sometimes I am the one to blame for what happened, sometimes you are to blame, and sometimes we both are to blame. Sometimes I think about things I could have done or said, or feel bad about things I did or said. Often, I feel I learned something and have changed because of what I learned, and I recognize that you have, or have not, done the same.*

Aftermath, Theme I: Accountability and Responsibility

After the conflict has ended or at least quieted down, some participants describe an experience of realizing who was at fault in the situation. Often a final verdict is made in the absence of the relationship or after the relationship has been put on hold and each person's accountability and responsibility assessed.

A^2 reflects on her experiences of conflict and renders a final verdict concerning his fault and lack of accountability within their relationship:

> At the time, I wasn't aware that the fault was his…. There was no responsibility in his head (A^2)

Jo describes her experience of reluctantly taking on responsibility and of the effects this had:

> I must have done something, I must have done something to make them feel that way. But I don't think I did all the things that they said that I did. (Jo)

It seems that Jo has accepted some aspects of her accusers' blame no matter how much she resisted it within the fight.

While Jo takes on some of the accusations made against her, Jeff tends to render a verdict that puts the blame on the woman who stood him up:

> Maybe I have a tendency to overplan certain things, but this was not one of them. This was just 'hey, I'll just meet you here at this certain time; will that work? If it doesn't give me a call. See you in a week or two I guess.' It's a few hours past the time that I'm supposed to have heard something and so I give her a call—no answer—and 45 minutes later I get a call back and well, I'll just say other plans were made off the cuff, which wouldn't have bothered me so much if it hadn't been an hour late. Even if I had been told 15 or 20 minutes before, it would not have turned out to be quite as significant as it was. The impression that I and probably anyone else with a pulse would get, it leaves one with the impression that that you're sort of unimportant. (Jeff)

When conflict took place with strangers, blame and fault may become generalized:

> I'm already going over the speed limit and what I'll do is hit the brakes and slow down to the speed limit and just stay there as long as they are behind me or as long as they are tailgating. And I used to do it with trucks too, but since I was rammed by one, I wouldn't put it passed some other trucker to do the same thing. (Malachi Murmur)

Ma'a describes a relational pattern that many of her friends and intimate partners have found frustrating in her and that has initiated many conflicts in her life:

> It's a pattern for me…from the time I was thirteen with my first major relationship where I got close with someone and then I run away….Next lifetime, my biggest conflict better not be trust…because this one sucks. (Ma'a)

Perhaps the best example of a final verdict concerning blame and fault comes from Ma'a's description of assessing her tendency to accept the blame her ex-girlfriend often leveled at her during their five-year relationship:

> [When she would complain about me] I would take that opportunity to look at myself and see what aspects of my self needed to be worked on. I loved it. The other side of that is that overtime you begin to think you have a lot of problems and in fact, when we broke up, everything that she complained about me: it was her … it was her. Her. Amazing. (Ma'a)

Holly describes the end of a friendship that indicates a sense of mutual responsibility for miscommunications and misunderstandings:

> Me and him, who had been friends forever, lost that friendship because of miscommunication and misunderstandings and he was really torn because he thought he was going to lose her and me. (Holly)

Missy attributes blame to a friend who would give her and other friends a ride in her car without disclosing that she was driving under the influence:

> She drove drunk all the time and would not tell us. I would have drove, I wouldn't care…it was just lack of responsibility. It irritated me because that is a big thing. She wouldn't tell us. (Missy)

Aftermath, Theme II: Hope and Regret

After the fight has ended, participants express hope and regret concerning the relationship. Hopes pertain to a wish to improve the relationship or to continue it. Regrets concern feeling guilty about what one may have done or said. Regrets, however, can also specify things that one wishes had been done or said, e.g., a biting remark, etc. This theme could also be labeled 'having second thoughts' and/or 'imagining other outcomes.' Jo regrets not having time to prepare for the attack to which she was subjected:

> I really didn't know what to say. If I had had some time to prepare or some warning, I probably could have come up with some clever things to say. (Jo)

At another point in her account, she entertains the possibility that her ex-boyfriend could have gotten involved in the physical attack:

> I'm grateful that he didn't decide to do anything like that. People could have gotten really injured, but no one really did. (Jo)

Malachi Murmur describes his hopes for interactions with other drivers on the Interstate:

> I am trying to educate the populace. I don't want them to celebrate stupidity. (Malachi Murmur)

Sanford reflects on hopes for his future relationships, in which he would like to break a long-standing relational pattern that has caused him trouble:

> I had a good upbringing … but nonetheless I see it affecting how I go about my relationships with my peers and it bothers me because I don't want to manifest that again. In many circumstances, you can't help but do it. It just kind of happens and it's about realizing when those things are happening and trying to do something about it. (Sanford)

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Aqua Lad also describes the exercise of reflective self-control concerning his experiences of anger, being glad that he did not respond with anger to a posting on an online listserv:

> I felt when I was typing that in that is was a very self-righteous thing that I was typing that even though I believed that her line of argument was full of perversion and lies and uncompassionate and un-Christian sorts of statements, and even though I sincerely meant that, my hope and my prayer was that, you know, that this woman who was clearly a very smart person that that knowledge would abound, would really increase in its sense of compassion and love, but I felt when I was typing it that it was a very patronizing and very self-righteous thing to be saying and I didn't want to come across that way, that is not the sort of person I want to be at all and it was certainly not the person I wanted to be in that situation and so I ended up deleting that passage and coming up with another sort of farewell statement. (Aqua Lad)

Aftermath, Theme III: Learning and Change

The theme that is perhaps most salient in the aftermath is how participants feel they have been changed by the conflict and what realizations they have come to about themselves, others and the relationship. It seems that to have learned something from conflict has a redemptive value for the individual: 'it was a bad situation and perhaps I wasn't an angel, but I did learned something that will benefit me in the future.' In sharing knowledge of what was learned, it felt that valuable information about life— wisdom (as Jeff called it) culled from experience—was being conveyed. At other times, it felt like participants were seeking such information from the investigator.

The theme of learning and change figured very prominently in Jeff's account. The following statements derive from his account:

> Conflict is a change agent in any situation and when conflict is undesirable, its because of an unwillingness to change or a problem with change; we're uncomfortable. People like to stick to what they know, people are stolid and cumbersome when placed in a new environment or new situation. (Jeff)

> It is like when everything else in my life is constantly changing, being bumped forward or backward by a couple hours…running, running all the time, it was nice to be able to place my faith in something that I was reasonably certain was going to happen. And, yet, it was another lesson, I guess [to be stood up]. (Jeff)

> I learned the hard way in elementary and middle school that while you may be on a roll, while you may be mister funny or whatever, if you keep talking chances that people will

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like you just continually go downhill from that point and so does your sense of humor. People tire of it. I guess I tend to be a little clumsy, I'm not really sure how, it just seems that…in some conversations, you just can't win, you ever have that? (Jeff)

Sanford and Ma'a note the power of conflict to change who they are:

> I've changed with all my interpersonal relationships…. I feel I've changed a lot. It's ongoing; it's still happening….I try to grow and try to learn….I try to figure all this crap out. If you stop questioning and pondering things, then what good are you? (Sanford)

> It allowed me to get to know myself so much better. That somebody who could facilitate that much change in me could not [change] that I could see. There were things that she said she enjoyed and that she was learning in the relationship what it felt like to be loved. To have calm and peace and just be able to relax. (Ma'a)

It seems that Ma'a learned from the conflicts in the relationship whereas her partner, who tended to live in a state of conflict, learned from periods of calm.

Jo also notes radical change in herself since the issues with her three attackers first arose in high school:

> I remember what it was like to have all these things that mattered—like someone is talking to someone else and that matters—but it doesn't matter anymore because that is not the world I am in anymore. I'm trying to move on, to find a place for myself in society and do all the things adults are supposed to do. I don't feel like it makes any sense or has any purpose….I don't need all that drama. It seems so immature and so, I don't know, imaginative. (Jo)

Learning and change are not always described as positive experiences:

> That was a decisive conflict. It left me, I was suspicious enough before that and after that I became not only suspicious of other people, but also insecure about my own capacity to relate to others. (Orlando)

> It made me sad because I didn't mean to do anything. If I had known I never would have, I would have completely chosen a different path. Maybe it's better that it happened like this so then if that's the way they were, somewhere down the road I wouldn't want to be with them. I guess that's a positive aspect . . . Better to find out now then later and have tried to build something that was flawed. Friends! (Holly)

For Aqua Lad, learning and change in conflict brought maturity and reflective self-awareness of one's inner conflicts:

> A sense of separating what I am feeling or wanting for my own personal gain and being able to separate that off, what I feel or want from what I actually believe and what I think is true, good, or right. I think that is definitely a skill that I have had to acquire and I imagine it is a skill that everyone has to acquire: how to distinguish between being selfish

and being defensive of what you believe in and what you really want, in a more selfless kind of way, to make happen in the world. (Aqua Lad)

Aftermath, Theme IV: Deciding on the Relationship

The aftermath writes the conflict into one's personal history. Some participants were interviewed while in the midst of the conflicts they discussed, for others the conflicts either were recently passed or were many years passed. Two aspects seem present when participants consider the future of a relationship. The first of these concerns the process of making a decision about the future, the second concerns how participants acted on that decision.

In becoming aware of, and reflectively exploring, possible futures for the present relationship, participants discussed how they debated with themselves as what to do, the issues that contributed to the decision they made, and the consequences of the conflict for the relationship. As Jeff notes:

> I just don't know what to do, because again you know I try not to sit around and mill about and bitch about it and go into a state of inertia; I try to change things; I try to get my opinions out in one way or another. (Jeff)

For others, issues of trust and commitment factor into their decision:

> Trust has to be regained for me. Proving yourself to me makes it better, instead of just not doing anything about it; so why am I going to waste my time? (Missy)

> After I gave a lot of thought to it I figured maybe I was just a convenience friend, they were like 'oh, since she's here, let's hang out.' (Holly)

A^2 stuck with her husband for many years trying to help him become a better husband and better human being, until she concluded that ultimately she would be unable to do so:

> So instead of getting mad at him, I was trying to study his weaknesses and trying to see how he could be helped or what could be done. I never thought he was really mean or a deviate or anything like that because I just didn't know what all that was. (A^2)

Malachi Murmur discusses how his usual manner of dealing with conflict in public venues will not work in intimate relationships:

> A lot of times I have difficulty in managing conflict or even having conflict with people I know. Maybe because my usual way of dealing with it won't work because I want to

continue to know these people and be friends with these people or something because they are family. (Malachi Murmur)

For Aqua Lad the decision was based on assessing the sincerity of the other:

I knew that if I invoked that story there was absolutely nothing that she would have to say. I knew that she might find some way to dance out of it, but it would have been a dishonest and insincere way that she would have done it. But I knew that if she was going to be sincere in this argument, once I told that story she had absolutely nothing to counter me. (Aqua Lad)

The question of whether to remain in a relationship or to let-it-go was still lingering for some and the way they fixed the meaning of the conflict in the aftermath seemed to contribute to the answer given. Table 4.3 provides a summary of what I learned was happening at the time the interviews were conducted. Seventeen conflicts resulted in a termination of the relationship, such as a divorce or break-up. Eleven were either completely or partially resolved and the participant remained in the relationship. Eight of the conflicts discussed remained unresolved at the time of the interview. There was not sufficient information to determine the status of two of the conflicts, with one being a potential situation that has not yet led to overt conflict.

For participants who opted to end the conflict relationship, the finality of that decision was quite clear. Those who remained in relationship, however, noted some desire to change the ongoing patterns of the relationship. For many the fundamental metaphor of the continuing relationship was one of recognizing their own or the other's relational pattern (or cycle) and of accepting or resisting it:

It's a pattern for me…from the time I was thirteen with my first major friendship/relationship where I got close with someone and then I run away. (Ma'a)

Maybe I did pick a girl that does that [acts chaotically] and that is just continuing the cycle. (Sanford)

Christin recognizes different patterns in different relationships; with her best friend, she notes:

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Table 4.3: Status of Conflict Relationship Discussed at Time of Interview

Participant	Conflict Relationship	Resolution
A[2]		
	Marriage	Divorced (Ended)
Aqua Lad		
	Online debate	Ended
	Dispute with audience members for political speech	Unresolved
	Mother and sister	Mutual Understanding/Partial Resolution
	Father	Came to terms with Conflict
	Jail inspector	Mutual Respect/Final Resolution Unknown
Christin		
	Roommate	Unresolved
	High school friends	One Resolved; One Ended
Holly		
	Colleague	Unresolved
	Friend	Relationship Ended
	Ex-Boyfriend	Relationship Ended
	Friends from high school	Relationship Ended
	Actors in play	Resolved
Jeff		
	Parents	Resolved
	Colleagues at school	Resolved
	A female friend/love interest	Unresolved
	High school bully	Relationship Ended
	Paris Hilton and other cultural figures	Irresolvable
Jo		
	Ex-boyfriend	Relationship Ended
	Best friend	Relationship Ended
	Ex-boyfriend's current girlfriend	Relationship Ended
Ma'a		
	Ex-girlfriend	Relationship Ended
	Ex's family	Relationship Ended
	Current girlfriend	Unknown

Participant	Conflict Relationship	Resolution
Malachi Murmur		
	Cut-off in traffic/hit by trucker/tailgaters	Unresolved; insurance company was sued by truck-driver
	Worker at Subway	Interaction Ended
	Best Friend	Resolved
	Friends	Resolved
	Aunt	Resolved
	Mother	Resolved
	The Driving Professor	Unknown
Missy		
	Friends from high school	Relationship Ended
	Friend's boyfriend	Partially Resolved
Orlando		
	Father	Unresolved
	Step-mother	Relationship Ended
	Ex-girlfriend	Relationship Ended
Sanford		
	Mother	Unresolved
	Ex-girlfriends	Relationships Ended

I felt like she and I were not spending as much time together, but the second I felt that way she and I sat down and had a talk about it and it was really like a mature situation and nobody was mad about anything. It was just how I feel about things and I just wanted you to know about it and that's the way I handle things with some other people. (Christin)

The choice for the future then becomes (1) to remain in the pattern, (2) to change the relational pattern, or (3) to exit the pattern and end the relationship. If the relationship is perceived to have already ended, some participants walk away, others seek revenge. In this sense, the experience of face-to-face conflict modifies the meaning of the first ground: the preexisting relationship.

For some participants, such as Sanford and A^2, the larger conflict is ongoing and is made up of many smaller, related incidents and this factored into the participant's decision to remain or to leave:

We always butted heads throughout my life, but I think where it really became something that affected me in my adult life was when she left my father and she just, it was very unexpected for me. They were never the type of couple who fought or was very, I mean she was always very verbal and loud but they didn't get in a lot of fights in regard to that matter. I think my father just kind of put up with it because there was no way he was going to win, and eventually she left. That basically, that caught me completely off guard and it kind of, I think the negative feelings that I had towards her were probably solidified that much more and for many years, I'd say a good 8 to 10 years, I didn't really talk to her much. There was a level of civility, I always tried to be civil, holidays and many other times, but I didn't go out of my way to make contact or be a part of her life because of all that anger I felt. I guess its something that being, it's been worked out over time. In its current state it's something that's being worked out on a daily basis. (Sanford)

For Sanford, the plan is to stay with the relationship with his mother. However, A^2 describes her decision for many years to stick with her marriage before finally leaving:

Once it was a pattern, when I would accept it and do what he asked, it was not out of real sympathy. It was just because I was trying to work a marriage. (A^2)

Jo gives an example of 'letting the conflict go' and of leaving the relationship:

I could just let it go and let it be their problem and I didn't have to deal with it anymore. That is pretty much how I decided how I felt about the situation was it was all their problem; I didn't need to deal with that. I could just ignore them and they would go away hopefully. (Jo)

Orlando describes an uncomfortable acceptance of the problems in her relationship with her father:

> He has always been a hypocrite to me before I realized the emotional intelligence factor, that he is prepubescent in many ways. We had a lot of conflicts about how he never respected my mother and her role in his kids lives, that she raised us, that she was mother and father and even with me he would not be a father, he would always be a buddy. We had arguments until I almost stopped asking for it and I accepted it. (Orlando)

In a rare instance within this corpus, Jeff describes taking revenge on his antagonist:

> The guy had no reason for it at all, he just started a fight and my parents really had pity on me. A month later—I really am not proud of this—I had been going to the gym every day. What does everyone do after they get their ass kicked? They go to the gym. I put on some weight and I found this guy and I took it a little too far. I really hurt this guy. It was actually to my shame that I was proud of it. I went home that day and my parents were ashamed of me when they found out I had started a fight with someone. (Jeff)

Missy describes how she has changed her relationship with a friend to that of an acquaintance, but has maintained a relationship with this person nonetheless:

> I am civil and I call her my friend for the two other girls because I don't want to start a confrontation. I will get along with her, but I won't share any secrets or do things that friend's do. (Missy)

Figure 4.4 on the following page depicts the thematic structure of the aftermath in the experience of face-to-face conflict.
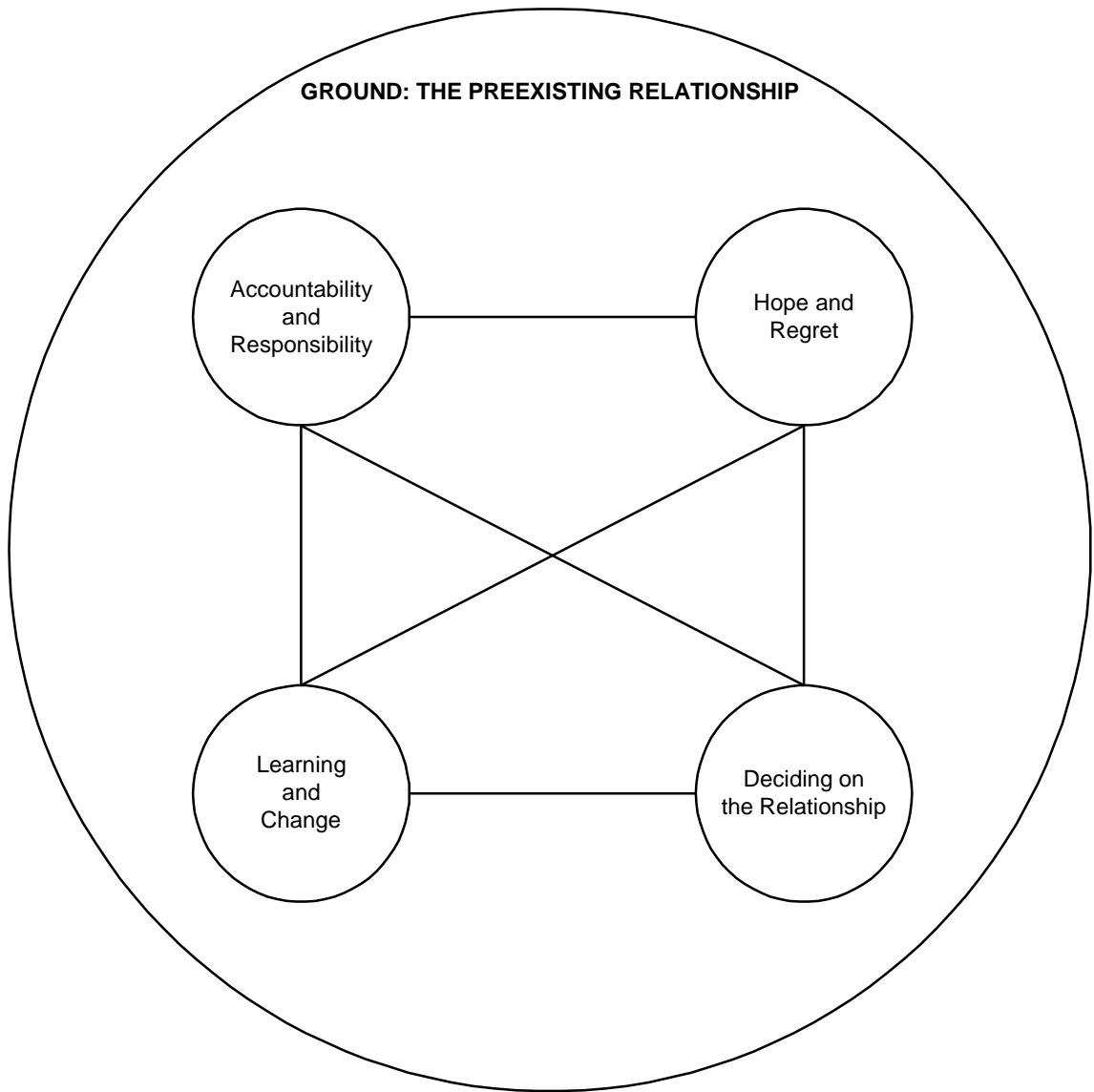
Figure 4.4: Structure of Themes for the Moment of the Aftermath in the Experience of Face-to-Face Conflict

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CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

In this investigation, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to explore the thematic meaning of face-to-face conflict as articulated in participant accounts. The total corpus of accounts consisted of approximately 17 hours of in-depth, dialogical interviews with 11 participants asked to describe 'a situation (or situations) in which they experienced a conflict between themselves and another person(s).' For these participants, situations of face-to-face conflict define events that contribute to the complexity and unpredictability of everyday social experience. Within this context, the structure of the face-to-face conflict centers around three *moments* that emerge against the ground of a *preexisting relationship*: *betrayal*, *fight*, and *aftermath*. Within each moment—or area of intentional focus—interrelated sets of themes serve to structure its meaning. Six themes describe the moment of Betrayal. These are: (1) the issue(s) calling into question the preexisting relationship, (2) an awareness of severity or seriousness of the issue(s) for one's personal and social identity and/or the relationship, (3) concerns about the unfairness or wrongness of what has happened, (4) a feeling of shock and surprise, (5) feeling hurt and losing trust in the other and/or the relationship, and/or (6) the process of deciding whether to act in response what has happened.

The experience of the second moment—Fight—consists of five themes: (1) control, power and strength, (2) blaming and being blamed, (3) frustration and confusion in recognizing an inability to understand what is happening, (4) a feeling and fear and anger toward the other person(s) and/or the situation, and/or (5) a feeling of being disconnected and different from the other in terms of identity, personality, or perspective.

The experience of the third moment—Aftermath—consists of four themes: (1) accountability and responsibility concerns a final verdict regarding who is culpable for the conflict, (2) an expression of hope and regret concerns future and past actions and events, (3) learning and change concerns a recognition of difference brought about by the

betrayal and fight for one's self and/or the other person(s), and/or (4) deciding on the relationship concerns (a) whether to stick with the relationship, (b) leave the relationship or (c) change the relationship.

The following first-person statement describes the meaning of the face-to-face conflict experience as it emerged across participant accounts. While each account is unique, themes that were consistent across the accounts serve as the basis for this statement:

I become aware of being in conflict with you when I feel that some act and/or event has betrayed, undermined, damaged, or interfered with our preexisting relationship. This issue, action or event came up unexpectedly and was shocking to me. It was wrong and unfair and I feel hurt by you and/or the situation. I feel that my trust in you and in our relationship has been called into question and this loss of trust may have consequences for the future of our relationship. I feel a need to do something about it and have to decide whether or not to act. If I act, or do not act, we could end up in a fight—a more serious situation than we had to begin with.

If we end up in a fight, I feel threatened by a lack of control in the situation and this makes me feel powerless. I feel a need to reassert my personal power—my strength—and winning or losing becomes a very significant concern for me. I feel like you are blaming me for things I did not do or that I am only partially responsible for doing. I do not understand why you are treating me like this—you seem so irrational and confusing—and I do not know what to do. I feel fearful and angry about the situation, as it seems like you, or the relationship, have become threatening to me. You, who are my former friend, spouse, parent, etc., seem so unfamiliar and different to me and I no longer feel connected to you.

After our fight ended, I am aware of needing to make a decision about what to do. Sometimes I acknowledge that I am the one to blame for what happened, sometimes you are to blame, and sometimes we are both to blame. Sometimes I think about what I could have done or said, or I feel bad about what I did or said. Often, I feel as if I learned something about myself, about you and/or our relationship and have changed because of

what I learned, and I hope or recognize that you have, or have not, done the same. At this point, we can either remain in our relationship, as it is, and let this particular conflict simmer for a while, end the relationship, or start a new and different sort of relationship (perhaps putting the conflict behind us).

Participants in this investigation displayed demographic variability in educational, socioeconomic, age and other relevant variables. There was, however, a bias toward female participants in the group, and if generalizing to a population were the intent, this bias might call into question the representativeness of the sample. The intent here, however, was to gather a diversity of exemplars of conflict experiences until *saturation*, or repetition of themes across the corpus, occurred. This criterion was satisfied at nine accounts; two additional accounts were collected to extend thematic saturation. Experiences described ranged from being heckled by audience members while delivering a lecture, being cut-off in traffic, and other conflicts with best friends, spouses and parents that concern issues such as being put at risk without consenting to it, arguing over a difference of opinion or belief with another as well as negotiating family politics and love or dating problems.

During dialogical interviews that produced the present corpus, participants often recalled life experiences of social conflict that included multiple episodes and tended to involve more people than the two-person dyad often assumed in the face-to-face situation. These additional parties were observers to the conflict episode, innocent bystanders affected by the conflict, or directly involved as disputants. The situations described turned out to be far more diverse than initially anticipated. The statement opening the interviews—'describe a situation (or situations) in which you experienced a conflict between yourself and another person'—elicited accounts that involved individuals ranging from strangers in public venues (on the road or online), political figures and celebrities in the media, to accounts of conflict with family, friends, and acquaintances.

A few participants developed accounts that reached rather high levels of abstraction and discussed conflict at the level of culture, religious belief, and political

attitudes as instantiated in the immediacy of face-to-face interactions. The latter part of the investigator's bracketing interview also indicates a personal leaning in this direction (excerpts included in Appendix A). Other accounts remained concretely focused on the meaning of conflict within personal life experience, such as Sanford's feelings of abandonment and concern about being adopted affecting the conflict he has with his mother and with female love interests. A^2 (whose interview is included as Appendix D) tends toward the concrete in her description of an ongoing 22-year conflict she had with her ex-husband and how this conflict played out in her immediate social network of family, friends and other significant community members (particularly a parish priest).

Two general patterns of exposition were noted in the way participants talked about their experiences. Some participants described situations of conflict with strangers as well as with people directly known to them. Others tended to focus on conflicts that only involved persons known to them, such as close friends, intimates, and parents. One group of participants tended to be more abstract in exposition, provided more philosophical explanations, and sought to justify their own and others' behaviors. Others tended to be very concrete and specific in describing their episodes and often focused on how the conflict played out within their personal social network. Such descriptions tended to involve detailed descriptions of social connectedness and what these relationships meant in terms of the conflict being discussed. This latter group also tended to provide accounts of conflict that had been resolved or had reached a stopping-point, whereas the group that discuss conflict on a more abstracted level talked about long-term, ongoing conflicts they experience in both public and private life.

Participants also seemed to differ in terms of their interpersonal styles and general linguistic patterns. Some participants seemed somewhat reserved and calm whereas others were animated and energetic. Linguistically, the idiom and voice of some participants seemed to remain within a single register whereas others moved between two registers, one being a reserved, calm and evenly paced and the other, an emotionally intense, louder and faster voice. The latter of these registers included more stops, starts, and occasional obscenity. Relational style and register tended to go together for most

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participants: reserved participants tended to stay within a single register whereas more energetic participants tended to move between registers. There was no clear relationship between participants' styles of exposition, interpersonal styles and linguistic patterns and the seriousness of the experiences they discussed.

Recursive Temporal Patterns in Face-to-Face Conflict Accounts

Within the extant literature, various conceptions of the stages and phases of conflict have been discussed (cf. Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003; Morley & Stevenson, 1977; Pondy, 1967; Rummel, 1976). Narrative conceptions of conflict have been studied and applied as intervention strategies by researchers such as Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) and Kellett and Dalton (2001). My interviews did not indicate that accounts of conflict unfold in a linear pattern, but rather are recursive in structure. The third person, scientific description of conflict indicates its linearity, however, when participants reflect on their own conflict experiences, their accounts tend not to be linear.

Thus, in Chapter IV, the concept of a *moment* was used to describe the temporal structure of face-to-face conflict in participant accounts. The reason for introducing this term is to suggest an alternative description of time to that of linear stages, phases, or narratives. The Latin 'movere'—the etymological root of 'moment'—indicates movement in space and time. The technical/scientific term, 'moment,' captures a similar idea by indicating a range of possible values (such as the standard deviation in statistics) for determining measures of a phenomenon to be treated as equivalent within some margin of error. It is for these reasons that this term was chosen as an alternative to stage or phase. A clearly defined linear structure can be derived from the conflict experience on the basis of after-the-fact analysis although this seems a second-order derivation by the researcher.

The scientific descriptions of temporal patterns in episodes of conflict often rely on reified concepts of stages and phases. For instance, Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast (2003) describe conflict in terms of processes of disruption, differentiation and then

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integration, revealing a three-stage temporal model of conflict. These stages do seem to correspond to the moments of betrayal (disruption), fight (differentiation), and aftermath (integration), although their description tends to emphasize third-person reflections over first-person meanings. Morley and Stevenson (1977), Pondy (1967), and Rummel (1976) also emphasize themes that are reflective in nature. Within phase models of conflict, the conflict is viewed as progressing through stages in an *orderly* way. The outside observer of conflict interactions can ascertain the phase or stage of the conflict, but being in the position of observer rather than a dialogical partner, may not be aware of the personal meanings the events have for each of the disputants and that each aspect of meaning is being recursively informed by each other meaning.

While various interpersonal dynamics are highlighted in these accounts—such as those surrounding participants seeking a 'balance of power'—these dynamics are often viewed in terms of parties testing each other's willingness to make concessions and/or to follow through on threats made. What these researchers miss is the significance of personal and social identity that is being put on the line; when this aspect of conflict is addressed, it is often treated as a complicating factor, stalling the progress of the conflict toward resolution as the interaction escalates in volleys of attack and counterattack. Aspects of the phenomenon that are most relevant to the scientific, stage-theory perspective are observable actions and responses, and what and how resources are being exchanged. From this perspective, a hostile and entrenched conflict moves to a situation of integrative problem solving and resolution, with issues of personal control and judgment shifted to a rational focus on mutually satisfactory solutions (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003).

This understanding of conflict does not fit the structure of the present set of conflict accounts. When participants discussed their experiences there were many stops and starts in the flow of the account (see Appendix C). Situations discussed blended into each other, were sometimes dropped in the middle of one only to be picked up again in the middle of another. This aspect of the way accounts were narrated does not indicate incoherence or a lack of intelligence on the part of the investigator or participants. More

likely it indicates the embedded nature of the conflict experience within participants' lives and the depth of the personal meanings associated with it. Conflict experiences do not exist in isolation but serve to inform each other and to inform experiences across other relational situations.

The meaning of a present conflictual event sometimes may only make sense when taking into account another, perhaps long-passed, event. This is the basis for all interpretive processes (Gadamer, 1960). Due to the open-ended interviewing technique used to collect the corpus of accounts, participants determined the flow of dialogue. They were first 'experts' concerning their own experience; thus, with no axe to grind, the interviewer was open to participant accounts and, as with much dialogue in everyday life, these accounts took on a nonlinear temporal structure.

Moments, then, are best thought of as points of personal focus within an experience of face-to-face conflict. When participants discussed betrayal, they discussed an interrelated set of themes associated with it; the same is true for fight and aftermath. For instance, a participant may begin his or her account by discussing the fight, and then move to discussing the betrayal and the aftermath. The order is not as important as the structure of meanings within the situations and moments discussed. Across accounts, many variations in narrative pattern emerged. Particular themes, however, consistently emerged in association with these moments.

This temporal structure is in accord with that described by Merleau-Ponty (1962), who argues that human experience is not lived in a *linear* way. Instead, a present moment in human experience may exist for us as a *psychological past* when we remember something, or as a *psychological future* when we anticipate what may be. Psychological time is recursive and does not follow the linear pattern of ordinary clock time (Dapkus, 1985). Thus, it is reasonable that participant accounts did not follow the linear structure of clock time, yet were coherent and communicable. The experience as recounted is informed by all that has intervened between the original experience and the present moment of dialogue. The meaning of the events recounted, often having great personal significance, are ongoingly transformed and reinterpreted by participants.

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Participants discussed the ways in which their past and present understanding has been changed by having experienced a conflict and that memories of the event often yielded insights even for years after the fact. Jeff discusses this aspect of conflict when he recounts his present shame over having exacted a violent revenge against a high school bully and his present vow never to handle conflicts in that way again.

The Ground of the Preexisting Relationship

A preexisting relationship is the ground, or context, in which moments of conflict emerge. The meaning of this relationship for participants is based on cultural conceptualizations of role relationships and role expectations (e.g., parent-child, husband-wife, best-friends, etc.) as well as on beliefs about the specific relationship that have accumulated over time. For participants, predictability and stability define the ideal state of a preexisting relationship. Betrayal, violation and/or breach of a preexisting relationship often concern problems that specify a sudden absence of characteristics that had made the relationship coherent and safe. Often in close personal relationship participants recounted, certain allowances were made for the other. In situations with strangers much higher expectations for maintenance of social roles—in terms of politeness, for instance—were articulated. It seems that in close personal relationships, participants describe a blending of role expectations with the realities of the relationship. In relations between people unknown to each other, role expectations are all we have to make sense of each other's behavior.

When discussing a preexisting relationship that is 'close,' participants often emphasized similarities between themselves and the other as well as a tolerance for differences. Differences that become potential sources of conflict were often tolerated and at other times acknowledged as endearing, albeit frustrating, qualities. Consider Sanford's statement about his ongoing conflict with his mother: "She's a great woman; She's just fucking nuts" (Sanford). His statement indicates that he accepts, at times, a fundamental difference between himself and his mother; yet, he also reports that her 'nuttiness' creates turmoil as he prefers 'control and stability.'

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In close relationships, participants described investing time, effort, and emotion toward developing and maintaining the relationship. In fulfilling relational expectations such as loyalty, honesty, fairness, equality, reciprocity and so on, participants come to share a sense of safety and trust. Gouldner (1960) proposed that the basis for relationships is the belief that 'one helps and does not hurt those who help us.' It seems that a similar attitude was adopted by participants in reflecting on issues of the betrayal and how these issues were antithetical to the relationship. Fiske (1992) also suggests that fairness, sharing, and distribution of significant resources according to implict, but *agreed upon*, rules are the basis for social relations. Goffman (1951) and Levinas (1969) discuss how people, who are present to each other, demand of each other interactions that maintain identity, moral treatment and respect, etc., and this complicit maintenance is the basis for predictability in a preexisting relationship.

Hawthorne (1989) has noted that a need for reparation emerges when a relational expectation goes unfulfilled. Many such expectations concern feelings of esteem, identity or other substantive emotional concerns. With the breach of a relationship (Hawthorne, 1989) or a relational injury (Rowe, Halling, Davies, Leifer, Powers, and van Bronkhurst, 1989) reciprocity norms have been violated. Thus, conflict may begin with a betrayal of some expectation that brings about a breach in the preexisting relationship and, with this betrayal or breach, a sense of injury. The betrayal breaks the relational pattern by undermining an expectation in a fundamental way. In this situation, personal and social identity is called into question as the participant recognizes what aspect of the preexisting relationship has been undermined by the other's, or his or her own, actions.

The breach in Hawthorne's (1989) study was often reported to be dramatic and harmful—but not always. It is the same with betrayals in the present investigation: many were perceived to be serious by participants; some, however, were not. What is most fundamental to these understandings of breach and betrayal is that they imply a recognized difference between a before and after that brings to the participant's awareness some characteristic of the preexisting relationship absent after the betrayal.

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These characteristics are described in terms of fairness, sincerity, equality, loyalty, fidelity, respect, and so on.

From the scientific, existential and social constructivist understandings of conflict, the basis for this phenomenon is found in the interdependence of relationships. Deutsch (1973) specifies negative interdependence as a fundamental cause of conflict. In negative interdependence, parties become mutually opposed as one party's actions interfere with the ability of the other party to achieve his or her goals. From this perspective, parties act within a situation of limited resources and influence each other's ability to obtain a 'reasonable' portion of resources.

Social constructivists add to this the problem of social meaning and identity; that is, the mutual claims being made with respect to the significance of the relationship and their roles within it. A resource is not valuable in itself, but because it is constructed as something to be desired and sought after within a social world. A resource is something *to be shared in a fair and equitable way*. McNamee and Gergen (1999) argue that, within Western culture, there is often an emphasis on viewing social actors as independent entities motivated by self-interest to maximize their share of finite and valued resources. What is being disputed, however, indicates what is important to the parties as individuals. Individuals demand of each other a fair share—and equitable treatment—in their interdependent pursuits.

While individuals may be aware of the social roles played in their relationships, the mutuality of these roles may be overlooked until it has been undermined as one fails to live up to it. With that shift in behavior, the expectations we hold (or held) for the other's behavior become salient to us. As Levinas (1969) argued, the existential fact of being present to an other elicits and makes real for us issues of morality, care and concern and calls on us to fulfill our responsibilities to the other. The preexisting relationship is the situation in which these responsibilities are being fulfilled and relational partners freely encounter each other. Nowell and Pollio (1991) elaborate on the human experience of other people in terms of the maintenance of role relationships:

Even if the aim were not to manipulate the other, but simply to get along, the cumulative effect of self-presentation would be to promote distance between people. Under these conditions of modern life, it is not surprising to find that much of contemporary social psychology concerns such topics as forming impressions or attributing reasons for the actions of others. These interests suggest that we experience others as events to understand rather than as people to be experienced. There is a peculiar distance involved when the meaning of the other, either to himself or to us, requires a reflective rather than perceptual act. Although it may be too strong to say that the drama of communal life requires distance, deception, discretion, and deliberation, it does not seem wrong to say that we frequently experience the other as an event to be understood rather than one to be encountered (pg. 130).

The shift in perspective when role relationships are called into question is the moment in which both the ground of the preexisting relationship (and its significance) and the moment of betrayal become salient for participants. In Nowell and Pollio's terms the perceptual act of encountering the other becomes the reflective act of making sense of the role relationships present in the preexisting relationship and how these roles—presentations of self—have been undermined.

The Moment of Betrayal

The first moment of conflict emerges in an awareness that relational expectations have gone unfulfilled and have undermined participants' sense of identity, self-esteem as well as feelings of security and confidence in the preexisting relationship. Many researchers and theorists consider the violation of expectations in a relationship as a significant issue in conflict, even perhaps the fundamental cause for it and its escalation (Gouldner, 1960; Hawthorne, 1989). Hawthorne, for example, points out that in the experience of reparation, a 'breach' dramatically changes an individual's sense of self, other, and the relationship. It consists of an awareness of injustice and unfairness within the relationship and elicits a sense of urgency to do something about the breach. Rowe et al. (1989) note a similar phenomenon concerning injury in the phenomenology of forgiveness. What is clear is that the preexisting relationship stabilized the participants' sense of who they are before the emergence of conflict and gives thematic coherence to their description of the experience of the betrayal.

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The experience of breach relates to the themes of shock and surprise, as well as to those of unfairness and wrongness. A sudden and shocking change in the behavior of the other has the effect of undermining a participants' confidence in what once had seemed a secure and stable relationship. This change can be traumatic if it is perceived to be an unfair action unexpectedly committed by the other, who comes to be described as a *'so-called'* friend, lover, spouse, etc. The designation of 'so-called' indicates a falseness perceived in the actions of the other. Hawthorne also notes an experience of urgency surrounding the breach, an aspect that seems related to themes of seriousness and deciding whether to act. The breach, like the moment of betrayal, leads to a sense of resentment that yields experiences of feeling hurt by and of losing trust in the other.

The reasons participants give for feeling betrayed tend to range in seriousness from minor disagreements to dangerous instances of physical violence. Seriousness is a reflective theme concerning the magnitude of the grievance or issue(s). It, along with the theme of unfairness or wrongness, represents a shift in roles from those of the preexisting relationship to those of 'victim' and 'perpetrator.' The more serious the issue(s) or problem(s) are believed to be, the more serious the events are perceived to be in changing the preexisting relationship and thus disrupting "the wholeness or integrity of [a person's] life" (Rowe et al., 1989, pg. 239).

Seriousness may also be conceived of as an "anticipatory" theme; one in which a projected future is called into question. The greater the perceived change for one's sense of self and for the relationship in the moment of betrayal, the greater the perceived disruption to one's life and the greater the seriousness attributed to the issue(s). As Adler (1998) notes, an individual develops an imagined future for themselves—a "guiding fiction"—and when this vision is called into question, it may bring about sense of confusion, fear and insecurity. The participant Christin notes a parallel idea: "small issues are issues you can get over … a lot of times, you don't get past big issues." The specification of the issue(s) and the seriousness of the issue(s) are primarily reflective themes, as the participant is giving reasons for the conflict and assessing the magnitude of change he or she has anticipated for themselves and the relationship.

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The theme of unfairness and wrongness primarily concerns injustice done by the other and thus relates to the emerging roles of victim and perpetrator. It also represents the moment in which the participant specifies that the other has wronged him or her by some standard external to the relationship (e.g., social norms, moral prescriptions, etc.). In those rare situations in which participants portrayed themselves in the role of perpetrator, the issue(s) were often surrounding some miscommunication or misperception. This may be seen in Holly's falling out with a good friend because she dated her friend's ex-boyfriend under the impression that her friend had given her permission to do so. This is consistent with Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman's (1990) findings concerning the narrative patterns of victim and perpetrator accounts. When participants narrated from the perspective of victim, extreme (i.e., serious) violations of moral standards were recounted, such as the betrayals enacted by A^2's ex-husband or the dangerously violent actions of Jo's ex-best friend, ex-boyfriend, and ex-boyfriend's current girlfriend.

Regardless of the perspective taken when discussing the moment of betrayal, participants described an experience of shock and surprise at the betrayal. Some describe it as 'unexpected' and 'sudden' from the standpoint of the preexisting relationship. As Ma'a notes: "I would have never thought….That was a surprise." Shock and surprise emerge as what was a predictable pattern of interaction has become unpredictable and volatile. Goffman's (1951) analysis of the confidence game describes a similar experience for the 'mark' or victim when he or she has been led to expect one thing from the relationship and when the con disappears, they are suddenly left feeling vulnerable and open to social censure. Goffman describes this feeling as primarily concerning the fact that the mark has suddenly had his or her self-definition—as a socially savvy person—undermined by the confidence game, a situation in which usual assumptions about the nature of social life are exploited by the criminal to obtain a valued resource from the mark.

Participants report feeling hurt by the betrayal and losing trust in the other and in the relationship because of it. This hurt and loss of trust may come about as the

participant feels that his or her victimization by the other in the moment of the betrayal was in some senses complicit (Goffman, 1951). In believing in the preexisting relationship and having placed a great deal of existential significance in the relationship, betrayal represents a radical questioning of the relationship and the trust the person had in it. As Ma'a notes: "the feeling of loss is tied in with investment." Orlando describes a feeling of "self-doubt" and issues of "trust" and "control" in relation to this theme. Hurt and lost trust may elicit for the participant the feelings of urgency to do something about the betrayal, as Hawthorne (1989) described subsequent to the breach.

In deciding whether to act in the moment of betrayal, the participant has to weigh many complicated possibilities, and this decision brings to the fore both cognitive and emotional concerns in imagining possible futures for the interactions of the fight and the relationship. Goffman (1951) describes the threat of revenge present after the confidence-game has been perpetrated and the 'cooling' processes that come into play to help a victim re-stabilize his or her sense of self and faith in the social world. 'Cooling' has the effect of lessening the threat the mark presents when deciding to seek revenge. 'Cooling' is a social process in which the mark is persuaded not to act on the betrayal presented by the confidence game. In the present corpus, the decision to act inevitably brings about some discussion of the moment of the fight; the decision not to act, however, did not always quell conflict. Instead, it often led to 'cold' conflicts that seemed to eventually escalate to a fight, especially if the other recognized that they had betrayed the participant and had expected a response (cf. Thomas, 2006).

From the perspective of the human relations school, conflict-handling strategies pertain directly to this decision whether to act (cf. Blake & Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1976). The decision, according to these researchers, is based on a concern for self (assertiveness) and a concern for the other (cooperativeness). In light of the present corpus, a decision to act leading to a fight relates to a high concern for self and a low concern for the other (a forcing/dominating strategy), or low concern for self and low concern for the other (an avoidance strategy). Participants describe conflict behavior in terms such as 'coming on strongly' or 'putting things on the table' typically believed to

be more 'mature' ways to handle conflict, whereas 'ignoring someone' or 'holding out' is viewed as less mature. Strongly asserting one's self in response to the betrayal as well as acknowledging the betrayal by purposefully not giving a response (which the other expects) seems to correspond with the emergence of the fight.

The Moment of the Fight

The moment of the fight, while not focused on destroying an opponent as in Rapoport's (1960) definition, is a moment of feeling a need to assert one's self and of being denied the possibility of doing so. Thus, issues of manipulation and strategy come into play, revealing the fight as the height of an instrumental *I-it* relation between disputants (Buber, 1924/1987). For this reason, one may think of the betrayal and particularly the fight in terms of the seemingly irresolvable scenario described in Sartre's *No Exit* (1945). The individual is locked in a defensive and destructive relation with the other, and is given little option but to attempt to assert his or her self within this relation. As May (1972) explains, to not attempt to exercise some control and self-defense in a fight may result in a "zombie-like deadening of consciousness" (pg. 42-43).

The fight is often described in terms of feeling a loss of control over the circumstances of the interaction, and hence one's interpersonal power and personal strength is called into question. Participants describe using strategies of control within the fight, or of having others use strategies to control them. Feeling powerless is an extraordinarily vexing situation, as Malachi Murmur portrays it in describing his conflicts with others on the road: 'they're just gone, I feel powerless,' or Sanford in conflicts with his mother, 'her control is very much out of control'. Even the threat of potential powerlessness may lead to extreme self-doubt and a need for strong assertion. The psychologist May (1972) described five domains of power that are potentialities in human life, and when these aspects of power are blocked, the individual reacts with escalating levels of aggression, leading eventually to violent action against the other(s). As May conjectures:

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A great deal of human life can be seen as the conflict between power on one side (i.e., effective ways of influencing others, achieving the sense in interpersonal relations of the significance of one's self) and powerlessness on the other. In this conflict our efforts are made much more difficult by the fact that we block out both sides, the former because of the evil connotation of 'power drives,' and the latter because our powerlessness is to painful to confront . . . . As soon as powerlessness is referred to by its more personal name, helplessness or weakness, many people will sense that they are heavily burdened by it (pg. 21-22).

Orlando notes the significance of control, power, and strength in stating:

I was at the point that I would put up with any situation but that. I would walk ten miles if that was required just to not give him the impression that he had me, that he had some power over me.

Having control in the moment of the fight is fundamentally an issue of self-assertion, of feeling that one is effective and can handle whatever the other may try to do to disrupt or damage one's sense of self and one's ability to achieve one's own ends. One of May's (1972) domains of power refers to self-assertion: when the individual is met with resistance in the social world, he or she has the power to make demands on others and to have others respond to those demands. If demands are resisted or undermined, however, the individual has to force the other to accede (barring violent action). Finally, if nonviolent aggression proves ineffective, the individual may move toward overt violence. For May, issues of power in human life manifest themselves in an escalating tension between that of demanding self-expression (power) and of acknowledging the demand of that expression by others (powerlessness). As Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) have argued, an individual belief that one is powerless, helpless, and dependent may be a significant factor contributing to the escalation of destructive conflict.

The meaning of blame relates to two aspects of the fight: first, the participant is able to take up a mantle of moral power by adopting a victim role and, second, blame may be used to justify extraordinary and dangerous actions toward the other (the perpetrator) being blamed. Within the scientific and philosophical literature, it seems that the victim-perpetrator relationship consists of a victim role and a correlate victim perspective, but only a perpetrator role—'perpetrator' being perceived and designated to the other almost always from the perspective of the victim. It can be a dangerous

dichotomization. Participants often seek to resist seeing themselves in the role of perpetrator as this role denies them full status within the interaction. From the perspective of the victim, the perpetrators' explanations are empty excuses, and their potential mistakes, intentional and unjustifiable acts of harm. Moreover, the social world tends to side with the victim. Being blamed (or blame-worthy) denies the blamed individual a perspective and hence a voice with any moral force. Thus, within the fight, exchanges concern 'who is at fault?'—'who has wronged whom?' Most of the accounts that serve as the basis for this analysis were narrated from the victim's perspective. Even from this perspective, however, participants note that the perpetrator sought to blame them for the betrayal, or to use other betrayals, as justification for the present betrayal enacted against the participant.

Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) contend that a belief in unjust treatment at the hands of others contributes significantly to conflict. Blaming and being blamed is no doubt a controversial theme for discussion here as assuming a position of neutrality on the matter may seem like I have taken the side of the perpetrator(s) described by the participants. This is certainly not the case. McNamee and Gergen (1999) emphasize the significance of 'relational responsibility' for assessing fault within conflict interactions and that it is our cultural bias toward viewing disputants as morally accountable 'subjective agencies,' who are solely responsible for their own actions within the conflict, that lead them to make attributions of victim and perpetrator to themselves and to each other. An attribution like this seems to serve to maintain the fight, rather than resolve it. When we shift our emphasis to conflict as a transactional phenomenon, for which both disputants share responsibility, rather than as an exchange relation between independent entities, fault cannot be located absolutely in any one individual.

Denied a sense of control over the conflict interaction and being blamed by the other, participants report feeling fear and anger toward the other. The other has become threatening to one's sense of identity and one feels unprotected and vulnerable in what seems an out of control situation. The theme of anger and fear is in accord with May's (1972) discussion of power and as well with themes in the Thomas, Smucker, and

Droppleman (1998) and Thomas (2003) studies of male and female experiences of anger. Women's experiences of anger often concern feelings of powerlessness in a relationship whereas men often report feelings that the anger-eliciting situation is wrong or unfair. In the moment of the fight, it seems that both themes are present and have relevance to the themes of fear and anger that emerge. In Horton-Deutsch and Horton's (2003) study of intractable conflict, participants report feeling fear of the other with whom they are unable to resolve a conflict and anger in a situation that seems out of control. These participants further note the negative effects of extreme stress—lost sleep and appetite, etc.—which they attribute to ruminating on their feelings of anger.

In this investigation, the theme of fear and anger was connected by some participants to a need to take time to be alone and reflect on the conflict. The negative emotions experienced within the fight and the experience of a loss of control and of blame make the moment of fight so aversive that participants may walk away from the interaction, only to return when things have 'cooled.' In Horton-Deutsch and Horton's (2003) study, the only resolution for intractable conflict was to walk away from the situation permanently—to leave and not return. Participants in this investigation, such as A^2, report finally giving up on a relationship because of intense feelings of fear and anger in a situation that became threatening to her physical safety and emotional well-being. Fear and anger concern what might happen in the out-of-control situation and thus relate to a radical revision of Adler's (1998) guiding fiction: a situation that is out of control is no longer predictable and hence gives no coherent indication of future. Feeling that anything can, and may, happen is connected to the theme of fear and anger and also to the incomprehensibility of the fight.

The theme of frustration and confusion indicates that participants felt unable to understand what was happening and why the other was doing what they were doing. This is fundamentally a cognitive theme—the participant is unable to make sense of their situation—although it also has an emotional component of frustration. Participants use statements like 'it didn't make any sense,' 'why can't we just talk?,' or 'we don't

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understand it completely' and often report frustration with the other and with themselves for not making sense of the situation.

The theme of disconnection and difference is often given as a reason for an inability to understand a fight. The other is viewed as being different in some fundamental way, in terms of personality or perspective, etc. This difference is viewed as the reason for the conflict, even though the participant is unable to ascertain what exactly is the difference. Feeling disconnected from the other speaks to the ineffective exchange that is unfolding between the disputants. The disputants are engaged in blaming each other, they are fearful of, and confused by, each other in a situation that is out of control and hence they feel disconnected and different from each other. Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) describe the destructive potential of us/them beliefs for conflict situations. Often a failure to understand the other may lead one to suspect the other has motives that are underhanded and dangerous. One cannot develop trust in a situation of disconnection because it does not allow for a mutual acknowledgement and understanding of difference. In a fight, the agree-to-disagree option is not on the table from the perspective of disputants; disconnection from the other never fully allows the participant to understand the other within the fight.

The Moment of the Aftermath

The aftermath is a reflective moment. Much of the initial storm represented by the betrayal and fight has died down, and the participant seeks to understand what the conflict means within the context of his or her life. The aftermath may perhaps represent a moment in which personal history is being written, victor or not.

A final verdict concerning accountability and responsibility for the conflict is significant here. The line existing in the initial dichotomization of victim and perpetrator blurs, and participants often acknowledge some responsibility for what happened. Participants are often able to view the other as a fellow human being with feelings, desires and meanings independent of the roles that emerged in the conflict. Sometimes, circumstances and misunderstandings beyond the control of either disputant are viewed

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as causing the fight. Other times, participants will acknowledge fault, and report that they learned and changed because of the fight.

The theme of learning and change seems to have a redemptive quality. While interviewing participants, there were times when unflattering characteristics of the self and questionable actions were described. Often, when participants would disclose in this way, they would explain themselves by providing a justification for what they did in terms of what they learned in the situation and how they have changed because of it. Such qualifying statements concerning learning and change seemed as if the participant was saying 'look, I did some bad things in a bad situation, but I did learn to be more mature and behave better in future conflicts.' Participants described things they regret having done and the hopes they have for themselves, the other, and the relationship.

A positive aspect to the aftermath, however, was not always the case. Some participants learned and changed in ways they viewed as destructive to future relationships—being stuck in a negative interpersonal pattern, being made insecure in love relationships—or they expressed regret at not having the presence of mind within the fight to get in a few really good caustic remarks. Reflecting on the fight participants report fantasizing about what they could have done and what the outcome might have been. This is similar to what participants reported in the Benson and Archer (2003) study of bar fighting in that they wish they had "given [their opponent] a bit more." The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962) reports a similar meaning in the lingering presence of the other being "felt as a threat" even after the conflict has ended. When participants discuss the theme of regret, they seem to be ruminating on their own powerlessness within the fight. They regret not being quick-witted enough or aggressive enough to have wielded more power and control in a situation that was out of control.

The aftermath defines a moment of decision as to what to do about the relationship. Some participants end their relationship, some repair or dramatically change their relationship (e.g., divorced spouses becoming friends), and some remain in the relationship with the issue(s) leading to the conflict remaining unchanged. This is a similar set of circumstances to those described by Hawthorne (1989) as exit, stalemate, or

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repair. Exit refers to the decision to leave the relationship, repair, to apologies and amends making within the relationship, and stalemate, to a tense and avoidant pattern in the relationship. A similar pattern was noted here in that participants discussed (a) leaving the relationship, (b) staying in the relationship (with the 'dysfunctional pattern' still in place), or (c) changing the relationship and starting anew.

The aftermath is often a creative moment in the experience of face-to-face conflict in which personal and social meanings are reconstructed and is that moment in which the possibilities present in conflict interactions become most clear. Even in an interaction such as the fight, the openness and possibility for new personal and interpersonal meanings are present. Thus, if one thinks of the betrayal and fight as Sartrean (1945/1989) moments, the aftermath certainly belongs to Buber (1924/1987; 1951/1999) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) since it represents a time of possibility for the parties in conflict and for their social relationship.

Arendt (1958) has argued that two fundamental social activities make possible human social life: making promises and forgiveness. Promises stabilize social life and forgiveness erases past transgressions (e.g., broken promises). In this light, one might view the preexisting relationship as an implicit promise relational partners have made to each other. The betrayal and fight may be viewed as breaking this promise. If this is the case, the aftermath becomes a moment of potential forgiveness and reconstruction of a sense of self and/or the relationship.

Psychological and Interpersonal Processes of Conflict

While the above discussion presents the structure of face-to-face conflict in a linear manner, one should recall that a *moment* is meant to convey an intentional focus on a set of meanings within the conflict experience; it should not be taken as indicating a stage. Moments, in fact, may be understood as locating aspects of five general psychological and interpersonal processes involved in the face-to-face conflict experience. On the following page, Table 5.1 enumerates these processes as they emerge across moments of conflict. These are: (1) controlling the conflict, (2) judging the

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Table 5.1: Psychological and Interpersonal Processes of Conflict

Psychological and Interpersonal Processes	Participant Accounts	
	Moments	**Experiential Themes**
Controlling the Conflict: Being Able to Decide and Act	Betrayal	Deciding Whether to Act
	Fight	Control, Power, Strength
	Aftermath	Deciding on the Relationship
Judging the Conflict: Socially-Relevant Evaluations	Betrayal	Unfairness and Wrongness
	Fight	Blaming and Being Blamed
	Aftermath	Accountability and Responsibility
Understanding the Conflict: Reflecting and Learning	Betrayal	Shock and Surprise
	Fight	Frustration and Confusion
	Aftermath	Learning and Change Hope and Regret
Feeling the Conflict: Positive/Negative Emotion	Betrayal	Feeling Hurt and Loss of Trust
	Fight	Fear and Anger Frustration and Confusion
	Aftermath	Hope and Regret
Explaining the Conflict: Reasons and Explanations	Betrayal	Issue(s) and Problem(s) Seriousness of Issue(s)
	Fight	Disconnection and Difference
	Aftermath	Learning and Change

conflict, (3) understanding the conflict, (4) feeling the conflict, and/or (5) explaining the conflict. The first three themes are binary/oppositional, indicating that participant awareness of the theme moves between two points of emphasis. For instance, being in control and/or out-of-control, judging and/or being judged, and understanding and/or not understanding indicate this bipolarity. Feeling and explaining tend to be unipolar processes. Often participants reported experiencing a preponderance of negative emotions (e.g., fear, anger, frustration) in the conflict experience and sought to explain their own and others' actions during the conflict. Psychological processes deal with understanding and feeling the conflict; interpersonal processes deal with controlling, judging and explaining the conflict. Interpreting themes in this way allows for an alternate conceptualization of the face-to-face conflict experience that locates it in the context of more general processes apart from issues of temporal structure.

Controlling the Conflict

The first interpersonal process that crosscuts all three moments is that of controlling the conflict. Controlling concerns experiencing one's self as having, or not having, an ability to decide and/or act within the situation: it consists of (a) deciding whether to act in the moment of betrayal, (b) exhibiting control, power, and strength in the moment of the fight, (c) and deciding on the relationship in the moment of the aftermath. It concerns the participant feelings of being empowered (or disempowered) within the conflict experience. Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) have suggested this set of themes when they discuss 'helplessness' and 'vulnerability' beliefs as major contributing factors to the escalation of conflict. Conflict may escalate when one or both parties feel powerless to act effectively and are thus in a vulnerable position *vis-à-vis* the other. Feeling vulnerable can intensify aggressive and protective actions on the part of both disputants.

This theme also deals with participants' sense of 'who they are/who they become' in their social relationships with others and with a need to exert some measure of control

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over their social identity. How others see us affects how we come to understand ourselves:

> If it is said that my temperament inclines me particularly to either sadism or masochism, it still merely a manner of speaking, for my temperament exists only for the second order knowledge that I gain about myself when I see myself as others see me… (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pg. 435).

In situations of face-to-face conflict, this meaning of 'self' as 'face' (i.e., as a personal and social identity) is being challenged and contested in a dialogical relation with the other. Participants are heavily vested in feeling free to decide and do in conflict, as this freedom is the freedom to define one's self and the other in a situation of contested control and contested meaning. To exert control is to express and maintain an understanding of self, other, and relationship both for oneself and others.

Judging the Conflict

The second process concerns an awareness of judging the other and of being judged; thus, judging defines an interpersonal process of conflict. Attributions of responsibility and other socially relevant evaluations are made (cf. Hawthorne, 1989; Nowell & Pollio, 1991); these are tied in closely with the victim-perpetrator role dichotomization addressed in the literature (cf. Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1991; Goffman, 1951). Judging is composed of the themes of: (a) unfairness and wrongness from the moment of betrayal, (b) blaming and being blamed from the moment of the fight, and (c) accountability and responsibility from the moment of the aftermath. It relates to the belief in having been 'treated unjustly by the other' (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). This set of themes concerns an individual's application of social criteria about *how social life should be* applied to the present relationship. These beliefs are are drawn from widely endorsed religious and legal tenets and other systems of legitimation within the sociocultural world.

The victim-perpetrator role relationship also may be viewed in terms of the breakdown of preexisting role relationships between disputants and the importing of an

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extra-relational role template to make sense of that relationship. 'Victim-perpetrator' roles bring into the relationship a readily applicable dichotomy that can be used to make sense of the conflict and to shift, between disputants, the balance of control and freedom to act. The most powerful way this role relationship may be used is when witnesses to the conflict make the attribution of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' to the parties, and judge the rightness or wrongness of the behavior of the disputants with respect to those roles. In a seemingly contradictory manner, the party who can secure the victim role in the eyes of others may be aware of exerting the greater control over the meaning of the conflict in the social world (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990).

Understanding the Conflict

The third process is primarily psychological and concerns themes of: (a) shock and surprise (betrayal), (b) frustration and confusion (fight), and (c) learning and change and hope and regret (aftermath). Understanding reflects various attempts at sense-making within the conflict experience, or a recognition that the conflict does not make sense. While the dialogical processes of conflict are not rational in themselves, rationality and understanding may be an aspect of how participants experience the phenomenon psychologically.

The strategies and manipulations of conflict require of disputants a great deal of planning and attention to detail. Even so, the dialogical process itself transcends these rational and strategic activities. This assertion does not contradict the utilitarian assumption that actors are able reflectively to comprehend the contingencies present in real life conflict situations and can then act to maximize personal gain and minimize loss (Schellenberg, 1996), but suggests that this is only an aspect of the dialogical process of conflict.

Conflict is a process of developing awareness and understanding. Understanding and rationality also relate to aspects of the *who am I* and *who is the other* role and identity awarenesses that are ongoingly challenged in conflict. Often, the other—as perpetrator— is viewed as irrational, confusing, incomprehensible. Not understanding the other

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undermines the perceived predictability of the other and of the transaction taking place and hence the participant is unable to feel trust or security in anticipating what may happen in the situation. This is similar to the distrust component of conflict indicated by Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) and may escalate aggressive and hostile actions between the disputants.

Feeling the Conflict

The fourth process is also psychological and concerns what the participant is feeling in conflict. As all meaningful aspects of a phenomenon are interrelated, this process is not be taken as distinct from those summarized above. Themes of feeling in conflict consist of: (a) feeling hurt and losing trust from the moment of betrayal, (b) fear and anger and frustration and confusion from the moment of the fight, and (c) hope and regret from the moment of the aftermath. The sense of feeling hurt is often associated with questioning the meaning of the other's actions toward one's self (e.g., did the other do this to me because they hate me or no longer think I am worthwhile, etc.?) To question one's self and the other in this way also undermines feelings of trust because the other is now becoming someone to be feared—he or she 'has become dangerous and hurtful to me.'

Anger closely relates to feelings of being disempowered by the other and made vulnerable to harm (Thomas, 2003). Participants often describe anger in a situation of defense—as in Jo's description of being physically attacked or in Orlando's description of her father threatening to exert control over her by refusing to give her a ride home from a restaurant. The feeling of frustration ties in closely with being ineffective in the conflict situation and of not being able to understand what is happening or why. In this context, hope and regret become lamentations on what has happened in the fight and to the relationship in the aftermath. The participant may sometimes ruminate about the conflict and negative emotions may remain for years if the conflict goes unresolved (Hawthorne, 1989).

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Explaining the Conflict

The final interpersonal process that crosscuts all three moments deals with perceived similarities and differences between one's self and the other person as well as newly noted differences in the relationship before and after the conflict. These perceived similarities and differences in identity, personality and/or perspective were frequently given as a reason for one's own and the other's actions in the conflict; thus, this theme deals with how a participant attempts to make sense of actions and events in conflict. It is hence an explanatory theme, and this explanation differs from understanding in that it is intended for the social world. It is fundamentally defined in terms of an awareness of dramatic differences and changes that become focal in the experience and consists of themes of: (a) the issue(s) and seriousness from the moment of betrayal, (b) disconnection and difference from the moment of fight, and (c) learning and change from the moment of aftermath.

Often the issue(s) surrounding betrayal are due to some sudden perceived difference in the other or in the relationship—for example, the other's interpersonal behavior toward the participant has suddenly and dramatically changed. The situation is suddenly made novel in a fundamental way, and this destabilization is often used to justify subsequent decisions to enter into a fight, or to maintain or end the relationship. This difference is also evaluated in terms of its magnitude: as serious (i.e., a big difference or change) or not so serious (i.e., a small and resolvable difference or change), and relates to the degree of disconnection and difference the participant experiences in the fight. It is interesting to note that in an ongoing study of college students' experiences of authority—in which a preexisting role relationship gives the respective parties disparate social power—the theme of justification in conflicts with an authority figure is prevalent (Kelly de Moll, personal communication, August 2006).

Finally, the theme of learning and change specifies differences perceived in one's sense of self and of the other after the fight, and often serves to justify for participants— and perhaps for other people—how they chose to comport themselves within the fight. As noted in the results, when participants discussed this theme, there was often a sense

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that having learned from the conflict had some redemptive value (e.g., implying they will not do it that way again, etc.). Redemption also serves a justificatory purpose within the conflict and when reflecting on, and discussing, the conflict with the investigator, who was not present during the situation(s) discussed.

Summing Up: Psychological and Interpersonal Processes

The methods employed in this investigation shift our perspective concerning social conflict from that of an observer-scientist, studying its objective aspects, to those of a co-participant and interpreter, seeking to understand the meaning of this phenomenon within a situation of dialogue with others who shared their experiences of face-to-face conflict. In face-to-face conflict, our own and others' socially intelligible identities—our 'faces'—are called into question, challenged, and re-created. Conflict is a social process of seeking to enact and maintain meaningful social roles when ordinary social roles have broken down. It should be understood in this way as much as in terms of a process of claiming and exchanging valuable resources within a situation of interdependence.

Conflict is fundamentally a dialogical exchange rather than an *economic transaction*. In ordinary social relations, we hold to the idea that our role identities will be maintained in our relationships with others (Goffman, 1951). The maintenance of social roles, as McNamee and Gergen (1999) point out, is a complicated social venture that necessitates attending to constant changes and unpredictability in our social environments. While this interpretation is useful for understanding the general psychological and interpersonal processes of face-to-face conflict it would be inaccurate to discuss this experience without also attending to the shifting points of focus that indicate aspects of change. Thus, an analysis of the moments of conflict is as necessary to our understanding of this phenomenon as are an analysis of related psychological and interpersonal processes that crosscut the moments.

Theories and Constructs of Social Conflict

How might one come to understand the experience of face-to-face conflict as it relates to scientific and theoretical understandings of social conflict? From a *Gestalt* perspective, scientific knowledge begins in first-person experiences of the phenomenon the scientist or philosopher seeks to understand (Kolher, 1947/1992). It is useful to view conflict from the scientific and philosophical literature in this light. The construct of social conflict developed by Barki and Hardwick (2001) consists of four general features that seek to account both for its *subjective* and *objective* aspects. These features are: (1) relational interdependence, (2) disagreement, (3) interference and (4) negative emotion. Interdependence may be viewed in terms of the ground of the preexisting relationship and the themes of the issue(s) and seriousness emerging in the moment of betrayal. Thus, it speaks to the social norms that guide interactions within a relationship and to the value attached to such a relationship.

Disagreement and interference correspond to the themes of disconnection and difference, and control, power, and strength. These themes are most related to the moment of the fight. Likewise, negative emotion relates to experiences of frustration and confusion, fear and anger, and in some ways, of blaming and being blamed. It is reasonable that researchers seeking to construct a parsimonious definition of social conflict would emphasize the moment of the fight within the conflict experience, as it would seem to have the highest potential for destructive actions and outcomes. While Barki and Hardwick's (2001) conflict construct makes sense in terms of the present description, it is based on a corpus rooted in *a priori* theorizing (the general conflict literature), seems to lack specificity, and does not account for the shifting intentional foci present within the experience.

The present experiential description seems to agree with Barki and Hardwick (2001) with respect to the ground of the preexisting relationship; their definition of interdependence depicts relationships as complex exchange relations in which one party's goal-directed actions are positively or negatively influenced by another party's goal-directed actions. This definition of a relationship, however, does not account for the

complex negotiations of meaning and identity taking place within the role relationships being played out between, and violated by, disputants (Deutsch, 1973; Simmel, 1908/1955). The themes related to the aftermath are not included in Barki and Hardwick's (2001) conceptualization likely because accountability and responsibility, hope and regret, learning and change, and deciding on the relationship, relate more to reflecting on, and making sense of, the conflict than on the experience of conflict itself.

Within the present corpus, some participants viewed face-to-face conflict as an interaction taking place between subjective agencies (i.e., individuals) who are connected in a shared environment and/or a specified role relationship. Often this role relationship was one of victim and perpetrator. McNamee and Gergen (1999) note that this understanding of individual accountability is one of the biases of Western culture that leads to blaming actions and power plays within conflicted social relationships; it is a potentially destructive bias that fragments rather than fosters interpersonal relationships. In addition, participants clearly noted that their sense of being in control or of losing control of the conflict situation derives from an experience of an empowered and/or disempowered sense of self.

Goffman (1951) might make sense of this in terms of the challenge conflict presents to 'face' within the joint context of the betrayal and the fight as the challenge presented calls into question the meaning of the present social relationship in much the same way as a confidence-game. When one expects a particular behavior from another with whom one is in a preexisting relationship, a violation of that expectation may be experienced as an affront to one's sense of personal and social identity and may make social life seem less coherent and predictable and, hence, more threatening. Betrayal represents a challenge to an individual's former understanding of self by challenging the stability of a relationship. Being able to maintain a sense of coherence in a role relation with the other is undermined by the betrayal and the fight. To have one's sense of self interrupted by betrayal, and further challenged and fragmented by a fight, personalizes conflict by calling into question the other's treatment of the self. Adopting the victim

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role allows the person to assume a position of moral authority and to undermine the perpetrator's ability to justify his or her actions within the fight.

Preexisting relationships may be conceptualized as an exchange relation although it is a relation that only emerges within a complex web of meanings that make a social reality of the relational situation. In face-to-face conflict, how one comes to understand oneself and others emerges within the relational situation; thus a fight, by taking the betayal of the preexisting relationship to its possible limit, may also be a basis for the creation of novel personal and social meaning in the aftermath (e.g., Simmel 1908/1955). For instance, face-to-face conflict in the moment of the fight is being mediated by socially relevant experiences of control, disconnection and/or blame, by cognitively relevant experiences of confusion and difference, and by emotionally relevant experiences of fear and frustration.

The irony of conflict is that all these moments—betrayal, fight, and aftermath—imply an investment in one's relationship with the other that can both destroy and create new modes of being in social life. Conflict puts rational understandings and expectations about social life into potential jeopardy and thus creates, changes and/or demands new patterns of interaction and new understandings within those relationships (Kellett & Dalton, 2001). Thus, it seems that conflict is a transactional process in which rationality (and irrationality) are constructed as relevant aspects of the phenomenon but do not ultimately define the phenomenon, as often conceptualized in utilitarian/behaviorist theories of conflict (cf. Rapoport, 1960; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). The rational-actor assumption may be useful in microeconomic and game theory investigations but tends to constrain the experiential meaning of conflict as lived in everyday relationships.

Like contemporary theorists, early social theorists seemed to emphasize the moments of betrayal and fight over those of aftermath. Marx and Engels (1848/1978) tended to focus on themes of control, power, and strength (with a more general focus on power disparities), disconnection and difference (with a general focus on differences in social class identity) as well as on blaming and being blamed (with a more general focus on injustice with the valuing of private property over persons in Western culture).

Durkheim (1893/1997) would seem to have similar concerns, except that he suggests society ideally would be conflict free with his equilibrist/homeostatic metaphor. Simmel (1908/1955) took a different tack by emphasizing conflict as a social force for personal and historical change; thus did he incorporate such themes of the aftermath as learning and change and deciding on the relationship.

Each of these theorists specifies the issue(s) or problem(s) that betray some ideal state of the social world. For Marx and Engels (1848/1978), the issue concerns what the social world *should* be—a world in which individuals have equal access to the means of production and thus equivalent social power. Conflict moves the social world toward that ideal. For Durkheim, the issue concerns what the social world *would* be if not for an economic system that encourages power disparity and exploitation. He believed that exploitative conditions of capitalism encourage disparity and alienation (notions captured in his concept of *anomie*) in the social world. Simmel focused on the possibilities inherent in conflict relations to change the social world and to move it toward novel states of affairs.

An understanding of conflict as the basic mechanism of social/historical change emerged with theorists such as Hegel (1837/1991) and may been seen in his model of historical progress as consisting of a pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. It would seem that the particular structure of conflict developed here fits a Hegelian model more than a Marxian model of thesis followed by unending antitheses. The ground of the preexisting relationship would seem to serve as the thesis in both Hegelian and Marxian models. Marx and Engels (1848/1978) would see social processes in history as taking place in persistent betrayals and fights between social classes whereas Hegel might see betrayal and fight in terms of antithesis and synthesis in terms of the aftermath, since the aftermath tends to suggest themes dealing with reflection and rationality and of making sense of the betrayal and fight.

It is necessary to recall here that the present corpus of accounts relates to life experiences of face-to-face conflict and less so, to the theoretical conceptualizations of conflict. Perhaps, however, we do get some insight into the personal meanings these

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theorists brought to the situation of making sense of social conflict. It is also interesting to note that the ways in which participants reflect on their conflict experiences may be viewed as more Hegelian than Marxist in theoretical structure, even though participants emphasized disparities of power and differences between self and other within the moment of the fight. These conceptual tendencies have relevance in suggesting an implied theoretical structure participants may have brought to the situation of dialogue with the investigator and thus may reflect a widespread set of cultural assumptions about conflict.

Conclusions

Applications for the results may be found in both pure research and conflict-intervention contexts. For investigators seeking an empirically grounded model of social conflict, an understanding of its phenomenological dimension is essential. As the most basic form of social conflict (Simmel, 1908/1955; Smith, 1987), face-to-face conflict may be the root experience from which conceptualizations and understandings of other forms of social conflict are derived and this investigation provides a model for this root experience.

For conflict-intervention professionals, the thematic description of face-to-face conflict may prove useful as a template for understanding the first-person meanings of conflict that emerge in present conflicts. Kellett and Dalton (2001) apply narrative techniques to assist individuals and professionals in structuring and analyzing interpersonal conflicts. The structure of conflict described here may have usefulness for this purpose as it is derived empirically rather than theoretically, beginning with accounts of conflict experience rather than with *a priori* understandings of narrative structure then applied to situations of conflict.

This structure may also be used in analyses of other forms of social conflict that involve face-to-face interactions between representatives of nations, religious groups, etc. For disputants, the thematic structure may be useful to help them reflect on and make sense of their own experiences; thus, it may serve as a heuristic device to facilitate

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discussion about the present conflict. A thematic structure—described in the idiom of participants—has the advantage of organizing complex phenomena of social experience into readily comprehensible and empirically grounded representations of conflict.

Face-to-Face Conflict in Historical and Cultural Context

As a forerunner to phenomenological and constructivist social science, the sociologist Simmel (1908/1955) parallels the activities of individuals' face-to-face interactions within the social world with ongoing historical change of that world. Historical change emerges out of "acts of individuation" in which individuals conflict with each other within the context of social institutions that, in Simmel's (1908/1955) words, "have lost their original human coefficient" (pg. 2). Put another way, the individual and the social together manifest a constant tension between the way things have been, are presently, and could be.

Social institutions tend to emphasize traditional beliefs and practices; individuals, however, are constantly creating new understandings, technologies and practices that challenge tradition and thus produce conflict within social institutions. Social conflict has the potential to alter social institutions, presenting a significant challenge to tradition. In turn, social institutions seek to regulate our everyday social interactions by structuring social conflicts that take place within their domain (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In coming to understand the human meaning of face-to-face conflict, we better understand the pervasive influence that these institutions have on our lives. We may also better understand the ways we effect change within these institutions as we encounter each other within their domain.

Religious traditions spanning from Judaism to Christianity to Islam to Wicca and others provide ideal conceptions of human social relationships and detail specific laws to guide behavior in such situations. Seul (1999) elaborates this point by stating:

> [R]eligions frequently supply cosmologies, moral frameworks, institutions, rituals, traditions, and other identity-supporting content that answers to individuals' needs for psychological stability in the form of a predictable world, a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and even self actualization (pg. 553).

Religious laws and principles serve to organize and maintain religious communities and supply tenets such as 'love thy neighbor as thyself' (Cohen, 1949/1995), 'if it harm none, do as thou willst' (Cunningham, 2002), and the individual-centered, conflict-fostering tenet of Satanism: 'do as thou willst' (LeVey & Gilmore, 1976).

These general maxims and their correlates in specific religious laws serve as a structure for making meaningful the social world and to establish behavioral norms for justifiable actions in our dealings with others (Geertz, 1973). Moreover, secular social institutions provide legal codes, social spaces, specified protocols and social roles concerning social conflict allowing impartial third parties to intervene and resolve disputes between individuals and groups (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003). Secular institutions that regulate social conflict often find their basis and legitimacy in common community traditions as well as in philosophical and religious beliefs and practices. Institutional forms of social regulation serve to diminish the potent destructive force of social conflict in public and private life and thus help maintain civil interpersonal relationships (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001).

In situations of face-to-face conflict, disputants' understanding, security and confidence are called into question. These concerns are particularly relevant in cultures that tend to conceptualize social actors as independent social agents, responsible for their own well-being (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Independent social actors tend to express concerns for justice in the resolution of face-to-face conflicts over concerns with shared relational expectations, as in interdependent cultures (Miller & Bersoff, 1992). An investigation that compared Indians—from a highly collectivistic culture—and Americans—from a highly individualistic culture—found that while Indians emphasized interpersonal concerns (such as disconnection and difference) in conflict situations, Americans tended to emphasize justice concerns over interpersonal ones (Miller & Bersoff, 1992). It would seem that social life in individualistic cultures organizes itself around theoretical ideals that exist apart from the particular relations between concrete persons.

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Even so, Berger and Luckmann (1966) have argued that abstract concepts forming our reflected understanding of the social world derive from face-to-face interactions. It is for this reason that this investigation concerned the meaning of the experience of face-to-face conflict, as it emerges as a phenomenon of social life and about which we seek to develop a reflected understanding. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003), however, note that socialization processes are significant in teaching an individual what constitutes a conflict and how it should be handled. In spite of this, I have assumed that conflict is an existential given and concerns our presence with others in social life; how we handle it and what meanings may emerge vary across cultures. For instance, individualistic cultural groups tend to emphasize personal goals and to view relationships in terms of 'loosely-affiliated individuals gathered for purposes of pursuing common interests.' The collectivistic cultural group emphasizes social identity in terms of membership in a family, tribe, nation, or other grouping that historically preexist the individual and the individual's particular interests (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). In both cases, being-with-others, and the inevitable discord that emerges in social situations, leads me to believe that social relationships of conflict are present. The conflicts just concern different types of issues and different types of social roles (e.g., Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003).

A collectivistic social identity tends to prioritize group needs and objectives over individual needs and objectives. Chan and Goto (2003) have noted that with increasing economic globalization, however, culturally shared perceptions may be of significant concern to conflict researchers. For instance, collectivistic cultural groups tend to endorse threat more and acceptance of demands less in international conflicts when compared to individualistic cultural groups (Derlega, Cuker, Kuang, & Forsyth, 2002). Chan and Goto (2003), noting a similar finding, argue that Chinese negotiators are more likely to endorse solutions to conflicts that do not disrupt the harmony of their own social group, and tend to make a clear distinction between their own and other cultural groups. Thomas (2006) has noted similar phenomena with respect to anger suppression in collectivistic cultures, for instance, in Japan.

In individualistic cultural groups, perceived cultural difference can also be a source of conflict in interpersonal interactions. Waters (1992) discusses sources of misinterpretation and interpersonal conflict between African-Americans and European-Americans in the contemporary U.S. workplace. The American social sphere is often reluctant to discuss issues of race and ethnicity as it is a source of societal ambivalence and can lead to interactions that point out the implicit, and sometimes explicit, racism and ethnocentrism in both social groups. In any social interaction between racial or ethnic groups, especially if such encounters are unfamiliar, beliefs about the other's social group may be particularly salient in the interaction, and may heighten each person's anxiety during the encounter.

The ways people behave in interpersonal interactions can have very different meanings for different cultural or ethnic groups. As Gergen (1991) argued, telecommunications technology has allowed for everyday communication between persons in distant parts of the world and has familiarized many with ways of life in cultures far removed from their own. We are exposed to ideas that span the globe and, while this may lead to greater understanding, it increases the possibility that cultural differences and misunderstandings may produce conflict. Technologically mediated relationships are not face-to-face relations and thus many of the communicative cues that allow us to assess the meaning of another person's communication are absent.

Even within a corpus of dealing with experiences of *face-to-face* conflict one may find examples of technologically mediated communication. This is likely due to the structure of the question asked of interviewees, specifically concerning "conflict between your self and another person(s)." This finding may also indicate that for some participants the line is blurry between the interpersonal situation of face-to-face and that of technologically mediated communication. It is unclear what difference it would make to compare the conflict experience in strictly defined face-to-face contexts and conflict over a technological medium. In the contemporary world, forms of communication, such as email, teleconferencing, and telephone decrease the interpersonal cues people are able to use in interpreting the meaning of communications. Technology may disrupt our

ability to form close face-to-face relationships, which serve as a ground for understanding each other's communicative behavior and for developing trust, but it also allows us to connect and maintain relationships as well as conduct business over great distances.

Face-to-face conflict is a fundamental human social dilemma. How 'conflict' is conceptualized and managed, however, differs across cultural contexts. Within Western culture, and in this corpus of accounts, the emphasis tends toward an individualistic bias. The issue of social meaning, however, is not completely under the control of the individual. When we seek to claim a particular role *vis-à-vis* others, we depend on the other to accept that claim. That claim to social meaning is not at issue within the preexisting relationship, but it is fast made a problem within moments of betrayal and fight. As Levinas (1969) noted, we do not exchange 'face' as if it were a social currency; 'face' is our concrete presence to each other in social life and it is that presence which makes a claim for acknowledgement, respect, care and concern.

Together, we maintain each other's identity and the predictability of social life and, together, we throw these meanings into disarray. Conflict is a transactional process in which the meanings produced transcend the agendas of the social actors involved. Ultimately we must view face-to-face conflict as a process that allows us to challenge and create the social world, but to do so in ways we may not fully anticipate. Like Cain, who was unfamiliar with the concept of death when he murdered Abel, conflict brings into being circumstances beyond anything we have purposefully intended or imagined. Both managing the concrete interactions of conflicts between persons, organizations, religions, and nations and developing a nuanced understanding of the meaning of conflict as it emerges in everyday life, are valuable goals toward which to work in advancing our social scientific understanding of this phenomenon.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS BY PARTICIPANT

Participant	Persons Involved in Conflict(s)	Situations Discussed
A[2] Female Age 41-45 Appendix B-1	Ex-Husband	Dispute with husband about starting a risky business venture
	Ex-Husband's Family	
		Dispute with husband about her not wanting to get involved in his family's politics
	Parents	
	Children	Husband not respecting her parents
	Boss	Toward the end of their marriage: husband begins attacking her emotionally—being mean to her parents, threatening to take the children and leave her, and betraying her trust by going to her office and relaying confidential information to her boss.
	Cousin	
	Priest	
Aqua Lad Male Age 22-24 Appendix B-2	Transgendered 5-Point Calvinist on Political Listserv	Exchange in online forum and by email concerning race and class issues within Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender (GLBT) politics
	Imagined Audience to Online Dialogue	Conflicts with students over personal political views while delivering lectures on criminal justice and non-nuclear proliferation issues
	Students/Audience when Delivering Politically-Oriented Guest Lectures	Fights with mother concerning radical nature of some of his political actions
	Mother	Conflict with father about father's self-destructive behaviors
	Father	
	Inspector and Guards in County Jail	Conflict with jail inspector during a brief incarceration for political activism

Participant	Persons Involved in Conflict(s)	Situations Discussed
Christin Female Age 18-21 Appendix B-3	Roommate High school friend Father High school friend's father	Recent 'little' conflict with roommate concerning a missed class High school friend angry with her because her friend believed her father was responsible for her friend's father's job loss
Holly Female Age 18-21 Appendix B-4	Colleague in Philanthropic Organization Friend Ex-Boyfriend Friends from High School Actors When She was Director of a Play	Organizing philanthropic activity for University organization; colleague takes credit for her work. When dating friend's ex-boyfriend in senior year of high school. When director for a play in high school; more seasoned actors refused to acknowledge her authority as director.

Participant	Persons Involved in Conflict(s)	Situations Discussed
Jeff Male 18-21 Appendix B-5	Parents	Political argument on speakerphone with dad
	Colleagues at School	Being stood up by a female friend who was becoming a love interest
	Political Opponents	
	A Female Friend/Love Interest	Exploring the similarities and differences among people when moving from a parochial to public school
	Male Friends	Trying to be patient with others' political views
	High School Bully	A ordinarily good-natured male friend flipping out at a party after drinking too much alcohol and taking the brunt of a practical joke
	Paris Hilton and other Cultural Figures	
		Another male friend who likes to get in fist-fights when he has been drinking.
		Two fist-fights with high school bully: one lost, one won.
		Feeling irritated with Paris Hilton and other pop culture figures that encourage a stupid way of going about life.
Jo Female Age 18-21 Appendix B-6	Ex-Boyfriend	Recent confrontation and violent attack by three acquaintances (an ex-boyfriend, a best friend, and the ex-boyfriend's current girlfriend)
	Best Friend	
	Ex's Current Girlfriend	Conflict in high school with best friend
	Her Boyfriend	Dispute with ex-boyfriend's current girlfriend about portraying herself as 'the victim' after recent conflict.

Participant	Persons Involved in Conflict(s)	Situations Discussed
Ma'a Female Age 26-30 Appendix B-7	Ex-girlfriend Friends and lovers generally Ex's Family Current Girlfriend	Inevitable conflict in beginning of a relationship; emerges as she tries to decide whether to commit. Running from relationship when things get too serious too fast. Feeling worry about beginning of new relationship Beginning and end of past relationship—conflicts over control issues and alcohol and drug use. Battle with Ex's family over bringing alcohol into her home.
Malachi Murmur Male Age 26-30 Appendix B-8	Other Drivers Truck-Drivers Worker at Subway Best Friend Friends Aunt Mother Professor	Being cut off in traffic; people not waiting their turn at stop signs Being antagonized by truck driver in mall parking lot Being a victim of hit-and-run by truck-driver Aunt overhears him saying something sarcastic at dinner Various 'good-natured' arguments with mother Best friend / roommate refuses to clean up after himself Coming on too strong in interactions with friends / peers 'Stupid' driver he cuts off and yells at turns out to be professor

Participant	Persons Involved in Conflict(s)	Situations Discussed
Missy Female Age 18-21 Appendix B-9	Friends from highschool Friend's boyfriend	Friends from high school who started pulling away when she entered college Friend who drove her somewhere without disclosing that she was driving under the influence Organized meeting with friends to talk about issues, but ended up being blamed and accused of creating problems Asking a girl friend not to let her boyfriend ride in Missy's car while the boyfriend is carrying marijuana.
Orlando Female Age 26-30 Appendix B-10	Father Step-mother Mother Brother Ex-Girlfriend Friends	Ongoing conflict with father that came to a head with his marriage to his most recent wife Conflicts with father's wife with father as intermediary Issues of trust and independence in various love relationships Violent break-up with ex-girlfriend and the aftermath of the relationship

Appendix A: Continued

Participant	Persons Involved in Conflict(s)	Situations Discussed
Sanford Male Age 26-30 Appendix B-11	Mother	An ongoing conflict with his mother
	Father	Effects of this long-standing conflict on other relationships and feelings and expectations of abandonment in romantic relationships.
	Step-Father	
	Ex-Girlfriends	
	Acquaintances	

*Note that Appendix B-1 through B-11 provides a thematic summary for each of the participant's accounts. These summaries consist of a brief description of themes present in each account and offer supporting examples and evidence in the form of quotations. Appendix B is intended to give the reader a feel for the unique concerns of each participant and for his or her voice and personality. Appendices A and B represent a first-stage thematic analysis in which each participant's account is the focus of interpretation.

APPENDIX B

PRELIMINARY THEMATIC ANALYSIS BY PARTICIPANT

Appendix B-1: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of A^2's Account

Themes	Evidence
Safety and Risk	I didn't mind that he wanted his way, as long as it was safe and we would not have any problem. I wouldn't mind doing it his way, but then he started gambling in business and that's when I was getting concerned…. Every time we had a problem I would tell him not to get into a business like that—it may not be good for us; it may be a failure and everything—and he was very optimistic, even overconfident, and he would just listen and then he would go ahead with it. There was no fallback if he failed and he used our money together as a couple.
Fault	I wasn't aware that the fault was his. There was no responsibility in his head.
Taking Sides	I knew they [his family] were doing things wrong, but at the same time, I also saw that [my ex-husband] was doing things wrong, so it was not for me to completely take [his] side and behave that way.
I Could Not Take it Anymore.	Conflicts just went on the same way, they didn't decrease, but the same things just expanded, and started growing more and more and more to the point where I was just, I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't take the craziness.

Themes	Evidence
The Pattern: His Tricks and Tactics	Once it was a pattern, when I would accept it and do what he asked, it was not out of real sympathy. It was just because I was trying to work a marriage . . . he still wanted his way like usual … and he would find different ways to humiliate me or try to make me feel guilty about something that was never there. He was always trying to put a guilt trip on me.
Being Threatened: Loss of Trust and Fear	It was very, very scary. I went to the police. I went to a counselor. One of the police, the counselor, or the priest, the second priest that I saw told my relative who knew the priest…. My cousin is a very nice person and that is why the priest could speak to him in confidence, he told him… 'we are usually here to save marriages, but in this case [her husband] is very, very devious, has a very devious mind, so please ask your cousin to leave him as soon as possible. He is going to destroy her.' There was no longer any trust at all.
Giving In/Not Giving In	If I did not give in to what he wants, then he is definitely going to destroy me. I was scared of him and I'm scared of this guy in accepting what he is saying, but what he didn't understand was why I am accepting… he would raise his voice and try to make me feel guilty as if I am pretending and trying to act like a saint. When I started not giving in at all, that is when he tried to destroy me completely.
It Makes No Sense: I Had No Words	There was nothing to explain or argue with him about. He was trying to attack and I had no words because there was no connection to anything.

Themes	Evidence
Confusion and Hope: Why Can't We Talk Straight?	I was sad and asking why our relationship should be like that. If he really wants something, why can't we talk straight, with everything on the table and say whether this is right or wrong and without all this other stuff. So when he was calm … I tried to bring it up and explain to him: why can't we just talk.
Relational Assumptions and Betrayal	It never occurred to me that a husband and wife could cheat and do [bad things] to each other. I was completely naïve in that way and even now I think it shouldn't happen at all. Then, slowly, I started understanding that this is happening, that there is a pattern, it just continued…conflicts just went on the same way. They didn't decrease, but the same things just expanded and started growing more and more and more…when it happens every time, you don't take it seriously anymore…I just took it like he was sick, and so it didn't hurt me like it used to in the beginning. I just began to feel that something coming out of his mouth had no value….I just thought marriage is something you couldn't just break and maybe it would be better in time, when the children came, so then he was trying to threaten me that if things were not done [his way], I could leave and stay gone …
Taking Action / Understanding	So instead of getting mad at him, I was trying to study his weaknesses and trying to see how he could be helped or what could be done. I never thought he was really mean or a deviate or anything like that because I just didn't know what all that was.
Accusation and Blame	He was telling me that I am having affairs with so many people, even if I just talked to somebody, to him it meant I was having an affair with the guy, or it is a lady, it was like I was talking about him, if it's a man, I'm having an affair. So, these stories were a never ending thing.

Appendix B-2: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Aqua Lad's Account

Themes	Evidence
Sincerity and Commitment versus Dishonesty and Insincerity	All of those conflicts I have between myself and other people bring to light for me a deeper inner conflict I have about my ego and sense of personal efficacy as opposed to my sincere commitment to what I believe in, what I am sticking to, that line that I've stuck to that I want to keep coming back to. We can make intentional choices that integrate what we are thinking and feeling, we can make the choice to bring those things together and that was when I was feeling like I was being most sincere rather than just responding in an instinctual or reflexive kind of way. I knew that if I invoked that story there was absolutely nothing that she would have to say. I knew she might find some way to dance out of it, but it would have been a dishonest and insincere way that she would have done it. But I knew that if she was going to be sincere in this argument, once I told that story she had absolutely nothing to counter me.
Strategy, Control, and Power	It's natural to want to feel like what we're doing is effective. That we are having some impact on the world around us. That's one of the trickier parts of the conflict that we both could contact each other by personal messages that we could send to each other or we could post them directly to the website. We knew anything that we had in the public I was aware that anything that I said to her could be read by anybody and there were things that I felt I wanted to say, some of which I wanted to say in a public forum and some of which I wanted to say in a private way and so we had a series of communications both on the public forum and then some through private email. You are always trying to make a choice about whether you want everyone to see it or not. By choosing what was public and private I was able to control to some extent what other people's experience of the argument was going to be, what other people's experience of the conflict was and use that as a tool for my advantage in terms of proliferating my own ideas, my own argument.

Appendix B-2: Aqua Lad Continued

Themes	Evidence
Maturity: Keeping Ego Out	A sense of separating what I am feeling or wanting for my own personal gain and being able to separate that off, what I feel or want from what I actually believe and what I think is true, good, or right. I think that is definitely a skill that I have had to acquire and I imagine it is a skill that everyone has to acquire, how to distinguish between being selfish and being defensive of what you believe in and what you really want in a more selfless kind of way to make happen in the world.
Justice and Fairness	This woman was openly identifying herself as a five-point Calvinist evangelical Christian and she would say a lot of things about the goings-on of the world that seemed very harsh and uncompassionate and frankly very un-Christian to me. I felt like it was becoming personal and unfair and a little bit catty when those remarks would be made. They are more concerned with defending the people they love at all costs no matter what, but don't seem to be so concerned about making sure that justice and fairness are promoted. They are more concerned about right or wrong—my country right or wrong, my family right or wrong.
Judgment, Blame: Being Devalued or Berated	She told me that I was a disappointment, comparing me to my sister, talking with my sister behind my back and sort of encouraging in my sister a sense of judgment against what I was doing. She was calling me names, she was comparing me to my alcoholic and abusive father. She was finding some really powerful buttons that she knew she could push with me in some very hurtful ways. So it had been a very devaluing experience.

Appendix B-2: Aqua Lad Continued

Themes	Evidence
Life Significance of Conflict Event	She's doing everything in her power not to understand me and even to as far as to hurt me. It is difficult in a powerful kind of way any time anyone tries to treat you that way, but when it's your mother that is a really tricky sort of thing. So that is what when that moment of 'you're absolutely right, I'm sorry' came in, it was like I have borne up under months of being berated and devalued and made fun of and hurt because of what I believe in and what I am doing and at one moment, an unexpected moment…it just happened so suddenly, it was like…this vague but very much present doubt inside of me that maybe everybody else is right and I am wrong about this, and I guess when you are being very public about an unpopular opinion, that sense of doubt and fear you might really be wrong becomes stronger and stronger and more powerful inside of you. And so at that moment when my mother, my guardian, my teacher conceded to me and put that voice inside of me to rest for a short period of time, it was about a lot more to me than my relationship with my mother, it was about everything that I believe and think and do.
Conflict Exposes Truth	I guess that was why it was so exciting to me in that moment of the conversation …when I knew this is the moment where this is going to be exposed. She is going to have to make an important choice after I say this and the choice that she makes and how she responds to what I am about to say is going to have a world of repercussions.

Appendix B-2: Aqua Lad Continued

Themes	Evidence
Anger and Shame	I felt when I was typing that in that is was a very self-righteous thing that I was typing that even though I believed that her line of argument was full of perversion and lies and uncompassionate and un-Christian sorts of statements, and even though I sincerely meant that, my hope and my prayer was that, you know, that this woman who was clearly a very smart person that that knowledge would abound, would really increase in its sense of compassion and love, but I felt when I was typing it that it was a very patronizing and very self-righteous thing to be saying and I didn't want to come across that way, that is not the sort of person I want to be at all and it was certainly not the person I wanted to be in that situation and so I ended up deleting that passage and coming up with another sort of farewell statement.

Appendix B-3: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Christin's Account

Themes	Evidence
Seriousness	I've had some serious conflict issues and I've had little ones. I don't think she should have been mad over that because that is a small issue. Small issues are issues you can get over and we'll probably be in this conflict for maybe a day and bigger issues are where you don't think that, a lot of times you don't get passed big issues. Big issues are either ongoing or they end your relationship.
Maturity in Conflict Handling	I feel like she is behaving like a child by ignoring me. I felt like she and I were not spending as much time together, but the second I felt that way she and I sat down and had a talk about it and it was really like a mature situation and nobody was mad about anything. It was just here's how I feel about things and I just wanted you to know about it and that's the way I handle things with some other people. I think it's immature in the first place for her to ignore, so I am going to be immature. In situations with her she wasn't being mature in the way she was treating me, so I didn't think I needed to be mature to her.
Winning and Losing	Ignoring is uncomfortable, but I am a very strong-willed person so I'm not going to be the first one to talk and I view that as not necessarily the best way to handle things but if she is going to come in and start ignoring me first, then I am going to ignore her longer than she ignores me because I feel like I've won.

Appendix B-3: Christin Continued

Themes	Evidence
Similarities and Differences in Identity and Perspectives	There were a lot of issues with her; I mean her dad didn't have a job and my dad did have a job and I had a lot of friends and she didn't have a lot of friends and I don't want to say jealousy but then I kinda do. I don't view myself as one of those people that everybody is jealous of me, but I think that probably was the root of things. I had a lot of things in place in my life and she did not. It really depends on how I feel about the issue. I don't necessarily critique it out loud. Sometimes I'll be like 'maybe you need to think about it from this person's point-of-view.'
Understanding / Sympathy	How does the person take it? In my situation with her, she wasn't going to take that as an attack against her and with my roommate she would probably be like 'oh, my gosh, I can't believe you said that about me. I don't do things like that' instead of being open to there might be a possible that what you are saying is right.
Intent / Strategy	She continued to do things that she knew got to me to make me lash out and yell at her or whatever. I never felt like I could do that because of the position it would put my dad in because she would probably go home and tell her dad everything and her dad would come in and talk to my dad about it. I never wanted my dad to have any issue—I never wanted that to affect him.
Frustration	It was a very, very frustrating situation because I wanted to handle it in a mature way, but she continued to do things that she probably knew got to me.

Appendix B-3: Christin Continued

Themes	Evidence
Blame	My roommate got mad at me for not telling her I wasn't going to one of my classes and she got a bit of an attitude with me and was ignoring me. She viewed it as my dad's doing and that lead into a huge, huge conflict where our friendship was over pretty much immediately over after that because of just things that were said and different things like that.
Miscommunication / Misunderstanding	I feel like I can't communicate with one of my friends for a philanthropy that is going on this week. Me and him, who had been friends forever, lost that friendship because of miscommunication and misunderstandings and he was really torn because he thought he was going to lose her and me. How am I supposed to know what she is thinking if she doesn't tell me?
Difficulty / Nerve-Wracking / Frustrating	It is really nerve-wracking lately. I think it was a really difficult situation.
Accountability: I Definitely Screwed Up	They just pulled away. There were a couple who were like 'what were you doing, what were you thinking dating him?' and I was like 'it was okay, I thought, I definitely asked' and they're like 'of course she's going to say yes; she didn't want to hurt you, but she actually think you were going to.'

Appendix B-3: Christin Continued

Themes	Evidence
Not Fair	I don't think it is very fair and she was like 'this is the way it's going to be' end of discussion. This is the first time we've actually worked together, so I didn't really know. She seemed really excited that I was helping her at first and then she kind of, I don't know if she wanted the credit, she didn't think that if I did something wrong would she be blamed for it…. As long as it's done correctly it doesn't matter whose name is on it; but it does bother me that she'd copy word-for-word what I said in my email, add her name to it, or when I asked her to bring the supplies and she not on top of it. If she wanted to take over the job I think she would have brought the supplies, instead of me going out my way and buy supplies myself…it's not very fair

Appendix B-4: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Holly's Account

Themes	Evidence
Miscommunication / Misunderstanding	I feel like I can't communicate with one of my friends for a philanthropy that is going on this week. Me and him, who had been friends forever, lost that friendship because of miscommunication and misunderstandings and he was really torn because he thought he was going to lose her and me. How am I supposed to know what she is thinking if she doesn't tell me?
Difficulty / Nerve-Wracking / Frustrating	It is really nerve-wracking lately. I think it was a really difficult situation.
Accountability: I Definitely Screwed Up	They just pulled away. There were a couple who were like 'what were you doing, what were you thinking dating him?' and I was like 'it was okay, I thought, I definitely asked' and they're like 'of course she's going to say yes; she didn't want to hurt you, but she actually think you were going to.'
Not Fair	I don't think it is very fair and she was like 'this is the way it's going to be' end of discussion. This is the first time we've actually worked together, so I didn't really know. She seemed really excited that I was helping her at first and then she kind of, I don't know if she wanted the credit, she didn't think that if I did something wrong would she be blamed for it…. As long as it's done correctly it doesn't matter whose name is on it; but it does bother me that she'd copy word-for-word what I said in my email, add her name to it, or when I asked her to bring the supplies and she not on top of it. If she wanted to take over the job I think she would have brought the supplies, instead of me going out my way and buy supplies myself…it's not very fair

Appendix B-4: Holly Continued

Themes	Evidence
Loss of Control	I tried to take it over and she decided to take all of what I had put into it as her own and put her name on it and all my work looks like it's hers. I feel like she is stealing something. It was through an email so I really couldn't do anything else.
Drama vs. Being Straightforward	I guess that's the way girls act, but I'm more like 'tell me yes or no' and be really forward and straight.
The Shock of Betrayal	I used to have my best friends and they never called me all summer. I can honestly tell you that my best friends, my two best friends—I thought we were going to be best friends forever—stopped calling me after graduation. It was huge….It was really shocking: I felt like I was more of convenience for them, 'oh, she's a friend at school, but once we leave, we're never going to talk to her again.' After I gave a lot of thought to it I figured maybe I was just a convenience friend, they were like 'oh, since she's here, let's hang out.'
Putting My Foot Down	I didn't feel bad, I had given the expectations that I had set and to tell you the truth, it needed to be done, because sometimes an example needs to be set for others to follow and I hated that it had to be like that. I wished people would have listened to me the first time, but I definitely the visual example kind of led the pack for the rest of the people.

Appendix B-5: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Jeff's Account

Themes	Evidence
Learning: Challenge and Change	Conflict is a change agent in any situation and when conflict is undesirable, it's because of an unwillingness to change or a problem with change; we're uncomfortable. People like to stick to what they know, people are stolid and cumbersome when placed in a new environment or new situation. It is like when everything else in my life is constantly changing, being bumped forward or backward by a couple hours…running, running all the time, it was nice to be able to place my faith in something that I was reasonably certain was going to happen. And, yet, it was another lesson, I guess [to be stood up]. I learned the hard way in elementary and middle school that while you may be on a roll, while you may be mister funny or whatever, if you keep talking chances that people will like you just continually go downhill from that point and so does your sense of humor. People tire of it. I guess I tend to be a little clumsy, I'm not really sure how, it just seems that…in some conversations, you just can't win, you ever have that?
Significance / Magnitude	A small conflict could be a discussion with my parents—we all know what parents are like: How are you doing in school?—I'm fine—Oh, really?—and thus begins the convincing. That [political debate] is all fun and games; no one walks away from that and thinks about it longer than five or ten minutes. But then there's other things like closer relationships with friends and other people who are potentially closer. I deal with conflicts with my friends every day it seems, but mostly just friendly challenges. This isn't the first time I've been stood up and it probably wont be the last. That just bothered me a bit. I was really looking forward to it and things didn't work out. Just when you begin to lose your mind, when you forget who you are—that's when it stops becoming a challenge and becomes a fight for survival. I'd rather like to avoid that.

Appendix B-5: Jeff Continued

Themes	Evidence
Similarities and Differences Between Self and Other in Identity and Perspective	I don't go with my dad on everything, but there are certain issues that he and I have common ideas on and same with my mother. People have reasons for believing that way. So, I'm not going to throw the book at them. I wouldn't want one of them to throw the book at me for believing whatever I believe. You can try to show people that people are basically the same, no matter what the appearances are, or disabilities, or anything like that. I'm not so different from the homeless guy I walked by on the street this morning; I'm not so different from the professor giving a lecture to 500 kids right now; I'm not so different from the guy on academic probation right now because he parties too much; I'm not so different from people fighting in wars on either side. I don't know if it's due to ignorance or irrationality, you can't talk to people like that. It would be wonderful if we could all talk away our problems. It's not that simple; people have opinions because they believe them.
Discomfort and Frustration	It becomes very awkward, no matter who you are talking to. I don't know if it's something wrong with me or maybe a perceptual fallacy of mine, eventually everyone runs out of things to say and it becomes very uncomfortable. To put it bluntly: it [racism] really pisses me off. It creates a really big inner conflict and I'm not the kind of person to just walk up to someone and speak to them about it unless I'm drinking beer or I'm really angry or whatever.

Themes	Evidence
Morality and Responsibility: Ones Obligation to Others	The guy had no reason for it at all, he just started a fight and my parents really had pity on me. A month later—I really am not proud of this—I had been going to the gym every day, what does everyone do after they get their ass kicked, they go to the gym, I put on some weight and I found this guy and I took it a little too far. I really hurt this guy. It was actually to my shame that I was proud of it. I went home that day and my parents were ashamed of me when they found out I had started a fight with someone. I would love to not give a shit what anyone thought of me; I'd love it, but I have to [give a shit]. Everything that I am tells me that I have an obligation to the people who I come in contact with everyday. Even if they don't see that they have an obligation to me. What if everyone went about thinking that they didn't have to be moral?
Control/Planning/Doing Something	Maybe I have a tendency to overplan certain things, but this was not one of them. This was just 'hey, I'll just meet you here at this certain time; will that work? If it doesn't give me a call. See you in a week or two I guess.' It's a few hours passed the time that I'm supposed to have heard something and so I give her a call—no answer—and 45 minutes later I get a call back and well, I'll just say other plans were made off the cuff, which wouldn't have bothered me so much if it hadn't been an hour late. Even if I had been told 15 or 20 minutes before, it would not have turned out to be quit as significant as it was. The impression that I and probably anyone else with a pulse would get, it leave one with the impression that that you're sort of unimportant. I just don't know what to do, because again you know I try not to sit around and mill about and bitch about it and go into a state of inertia; I try to change things; I try to get my opinions out in one way or another.

Appendix B-6: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Jo's Account

Themes	Evidence
Loss of Control / Being Deceived / Manipulation / Being Out to Win: Plans, Strategies, and Tactics	The three of them were telling me how I influenced their lives and screwed everything up for them. I found it interesting that they would give me that sort of credit, they would give me that sort of power over them that I didn't really want. I think they just wanted to fuck with me as much as possible. I think they had a plan of attack and they were out to win and they did.
Shock and Confusion: Being Put on the Spot; I Couldn't Deal; Not Knowing How to Respond	I really didn't know what to say. If I had had some time to prepare or some warning, I probably could have come up with some clever things to say. I said 'I don't think I have anything to say to you because it's not going to matter anyway' and she had a bottle of liquor in her hand and she slung it on me. And all of a sudden, I was being attacked and she had me on the ground.
Responsibility and Blame	It was just a bunch of crazy nonsense and it was 'all my fault.' I was the one that told about it, so it was all my fault. That was one of things they brought up saying that I destroyed their lives. So she was always sneaking around and getting me to tell all these lies for her and stuff and when I decided to stop doing that was when everything fell apart. So, it's like 'I'm sorry I couldn't hold up your wall of lies.' Sure there were better ways I could have dealt with it, but I didn't know any others….They were all talking about stuff that had happened before and they brought it all together and wanted to talk about it all at once and come to this conclusion that I was a terrible person and I needed to be punished. I must have done something, I must have done something to make them feel that way. But I don't think I did all the things that they said that I did.

Appendix B-6: Jo Continued

Themes	Evidence
What ifs? Could haves…; Better Ways to Have Dealt with it	I'm grateful that he didn't decide to do anything like that. People could have gotten really injured, but no one really did. I was like 'sure there are better ways' I mean hindsight is 20/20, but at the time I was 16, I didn't know what to do about that.
Severity and Magnitude	After I left, the first thing I notice was a big cut on my head and I was like 'when did I get that?' And then as hours went on, I started noticing all these injuries that I had, and but my adrenaline was going and I was shaking and crying and stuff. It took me hours to notice what a fight I had been in. The whole situation although it seems like it stretched on for hours took probably about 30 to 45 minutes. The fight was probably no longer than about 3 or 4 minutes, but it seemed like a very long time and there was furniture and stuff and things to be bashed against and walls. It was a fight; it was the most traumatic I've experienced as far as personal conflicts are concerned.
Ending it: Action or Avoidance?	I remember what it was like to have all these things that mattered—like someone is talking to someone else and that matters—but it doesn't matter anymore because that is not the world that I am in anymore. I'm trying to move on, to find a place for myself in society and do all the things adults are supposed to do. I don't feel like it makes any sense or has any purpose. I could just let it go and let it be their problem and I didn't have to deal with it anymore. That is pretty much how I decided how I felt about the situation was it was all their problem; I didn't need to deal with that. I could just ignore them and they would go away hopefully.

Appendix B-6: Jo Continued

Themes	Evidence
I Don't Understand Their Perspective	They had stuff that was true, but it wasn't from the perspective that I had, so it didn't seem right at all. And they were saying stuff about how I was as a person and the way my mind works and it didn't make any sense to me because they were wrong. It makes me wonder about what the point of it is…I was like 'why, why? What was the purpose for that?' and they must have gotten something out of it. They must have enjoyed it or something. I don't need all that drama. It seems so immature and so, I don't know, imaginative. I remember pretty accurately what happened. And what they said about me, a lot was not true, but there were some of them that were true, but they were mixed in with so many things that weren't true that it made it all seem out of perspective. Which I guess it was, it was very much out of my perspective because it was theirs.
Feeling Lost: I Don't Know Myself Any More	By having them stand there and say all these things, I felt like I didn't know myself anymore. For them to be able to come up with all of these things that they thought I was and I don't know, I felt very disoriented and very confused and I didn't know how to go about my life anymore. I didn't even go to classes the next day. I was like I can't, I can't deal with anything right now because I'm just still shaking from it all and I hadn't decided what should have been done about it other than nothing.

Appendix B-7: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Ma'a's Account

Themes	Evidence
Relational Pattern/Cycle	It's a pattern for me… from the time I was thirteen with my first major friendship/relationship where I got close with someone and then I run away.
Deciding to Commit: Trust, Security and Vulnerability	When I'm vulnerable, I run. I'll know that they care enough from hanging on when I've put them on hold; if they hold long enough and they are still there, then I feel like I can commit. Next lifetime, my biggest conflict better not be trust … because this one sucks.
Being Sturdy and Stable: Getting Distance and Taking Time to Process	I had no reaction, I wasn't fast. Intelligent, yes, but definitely slow on the conflict. The issue will be brought up, and I can focus on it until it gets heated. Then I'll let the other person wail and I'll say nothing for quite a long time. Maybe after a day or two, I'll bring it back up because I've thought about it, had time to process … I like to be sturdy and stable when I talk about things.
Fairness, Unfairness	I'm trying not to put it on hold because I realize that's not fair.

Themes	Evidence
Pointing the Finger: Responsibility and Blame	I took the brunt of the responsibility for it, which was conditioned over time because if you hear that you're the problem for five years straight and you're working on yourself. Every time a conflict would arise and she'd point the finger at me, I would take that opportunity to look at myself. I've been conditioned over the past five years, even though I feel nurturing is good, anytime I would show her my nurturing side, it was always like a weakness. I was weaker because I was emotional, but she liked it. It was twisted. It is hard now for me to say these things about myself that I feel are virtuous, great and beautiful. I'm really trying to find that again.

Appendix B-7: Ma'a Continued

Themes	Evidence
Investment and Loss/Failure	I told her I don't want to invest in this relationship, I want to just be in this relationship. We had many discussions about how couple's invest … it ended up being an investment; well, the feeling of loss is tied in with investment. I hate speaking of relationships in terms of investments because it makes it sound like a business.
Recognition and Insight	I would take that opportunity to look at myself and see what aspects of my self needed to be worked on. I loved it. The other side of that is that overtime you begin to think you have a lot of problems and in fact, when we broke up, everything that she complained about me: it was her … it was her. Her. Amazing.
Changes in Self and Other	I allowed me to get to know myself so much better. Somebody who could facilitate that much change in me could not [change] that I could see. There were things that she said she enjoyed and that she was learning in the relationship was what it felt like to be loved. To have that calm and peace and just be able to relax. She was becoming a better person.
I Would Have Never Thought: Surprise and Frustration	She left me for a woman who came from an alcoholic home, drugs everywhere…I would never. I mean the mother is a crack head, the daughter prides herself on … being able to take more of these pills than anyone. I would have never thought that she would go for something like that. These people don't take baths. That was a surprise.

Themes	Evidence
Control	We spent so much time fighting over whether we could commit, whether we could not commit. Whether I was controlling or not. Because she couldn't commit, I would get more controlling and that continued through … I guess we were building to that commitment … I felt like there was a wall and I'm persistent and I don't like to fail and to get in that relationship I gave up a lot … since I gave up so much, there is no way this can end … so fighting tooth-and-nail, I latched on and the more I latched on and tried to control.

Appendix B-8: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Malachi Murmur's Account

Themes	Evidence
Rationality versus Stupidity: Disappointment with People	I got the feeling that this person might try to go, but it was too late for them to be going—rationally—and they went. And so I had to slam on my brakes and hit the horn as I avoided colliding with her, but of course if I didn't slam on my brakes it would have been a t-bone and I probably would have killed the bitch. I don't think I derive pleasure from the fact that most don't get it because I really don't want people to be as stupid as they are, but they are really stupid. People are stupid for the most part [laughter]. I am trying to educate the populace. I don't want them to celebrate stupidity. It is humorous to me that so many Christians are so adament 'our culture is filthy and all these horrible bad influences' …and 'we need to clean it up' and yet they are running around driving recklessly and cutting people off in traffic and flipping people off and cursing at them and bombing nations. It doesn't seem all that Christee to me….Nonviolence, love, peace, good-driving, they seem to have lost the point somewhere along the line. It is pleasureable to see it verified because a lot of what they are spewing is going against me and/or my beliefs. So to see them behave so hypocritically provides me with a satisfaction because it basically invalidates all their spewings.

Themes	Evidence
Acknowledging Fault / Avoidance	They will look kind of startled, but they wont look at who they could have potentially collided with. I don't know if I have done that, but I've certainly noticed other people doing it. The only thing I can imagine is that they don't want to acknowledge it. The guy sort of slowed down, but then released and went right across the intersection right as I was starting to move from my stop sign. I guess I probably got angry and yelled something that to him was inaudible, probably called him a 'stupid fuck' or something like that and he turned toward me as he crossed the intersection he looked to his left, right at me and did this big open-mouthed head-bobbing kind of laugh like 'ahhh ha ha ha' look what I'm doin' like a little redneck fucking child with a rat tail. I think that emanated from a sense of embarrassment on his part and he then tried to cover it up by having this big, blatant 'hahaha—I meant to do that, look how funny I am' reaction. I dunno: avoidance.
Powerlessness: Frustration and Fear	I get really, really frustrated by my lack of ability to do something about the situation, such as retribution or punishment, just anything to get the person to be aware that what they did was completely fucking idiotic and dangerous. Unless I completely altered my course and/or destination and decided to spend the time following this person I couldn't even yell at them from behind or make angry gestures. They're just gone and I feel powerless. This wasn't something I thought happened in the real world. I thought we were going to get shot if we stopped and tried to talk to the guy, so there was no way I was stopping. So I took off and then it was like I did something wrong.

Themes	Evidence
Creating Conflict: Calling People Out and Making an Impression	I used to create conflict between all vehicles and myself [laughter] on the road. I drive above, generally, the speed limit, but usually no more than about 5 miles per hour and I try to keep my speed consistent. But when people come up on me and they tailgate me and I'm already going over the speed limit what I'll do is hit the brakes and slow down to the speed limit and just stay there as long as they are behind me or as long as they are tailgating. And I used to do it with trucks too, but since I was rammed by one, I wouldn't put it passed some other trucker to do the same thing. I followed her closely so that it was apparent that I was following her and so she pulled into the mall and I followed her into the mall …and she pulled into a parking area and stopped and so I fucking stopped right behind her. And then she opens the door of her car and gets out and she has the frosty bleached hair and the jeans with the white shirt/blouse tucked into em' and gold jewelry crosses and whatnot and so she walks back to my car and so I turn the radio off—I happened to be listening to NPR at the time—very relaxing program—and I muted that and rolled my window down and she came to window and said something like 'what's your problem?' and so I explained to her what she did … it was very dangerous and I had to slam on my brakes to avoid hitting you and she said something like 'well, I'm sorry, I didn't see you' and I said 'exactly! Pay the fuck attention!' and she probably had a bit of a stop at that point and said 'screw you' and she walked back to her car and I drove around her and left.
Different Wavelengths and Unpredictability in the Interaction	It has to do with the fact that we are on different wavelengths with that interaction where the problems arise because they are not where I am and they don't have the same understanding and sort of ground to work from. It's a normal state for me: I guess it feels like there's some sort of message was missed somewhere and there's something missing that is causing us to—it is sort of like gear slippage—it's like the teeth aren't catching where they are supposed to and something is off. There is a bit of slipperiness to the interaction because you have discovered that you are on different this different place and it becomes really unpredictable as to what is expected.

Themes	Evidence
Discomfort and Difficulty	A lot of times I have difficulty in managing conflict or even having any conflict with people I know. Maybe because my usual way of dealing with it wont work because I want to continue to know these people or be friends with these people or something because they are my family. I have difficulty conflicting with people I know, yet that's what I feel comfortable doing at the same time.

Appendix B-9: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Missy's Account

Themes	Evidence
Learning and Change	I was changing while that was happening and they were changing too, so we both were changing.
Different Perspectives	This one girl, me and her don't see eye-to-eye. Men are more aggressive in making their point verbally, something with their pride; girls are more emotional … I guess guys talk with their head and girls with their heart.
Extremeness of Reaction	I didn't have any emotion toward her, so I'm not going to get worked up about it. It was nerve-wracking, I had never done anything that extreme before.
Betrayal: Pulling Away	A. and B. hurt me most because I felt closest to them. I thought they were like my sisters. [I: So it was like losing a sister?] Yeah. I was friends with them for so long…but the three other girls started not liking the girl I'm best friends with now, so that was a conflict too and they kept bringing her into the story. I was like 'I don't want to talk about her; whatever issue you have with her you tell her about it and not me; I don't want anything to do with it.' I don't consider C. my friend anymore because she didn't seem sympathetic when we talked or even cared, so I am civil and I call her my friend for the two other girls because I don't want to start a confrontation. I will get along with her, but I won't share any secrets or do things that friends do.
Feeling Unhappy and Bothered, Frustrated and Angry	They were denying it and that mad me really mad. We were in a restaurant and it wasn't pretty. It made me really mad. I just wanted to tell her to shut up; it was very annoying.

Appendix B-9: Missy Continued

Themes	Evidence
Need to Compromise: Responsibility and Blame	She drove drunk all the time and would not tell us. I would have drove, I wouldn't care … it was just lack of responsibility. It irritated me because that's a big thing. She wouldn't tell us. We were probably both in the wrong, but she made me feel like it was all my fault when I know it was everyone's fault, including myself. No ownership to what she's done. He kept getting louder and I was like 'we are both wrong, we need to compromise on it, it is not a big deal.'
Being Rational and Calm	I like to be calm and rational about things and don't want to set anyone off or hurt anyone, so I think if you talk in a calmly manner you get more things across and people understand you more. With my boyfriend, I try to be the calm one, but no offense, he's a guy.
Sincerity and Loyalty	I'm a person who likes to say it to their face and not like 'I didn't say that' when I really did say something. I'll admit that I said something if I did. People I begin relationships with, they know who I am. I felt very angered and betrayed in a way. I was proud of myself that I stood up for myself against three people at the same time. I was still loyal to them; I wouldn't ever talk bad about them.
Trust and Mistrust	Trust has to be regained for me. Proving yourself to me makes it better, instead of just not doing anything about it. You don't care if you don't do anything about it, so why am I going to waste my time.

Appendix B-10: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Orlando's Account

Themes	Evidence
Insecurity and Suspiciousness	That was a decisive conflict. It left me, I was suspicious enough before that and after that I became not only suspicious of other people, but also insecure about my own capacity to relate to others.
Being Caught off Guard / Learning to Cope	On my birthday he called me to say 'get your stuff out of my apartment.' It was painful, but considering my relationship to him—always more a buddy than a father—my attachment to him is volatile to say the least. So it was painful, but I had to learn to cope.
Power / Control: Personal Strength in Confrontation	He cannot emotionally touch me because I have a very thick crust when it comes to him…. I had to confront him with a number of situations in which he had failed his children as a parent and he kept denying that failure, he kept denying situations: missing birthdays, being physically aggressive at times, and he tried to deny it…. This is not how you deal with me…. I was at a point that I would put up with any situation but that. I would walk ten miles home if that was required just to not give him the impression that he had me, that he had some power over me.
Cycle: Belligerent / Silent Conflicts	It has been at times a more belligerent conflict and at other times implicit or silent conflict.
Don't Put Me in a Position of Being Dishonest	I don't want to be in a relationship with the three of you because I can't. It would be dishonest; it would be hypocritical to have such a relationship and therefore I wont go to your marriage because going to someone's marriage is giving approval, it is giving your blessing, it is being a witness to that event, to that ritual, and I didn't want to be in that position.
Being a Catalyst	I was the catalyzer of this whole situation. He said every 'action has a consequence and you'll pay for your actions.'

Appendix B-10: Orlando Continued

Themes	Evidence
Hostility and Aggression	He is a very irate individual. As an adolescent I started being very much the same way—slamming doors and other—and once my mother told me, and she was very calm about it, you know you are starting to look like your father. At that point I stopped doing the slamming doors and I started being much more aware of my social behavior, of my emotions.
Questioning Oneself	It was why I shifted completely from stable relationships to 'friends with benefits'—the issues of trust, control, self-doubt about connecting and I would think a lot of times, 'what if I am like [my father]; what if I can be with someone for just a little while and then I get tired or start seeing flaws; what if I am what I don't want to be?'
We Didn't Start Off on the Right Foot	He doesn't have it in his genes: parenting qualities. So we didn't start off on the right foot—I mean with my brother and I and everyone else. He has probably the emotional intelligence of a 12-year-old. He will have impulses; he will fall in love easily, but he won't nurture, he wont keep his own; he wont be a father; so we had problems from a very early part of my life.
Hypocrisy of Father / His Inability to be a Father	He has always been a hypocrite to me before I realized the emotional intelligence factor, that he is prepubescent in many ways. We had a lot of conflicts about how he never respected my mother and her role in his kids lives, that she raised us, that she was mother and father and even with me he would not be a father, he would always be a buddy. We had arguments until I almost stopped asking for it and I accepted it.
Widespread Repercussions of Relationship	I can only give him buddy type emotions because the conflict went too deep at the level of attachment and trust, and it had repercussions in my life in the way I relate to people: suspicion and other aspects. So he has been throughout my life THE experience of conflict influencing other conflict I have with other people.

Themes	Evidence
Personal Power: I Move on With My Life	Even when people love each a lot, there is always that sadistic dependency desire where you want the other person to suffer if you leave or something goes wrong. It is about power, it is about self-esteem, it is about ego and that is something I don't give people because I don't have that to give. I don't fall if someone leaves, I don't beg and most of all, I get up and move on with my life.

Appendix B-11: First-Stage Thematic Analysis of Sanford's Account

Themes	Evidence
Duration of Conflict	This has been going on my whole life. But there were particular moments that inflamed it. We always butted heads throughout my life, but I think where it really became something that affected me in my adult life was when she left my father and she just, it was very unexpected for me. They were never the type of couple who fought or was very, I mean she was always very verbal and loud but they didn't get in a lot of fights in regard to that matter. I think my father just kind of put up with it because there was no way he was going to win, and eventually she left. That basically, that caught me completely off guard and it kind of, I think the negative feelings that I had towards her were probably solidified that much more….I guess its something that being, it's been worked out over time. In its current state it's something that's being worked out on a daily basis. (Sanford)
Control and Order	Her control is very much out of control. The way she controls her reality is very much an out-of-control way. I am a much more controlled personality. I like order. Very important to have structure, some form of structure for me. You can't control everybody.
Confusion: Bemused Befuddlement	I guess I'm trying find that happy median, where I like that craziness and independence without all the I make all the decisions all the time bullshit with complete lack of self-awareness. It is definitely a trip … it's bemused befuddlement…. If I can continue my status quo without getting completely knocked off course with her craziness. She's a great woman; she's just fucking nuts.

Appendix B-11: Sanford Continued

Themes	Evidence
Force: Coming on Strong	With some things I have to come on strong right away, and that's the only thing she understands. I hate to be that way, but it's the only way to stop it in its tracks is just immediate aggression, forceful, and I'm not talking about being creul or calling names, but just saying 'hey, I'm not going to put up with this. I'm dealing with this; this is my thing—give me some space, butt out, leave me alone.'
Pattern/Cycle: Seeing it All Over Again	Maybe I did pick a girl that does that [acts chaotically] and that is just continuing the cycle. I had a good upbringing … but nonetheless I see it affecting how I go about my relationships with my peers and it bothers me because I don't want to manifest that again. In many circumstances, you can't help but do it. It just kind of happens and its about realizing when those things are happening and trying to do something about it.
Questioning and Change	I've changed with all my interpersonal relationships…. I feel I've changed a lot. It's ongoing; it's still happening….I try to grow and try to learn….I try to figure all this crap out. If you stop questioning and pondering things, then what good are you?
Connection to / Disconnection from Others	For eight to ten years, I didn't talk to her much. There was a level of civility. I always tried to be civil. I didn't go out of my way to make contact or be a part of her life. It turns one into having a disconnected, aloof, and stoic type personality because if you came into being by being given up, I guess you expect that from every relationship.
Frustration: It Seems All for Naught	It not going to change because she's the boss. I mean it's frustrating for me, and I see my father and step-father—try to talk stuff out, be logical, give our point of view on the issue and it seems all for naught.

Appendix B-11: Sanford Continued

Themes	Evidence
It's not Fair	I realize that when I meet a girl, and I don't always consciously think about it, but when I have that mechanism in me that expects her to screw me over, it's obviously not fair to her….I may already be putting her in the hole so to speak and being very unfair to who she is and what she can offer.
It was Unexpected	When she left my father, it was very unexpected for me. They were never the type of couple who fought…but basically, she left, and it caught me completely off guard. Any of the negative feeling I had towards her were solidified that much more.
It Doesn't Make Sense / I Don't (or She Doesn't) Understand	She doesn't understand how—a mother leaving, period, can cause a person strife. She doesn't understand that fully because she figures, oh, she has to go about her life… it's selfish, but we're all selfish…. She doesn't get it and there's a good chance she never will. It's pointless. We don't understand it completely. I don't think she understands it. It's pretty fucked up.
We're Different People	We are two very different people. Personalitywise—how we operate, how we do things.
Honesty and Disclosure	If someone is being honest and not jerky about it, I don't care. In my way of coming to terms with myself is to be as truthful and honest with myself and with other people around me. But at the same time, there are things we all need to hide from think that is not humanly possible.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT

Female
Age: 43

I: Please describe a situation in which you experience a conflict between yourself and another person.

P: okay [pause] experienced conflict?

I: umhmm

P: with my ex-husband [I: okay] and should I tell you a story of what went on, kind of thing, what was the conflict?

I: anything you want to talk about

P: okay. [pause] things started off okay, then we umm, he wanted his way and everything and umm, I didn't mind that he wanted his way as long as it was safe and we would not have any problems, I wouldn't mind doing it his way, but then he, umm, started gambling in business and that's when I was getting concerned and so we would have conflicts everytime, every time we had a problem I would tell him not to get into a business like that, it may not be good for us, it may be a failure and everything, and he was very optimistic even overconfident [I: ummm] and he would just listen and then he would go ahead with it

I: ummhm. Is there a specific time that you think about?

P: what specific time? Like what?

I: is there a specific time where he started up a business and it felt like it might not be safe to you?

P: he actually was into this business even before we got married, which I didn't know him then and I knew he had a problem in the business that he had tried to venture, but I didn't know the background of that and enough of the story so [pause] I wasn't aware, I knew, but I wasn't aware that the fault was his, I was just thinking it just happened, so it was not that it just started off after we got married this was in him from before, he was in business with this guy working for his dad and so he always wanted a business and not to have to work for somebody, and uh so uh, he'd work for a year or so, quit, and then get

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into a business, then of course we had money and we used our money together as a couple, I didn't keep my money and he didn't keep his money separate, and so there was no fall back if he failed and he used the personal money for the business and that was my concern that, you know, if something went wrong and the business failed, every time we had to start from scratch, so our conflicts were me trying to tell him not to get into something and his was that I'm not a business person and I don't see things in, you've got to take risks and so you've got to do it and he wouldn't listen and would go ahead, and then I would just, umm, not say, I had a job and that kept me going and I just tried to fulfill his kind of wish, but he always made problems for himself more than problems just coming to him from the business because he just couldn't get along with people, staff, and he would treat people badly and then the staff would quit, or staff would create problems and all that would affect the business and then the business would fail and then we were at a loss, so we'd start again, so during that period when we had lost until we recovered he would be okay, things would go very smooth, and soon after we had recovered from one and we started having money again, he'd want to get into another business and then there'd be another problem, then he also had his family problems, he just couldn't get along with people, he had problems with a lot of people and so, in the family, in their family I felt like a, umm, when I'd see what was going on with him and his family it was like the parents were giving attention mainly to the eldest sister and the eldest sister's husband, the son-in-law, and it was not only him, but everybody else in the family, all the other kids, I observed that they were suffering from lack of attention or not being given leadership, everybody was fighting for leadership in the family, everybody wanted the parents to ask them something or tell them something where the felt like it was only being told to the eldest sister, and we should also know kind of thing, and all that mess and the father was the only one working, he was not running the house, so it was the mother, so almost half of the children hated the mother very much and so Shawn had maybe the worst hatred toward his mother and that affected us too, we had some problems with that because, umm, he would want me to also treat and behave toward them the way he behaved, now I knew they were bad, I knew they were doing things wrong, but at the same time I saw the Shawn was also doing things wrong, so it was not for me to completely take Shawn's side and behave that way [I: yeah], moreover, we were not living with any of them and they were far away, so I thought that you know it wasn't disturbing our personal life and we were not involved with them, they were not involved in running our lives, it was just a family politics kind of thing where you'd meet or something like that, so I think why bother, you know, for a little while like that, who cares, I can just put up with that stuff and then just leave and go on from there, but Shawn probably being the family person he couldn't, and how hard was it for me to simply do something to someone without really experiencing a problem with them [I: yeah], so I would tell him from my point of view, why are you doing that, just forget it, and that would just irritate him so much and then there was a conflict, so that was another topic we had other than the business was the family, his family problems, that he would blame me then that I am too soft and so they can treat you like dirt, you should be just like them, you should treat them like the way they are treating, and things like that, so all those kind

of arguments, then it was my parents, so my parents were, me being the only child, I was treated and raised very, very well and their whole life is around, like, um, me, in the sense that their happiness is my happiness, so they were ready to do anything for us because that brought happiness to them and I wanted to do something for them, so, um, which Shawn kind of like after a year or so, maybe after two years, he really began to take advantage of the situation, because he knew that they would do things, so he made them work having them do this that and all the other stuff, and so while they were doing things, it wasn't appreciated at all, it was as though they are doing things because they are there to do things, so he just got into that habit and didn't appreciate the good stuff he was getting, and he was thinking that this is part of the, it has to be like that, it became that way, so umm, so he didn't respect them at all, and that bothered me, but then I thought, well, we are not living with my parents either and they would have been there and all so I shouldn't allow myself to get worked up over that, but then he would, if he had something if he was talking about something to do with business, when he wanted me to agree, he would use things, knowing that I only had my parents and nobody else in the family because I was the only one, he would kind of speak bad about them just to shut me down [ummm] to make me agree because he knew that if he raised his voice or he would talk like that, that I would say oh God, it's better to accept what he is saying than for him treating me badly and doing all this stuff which is not at all necessary, initially I didn't understand that this was his trick or his way but as he was using this method of raising his voice, I would then just keep quiet and would not continue an argument when one person is raising his voice, there is no point, that gave him [pause] as soon as he'd raise his voice he knew I'd shut my mouth, so he always did that to shut my mouth, and then he would abuse my parents and so I'd shut my mouth because I just didn't want to hear it, so he used these as things all the time and then I realized that he just uses this to get the things that he wants, and it may be completely something else, a loan to be signed or, it is always something to do with money, getting money for his business plans, so it was [inaudible] marriage, and we didn't have kids, he had a problem, so I was trying to empathize and and be understanding that he is having a problem, so all this must be bothering him, if we had kids it would have been better, it would have focused him on something else, so he doesn't really think there is a responsibility, that individually we can manage ourselves, and so there was no responsibility in his head and so he thinks he can, yeah, I was trying to think of ways to figure out what is troubling him, I was studying him, because we didn't really have a problem, but it was just created by him all the time, so instead of getting mad at him, I was trying to study his weaknesses and trying to see how he could be helped or what could be done, I never thought he was really mean or a deviate or anything like that, because I just didn't know what all that was, I was never raised, like my immediate relationship with my parents, people that I still trust, so I though my next kin was my husband, and I thought, you know, how can a husband and wife ever think of being mean or creating problems for each other when you are thinking of spending your life together, so it never occurred to me that a husband and wife could cheat or do, I was just completely naïve in that way, and even now I just think that shouldn't happen at all, then slowly I started understanding that this is happening, that

there is a pattern, you know, it just continued and so I started understanding things and the problems with parents and all this stuff, so it went on, conflicts just went on the same way, they didn't decrease, but the same things just expanded, and started growing more and more and more to the point where I was just, I couldn't take it any more, and then I understood that he is raising his voice and all that stuff, and so after that, like the last three or four years we adopted kids and things didn't change, then he used the kids as a trump card, so anything which was close to me, like my job, my parents, my kids, these were the three things he used to try to attack, first with my parents, that one I could deal with because they were away and when it happens every time, you don't take it seriously anymore, it happened, it started, it, you know [pause], I knew that, I just took it like he was sick, and so it didn't hurt me like it used to in the beginning, I just began to feel like something coming out of his mouth had no value, so that's the way, nothing affected me later, I just took it like that, I just thought marriage is something that couldn't just break and maybe it would get better in time, when the children came, so then he was trying to threaten me that if things were not done, you can leave and stay gone or this is the way it is, so, to leave and go means that I would not get the children, it was those kind of things [I: yeah], so then he reached my office because he knew I would never give up my job, my job was very important to me because he wasn't much of a base or anything like that, so he knew that, so these are the three things that he had, so when I learned this, and of course I had lost any sort of interest in him, then I knew there was nothing with this guy, then he got, then he came to my work and was threatening me with the children, I knew he wasn't really sick, but that he was [long pause], you know when I realized that he was trying to destroy me [I: umhmm] that is when I really, I tried to talk to him many times, but then I was convinced that if I don't give in to what he wants, he is definitely going to destroy me [I: hmmm] and so I thought I have got to take care of myself and my kids and then my parents and so then I put an end to the whole thing, and so that is my story of interpersonal conflict.

I: so, what you notice would happen is that he would want something and in the situation when he would want something and you didn't necessarily feel that it was the right thing to do, like for instance starting up a business, or having you sign on a loan, or something like that, he would use the things in your life, the people in your life, that you cared about, to attack you [P: yeah] and in that situation of feeling attacked you would tend to back away from the situation, or just accept what he was saying because for you, I think you said it wasn't worth it to you to um…

P: no, um, initially, it was new, but um, I just didn't like to hear him talk so badly and first of all it had nothing to do with what he was saying, so there was nothing to explain or argue with him about on, um, what he was trying to attack, I had no words because there was no connection to anything [I: yeah] and so then to just keep explaining to him was something I really didn't want to do, but once he would stop being abusive and talking, attacking my, anything that was connected to me [I: umhmm] because he would just have a worse fit and I just couldn't hear all that stuff, it was just impossible and I

wasn't ready to confront him or do anything like that on that subject because for me it didn't make any sense, it had no connection to anything and what he was saying was not true [I: yeah] so I tried to just accept what he was asking for finish the, uh, rather than get into something that had absolutely nothing to do with anything, and it happened, once, twice, and he thought I was scared, like he thought I was scared of him and I'm scared of this guy, you know, in accepting what he is saying, but he didn't understand, which was why I am accepting, in the sense that what he is saying just doesn't make any sense, kind of thing, so he used that all the time [I: umhmm]

I: he would use that, that

P: the tactic

I: the tactic [I: yes] of, of not, of suddenly attacking you in a way that didn't make sense to you [I: yes] in a situation where you could produce very good reasons as to why you didn't want to agree with him on something?

P: yes, he would not argue or try to explain or answer my questions about what the problem is or what we are talking about, he would go completely out of the whole thing and talk about something that didn't exist and I'm not, I'm, everything that came was a real shock and where did he create this stuff [I: hmmm] and all that, but, and if I would ask him, what's this all about, he would then raise his voice and try to make me feel guilty as if I am pretending and trying to act like a saint in asking him what, when I am fully aware of this, so then the main problem, umm, I mean what he is trying to get from me, not problem, what I mean the main, I mean the thing that he wants to get from me and what we started on is completely out now and he has diverted and changed the topic and made me a liar and the bad one, so he has something to blame me for, he created a story here [I: umhmm] and uh, so it is interesting that the first time or one of the first times, when I didn't know that a husband could really be mean to his wife and destroy his wife or do things to his wife, which I thought poor chap, you know, why is he continuing like this when none of this is there and how is this happening, then I would think to myself, oh God, it started with this one thing, maybe he will be happy if I just do that, what he wanted, and we can get this other stuff out, not because it was there in the first place, but I just wanted to, I couldn't take it, I couldn't take the craziness [I: umhmm] and so I would try to get back to the subject and start asking him more about that on his terms, to have a good relationship [I: yeah], so it happened twice and I was just thinking that there is something really, I was thinking I really think there is a problem and I feel sorry for him that he has misunderstood, but after two or three times, I knew that this was his style, pattern, that there was not really something that was wrong, but he is creating it and he is doing this to get back, and I did say it to him, what I was thinking, and then we'd fight again

I: so before you realized that he had this pattern of creating stories or, or, or in a sense lying, and you experienced that sense of shock [I: yeah] the first, the first couple times, what was that like, that sense of shock?

P: umm. First I sympathized, I was feeling really [pause], one is sympathy for him and sympathy for my parents as the poor things are doing so much, and how come he is thinking such bad things about them, and pretty sorry for him, why is he letting himself become so sick and this was not, like maybe, my thing was how can I solve this problem, he is misunderstanding the whole thing and so is there any way, and so I tried to ask him, but by asking him he would get ever more mad [I: umm] and so the whole time I knew that this was not stuff was not there in the first place, so then I'd think that I was not getting anywhere, so if I just do what he says it will make him happy [I: umm] and then we were still very young, so I didn't think that we needed to save and all that, when you're so young, your not thinking about things like that, like retiring or dying, or getting sick, you know, not being able to work or something like that [I: yeah], so okay, maybe, I can help him be successful, I could help him to do what he wanted, so it was trying to work things out and understand him, so that was my first reaction [I: umhmm]

I: and before you realized, this was after when you realized that this was a pattern?

P: yes, once it was a pattern, then when I would accept it and doing what he asked, it was not out of real sympathy [I: umhmm] but it was just that it was because it was a marriage [I: yeah], and I was just trying to work a marriage out and not immediately think of breaking it up, and so I was trying to help him at least in any business, at least in one business, to help him and make him successful and so that was my, that was my reason that was my thinking, at least if I help him and have made him successful, then at least he'd be on his own, and uh, be happy and then he'd have enough to gamble or do anything he wants with what he has, so I just need to make him successful, and so we were very successful in that business then, but as soon as he was successful in one and it was all going fine again, he still wanted his way like usual, and the usual arguments and stuff like that, it was all still there, but it was not so much of a financial worry [I: umhmm] so I could kind of, you know, be relaxed a little bit, but then he started with another business and he used everything that he had made in being successful in the other, and it was not only me, there were many people who advised him not to get into that in the restaurant and I told him and everything and we started with a new subject and new thing, so it would go okay for a little while and then he had to do something else, it was the same, it was the same thing, it was never anything new, that we'd end up in an argument, it just continued and continued and continued, and then it was, he would always find different ways he could humiliate me or try to make me feel guilty about something that was never there, but he was always trying to put a guilt trip on me, so he, he had studied me very well [I: umhmm] that if he made me feel guilty about something, I would just feel, umm, not scared, but I would shut him out and then just accept what he wanted, but he didn't understand that it was not that I *was guilty*, it was that I just

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couldn't take it [I: umhmm] and that's why I would just try to accept and do what he wanted, so at least we don't have to have that argument every day and that problem will be finished [I: umhmm] and, you know, I could then breathe properly in the house [I: yeah], he took advantage of that situation, I could have just walked out but I was just trying to save this marriage, I was think that you shouldn't break a marriage and that kind of thing [I: yeah] and so he took advantage of all the good things that I thinking of [I: umhmm] and so then it was, uh, what's that, uh, he was telling me that I am having affairs with so many people, even if I just talked to somebody, to him it meant I was having an affair with the guy, or if it was a lady, it was like I was talking about him, if it's a man, I'm having an affair, so these stories were like a never-ending thing, he always wanted stuff and then his pattern was to attack people about whom I care or make me feel guilty about something that I wasn't even aware of [I: yeah]

I: so it seemed as if, with other relationships, with other relationships that you have in your life that he would directly attack you on those grounds and it would get to the point in that exchange that you were having, you would, you would say, I just can't take this, anymore, and it would be at that point that you would back away and accept, or just accept or agree to whatever that he wanted [P: yeah]. What was it like at the point when you decided, I can't take this anymore

P: when it became very, very dangerous, when he walked into my office [I: uhhuh] and uh, spoke to my boss to have me terminated and uh, yeah, I thought that was the ultimate, that he walked into my office, my work place, and to tell my boss that, and I thought that if he could do that he can do anything to me [I: umm], he wasn't worried, so that was the time I thought that, uh, no, it all happened around the same time, umm, you come home and you kind of discuss things with your husband, or other people that you love, but maybe you discuss a lot of confidential stuff with your husband in the evening, or when your just talking about stuff, and that shouldn't go out, and so he knew some of the things that were going on in the office because I had talked about them and he started threatening me about it, okay [I: yeah], so when he started threatening me about those things, then it was [pause] another couple, um, his wife had told me something, which, or no, it was something, something he knew from me, and he called them up and he told them, he started doing all these things [I: umhmm], so there was no longer any trust at all [I: yeah], and he was just trying to destroy me, and that was the final

I: that was the final, I can't [P: no, yeah] take

P: I mean it was because it was very very scary [I: umhmm], now I went to the police, I went to _____ who was a counselor as well [I: umhmm] and actually, one of the police, or the counselor, or the priest, the second priest that I saw told my relative who knew the priest, he asked him if he could come to me and tell, and he said yes, she is my cousin, and since she is your cousin, and since he knew, the priest knew this man, my cousin, my cousin is a very nice person and that is why the priest could speak to him in

confidence, he told him, with your cousin, um, we are usually here to save marriages, but in this case, Shawn is very, very devious, has a very devious mind, so please ask your cousin to leave him as soon as possible, he is going to destroy her [I: yeah]

I: so even the priest had recognized, just from interactions with him? [P: yes] In a sense what it sounds like is that, that he would create stories [P: yeah] and particularly in situations when things weren't going the way that he wanted them to go [P: umhmm] and it started with him making up stories, or making accusations, making you feel guilty about things that were just completely, just weird, that shocked you [P: yeah, yeah] umm, that pattern continued to the point where he began to, to do worse and worse things to you [P: yes] like, in a sense, trying to destroy you, going to your boss [P: that was at the end], calling your friends [P: yeah], okay, but it got to the point finally at the end where …

P: that's because I stopped, uh, um, initially, when I was, it was going on but I used to give in, when I stopped giving in [I: ummm], so at that point it became too late, I cannot give in to this anymore [I: umhmm] so when I started not giving in at all, that is when he tried to destroy me completely

I: had the priest given you that advice, or given your cousin that message [P: no] or that advice

P: no, this was just before leaving [I: okay, okay], just before the end

I: so finally you reached the point where you realized that if he is capable of doing this, he is capable of doing anything

P: yeah, but he went there [I: yeah] and because he did it and I had not even realized that it had happened and so then one day I took action [I: yeah]

I: so he actually acted first [P: yeah] so you hadn't stopped agreeing with him?

P: no, no, no, it was all, it was all the threatening that was going on, but uh, after I stopped, then he did say to me, I am going to come to your office, to see if, then it was like direct [I: just a straight up threat], before it was all going along, you know, and I would have to make the connections, asking why he is doing something, asking my self all these questions to understand what he wants, probably, you know, but when I refused for many years, then it was direct threat, like if your going to say this and do that, I'm going to come to your office [I: wow] or I'm going to call this person or that person, it was direct, there was nothing left for me in dealing with this man [I: yeah]

I: so prior to you, in a sense, when you stopped giving in to him, he would leave you, kind of guessing? [P: yeah] like as to what his reasons were …

P: yeah, because I had guessed once, he knew I could guess it again, so he used that as the ruse, the usual pattern [I: yeah…yeah]

I: what was that like, that period guessing, that period of trying to figure…

P: umm, I mean, I was, I was just sad about, and asking why our relationship should be like that [I: umhmm] and um, if he wants something, why can't we just talk, talk straight, with everything on the table, and say whether this is right or wrong and without all this other stuff, and so when he was calm, when I felt like he was okay, I tried to bring it up and explain to him that, you know, yesterday, or whenever, last week when this stuff happened, instead of going through all that again, why couldn't we, why can't we just talk, why can't you just tell me what you want, or what it is, if it is good for both of us, then let's do it, you know, I'd like to just talk, sometimes he was just quiet, no response [I: umhmm], sometimes that would trigger [I: ummm] and you know, something else would start, so, I would just feel sad about why this is happening to me and our relationship and then I just thought, well, I've just got to live with this, this is my luck [I: umm],

I: so it was pretty much during the time when you were still guessing, or during the time that, that, that was kind of the way you were handling the situation and then occasionally bring up with him why does it have to be like this, why can't you just tell me what you want, you know, present it too me in such a way that that that you can show me that this is going to be good for both of us [P: yeah], and he would respond either by ignoring you or it would start up again, like he would begin to say those same things to you again [P: yeah, umhmm], and then finally when you did, um, confront him, then he just became directly threatening toward you [P: yeah, yeah], and then saying like if you are not going to go along with this, then I'm going to do x,y,z [I: yeah], I'm going to go to your office, I'm going to call your friend [P: yeah]. Is there anything else that came up for you in those conflicts?

P: not really, it was, I mean, um, this was only conflict, right, but there were times that he would be good and normal [I: hmmm], and sometimes, he would just, sometimes, he knew the things that he could do, so it was not that he didn't know, so sometimes he would do nice things and all that stuff, so that used to confuse me, so that used to, umm, if he only did bad things from the beginning, then it probably would have ended earlier, but since there were times when he used to act normal and do the good things you are supposed to do, sometimes he would ask, and we would do things together, sit down and talk, you know, and he would do things that I like and all that, so that used to bring up sympathy in me in thinking that there is something wrong with him and that I should probably help him, so this is how all this, the confusion, or the confusion I felt in trying to understand him, his ways, whether he was really selfish or, um, sometimes it was, he was really very good [I: umhmm], but it didn't last too long, I was always trying to figure

out if something was affecting him, something making him sick, something is troubling him, then I knew his back ground at home with his family, with his mother, so that had affected him and he always wanted to be really something to show his mother, his parents that he can also be something and all that, I knew those things were there and I was just trying to see how I could help him to be successful, to help him to fulfill his ambitions, and at the same time, bring happiness between us [I: umhmm], and I was trying to work on that, and so those are the things that just, uh, [long pause]

I: so the general things that you seem to be aware of there is this mix of sympathy and fear [P: umhmm], and at times, sometimes, he could be very nice and, and other times these stories would come up and you felt shocked and confused [P: yeah], so the whole situation in a sense was confusing to you [P: yep] and then you also felt like you needed to stay in the situation because you felt like you could make a good marriage with him, and if you did support him enough then perhaps he would be successful, perhaps his ambitions would be fulfilled and he could then sort of focus himself on his work and then you in a sense would be able to not have to deal with that so much [P: yep, umhmm] and then you could step away from that, but you found that when one ambition, or one business, would fulfilled that even in periods of success, he would take that money, he would take what y'all had worked to get and then go and suddenly decide to something else that didn't make sense or was confusing to you [P: the whole thing would repeat over again] and then other things that came up was that he would create these stories in order to attack you or attack you parents, um, or if he saw you out in public with a friend, he would make up some story about that, and would try to make you feel guilty [P: umhmm (chuckling a little)] or in some way be accusatory toward you and when you realized that this was kind of, of his tactic [P: umhmm] to confuse you and to shock you, and to sort of say things that were completely irrelevant or completely off the topic, that you stood up to him and at that point he became very, very directly threatening toward you and that is pretty much when the conflict ended [P: yes], because once that had happened you realized, okay, I can't really, if he is capable of this he is capable of anything [P: yeah] and then you realized that trying to make that relationship work wasn't going to go anywhere [P: yeah]. Was there anything else?

P: no that pretty much covers everything.

I: that's it. Do you feel okay talking about this?

P: yeah, this is pretty much now an old story, he's completely finished and I feel nothing for him, so nothing is going to

I: so it doesn't upset you to talk about it?

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P: no, because I lived it and lived with it for 22 years [I: yeah] and so basically the last 8 years I was living with him only because of the children, but with him there is absolutely nothing, so when I talk about it, nothing happens, it's like …

ACADEMIC VITA

Thomas Rhett Graves was born October 16, 1973 in Martinsville, Virginia. At six-weeks old, he found himself *en route* to Hong Kong, where he spent the first three years of his life. After that, the following seven years were spent in Singapore. He began his education in Singapore in the British expatriate school system, attending Raeburn Park Primary and Tanglin Junior School.

He and his mother and sister then moved to Houston, Texas in the mid-eighties where he finished grade school, attending Millsap Elementary and Bleyl Middle School. Aside from a year at Colonial High School in Orlando, Florida, he graduated from Cypress Creek High School in Houston, Texas in 1992.

After some indecision as to what exactly he wanted to study—philosophy, mathematics, computer science, anthropology, sociology, or psychology—he took a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology, *summa cum laude*, from Illinois State University in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois, May 1998.

When he graduated from college, he had intended to study cognitive neuroscience, but in fact ended up studying psychological anthropology at The University of Chicago. It was at Chicago that he began to develop an interest in applications of phenomenological and hermeneutic methods in the social sciences. He graduated from Chicago in August 2000 with a Master of Arts thesis entitled: "An Existential Hermeneutic Analysis of Autobiographical Accounts of Mental Illness Experiences: Psychopathography and Experiential Representation in Narrative."

He spent some time working in the public health research field—primarily doing medical demographic and epidemiological research for the state of Tennessee before returning to school to complete his graduate career in psychology at The University of Tennessee.