

## CHAPTER 4

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# CULTURE, ATTRIBUTION PROCESS, AND CONFLICT IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Conflict can be defined as the objection of one individual to the actions of another; whether these actions may or may not have been intended (Isenberg & Raines, 1991). It can occur in any setting, especially in learning and educational environments, essentially because it is a natural part of human interaction. Although conflict is inevitable in educational settings, from pre-school through the 12th grade, the sources of these conflicts evolve as the children become older. In the case of preschool children, the primary cause of conflict involves possession disputes and access or denial of play into a group (Isenberg & Raines, 1991). Typically, children dispute over classroom toys and materials when there is scarcity of play materials. Conflict can also arise when a child attempts to enter a group of children engaged in play and the group meets the child with resistance.

As children become older, the nature of these conflicts changes from concrete struggles over possessions to conflicts over roles (Isenberg & Raines, 1991). When studying disputes over roles, it is essential to have an understanding of the group interactions as well as culturally based factors, such as the values, beliefs, and expectations of a group. This is the case

particularly in the increasingly multicultural environment of learning institutions in the United States, where the nature of disputes over roles involves who possesses the dominant role. In order to understand these disputes it is essential to highlight the way in which conflict emerges and how the conflict may escalate or de-escalate. In fact, these interpersonal and cultural factors may influence whether conflict is handled constructively or destructively.

Although the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of the population is a reality across the nation, this is particularly notorious in some regions of the country. In some states it is no longer an ethnic majority versus ethnic minority groups, but rather a dominant ethnic group, which no longer represents the majority of the population, and the non-dominant ones, which together are or are soon going to be the majority. For example in California, according to estimates from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, the mainstream Anglo American population (non-Latino Whites) represent 49.9% of the 33.9 million residents. Latino Americans (of any racial background) follow at 31.6%, Asian Americans at 11.4%, African Americans 6.7%, and Native Americans less than 1% of the population (Richardson, 2001). In major cities, such as Los Angeles, the "minority" groups already total the numerical "majority." This increase in ethnic and cultural diversity is even more apparent in educational settings and can present new challenges to understanding conflict, its resolution, and its impact in education and social relations. However, oftentimes educators do not recognize the role of culture in psychological processes relevant to interpersonal and group processes as well as the impact these have on teaching, learning, motivation, and education in general.

Historically, educators have viewed squabbles among school children as negative and undesirable. Many teachers and administrators sought out strategies to avoid or prevent any conflict. However, approaches based on the cognitive-developmental and socio-cultural perspectives found that this traditional method of dealing with school conflict did not resolve much and could actually have a negative impact on the punished participants. In addition, schools often failed to prepare children to deal with conflict and the realities of a multicultural society. In the meanwhile, researchers in this area learned that when conflict is handled properly, it has the potential to stimulate children's social, cognitive, and moral functioning (Isenberg & Raines, 1991). Essentially, preventing conflict in school is less significant than understanding the process. The latter may allow conflict to be organized in ways that make positive contributions to the social system as well as to the parties involved (see Woehrle & Coy, 2000). Moreover, the understanding that conflict is a normal aspect of daily life may result in approaches that emphasize non-violent conflict resolution (see Arnow, 2001).

The objective of this chapter is to examine some of the psychological processes and related cultural factors relevant to the understanding of conflict in multicultural educational settings. First, some of the historical approaches to conflict and the mediation programs that emerged as a way to offset the traditional punishing methods for dealing with disputes in schools will be briefly reviewed. In general, these programs lacked a foundation in the psychological principles relevant to conflict and its resolution. In addition, they fell short of accounting for the influence of cultural factors relevant to conflict and the psychological processes involved. Second, in order to illustrate the role of culture and related psychological processes, the collectivism and individualism value orientations will be examined in relation to psychological processes relevant to the understanding of conflict and its resolution. Specifically, cognitive (attribution) processes and emotions theoretically relevant to interpersonal and group processes associated with conflict and violence will be analyzed. The role of value orientations, such as collectivism and individualism, in attribution processes as well as in conflict resolution are used to illustrate the various ways in which culture plays a role in both psychological process and related social behavior in schools. Finally, various implications for future research and interventions dealing with conflict in multicultural educational settings will be discussed in light of the analysis of these cultural and psychological factors.

### CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

Traditional methods of handling conflicts in school included a rather polarized approach in which one student was seen as being right while the other was considered to be wrong. The consequences for the "bad" student included detention, suspension, or expulsion (Webster, 1991). More recently, reformers began to see that the traditional methods of dealing with school-based conflicts were arbitrary and fostered a competitive environment. Since the implementation of the school-based conflict resolution programs that came about in the 1960s and 1970s, traditional means of punishing students have become less common. According to Webster (1991) there were several assumptions behind these school-based conflict resolution programs. First, children in conflict situations were thought to have the wisdom to resolve the dispute and the will to choose to do so once it was clear that mutual interests could be satisfied by a non-violent resolution. Second, conflict was seen as an unavoidable circumstance and, therefore a prime opportunity for student learning and growth. Third, because conflict was seen as unavoidable, teaching conflict resolution skills can be an educational experience that can be applied to other areas. In addition,

it was assumed that encouraging disputing students to collaboratively resolve the current conflict is more effective in preventing future conflict than the administration of punishment.

There were two critical movements that triggered the development of these school-based conflict resolution programs. The first movement came from the outbreak of mediation centers in different communities. This outbreak was a reaction to the overwhelming amount of lawsuits that would have to be dealt with without arbitration. Law professors began to train community members in mediation, so they could serve as facilitators in the resolution of interpersonal conflicts that ranged from quarrels between two persons to disputes involving the entire neighborhood (Webster, 1991). The objectives of the centers were clear: To resolve the conflicts without going to court. This operation of mediation began to be seen as a powerful tool. Given the incidence of conflict in schools, educators and other individuals involved in mediation realized that the skills taught in mediation training should be transferred to the schools.

The other critical movement resulted from the socially responsible ideals of particular religious groups. Peace-minded religious groups, in their efforts to reduce violence, contributed to the introduction of conflict resolution teaching in schools. During the early 1970s the Quakers in New York City believed that children who learned conflict resolution skills at an early age would grow up to be less violent. Based on these beliefs they developed a program currently called Children's Creative Response to Conflict (CCRC) that emphasized cooperation and communication through music and structured tasks (Webster, 1991).

Over the years, the developments of various mediation programs in public school settings have been expansive as a result of these two movements. Currently there are hundreds of school-based mediation programs throughout the United States. The main focus of these programs is to teach cooperation, problem solving, and empathy-building strategies. These programs train teachers and administrators to use collaborative problem solving strategies in handling conflicts between students (Messing, 1991). By using teachers as mediators, students have been allowed to verbalize their concerns and find alternative solutions to their conflicts. Students were provided the opportunity to build empathic skills by listening to each other's concerns in order to find solutions that were agreeable to both parties. For instance, some studies show that when kindergartners were trained in conflict resolution skills, these children demonstrated the ability to retain the conflict resolution procedures as well as the willingness and ability to use the procedures in future conflicts (Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Oberle, & Wahl, 2000).

These programs may have been successful in the days when quarrels among school children resulted in fistfights, bloody noses, and damaged

property. In the wake of the incidents of violence in Columbine and other notorious cases of school violence, destructive conflicts between students have reached a new height and have taken much more violent forms. The traditional foundations for mediation programs do not seem to be sufficient to address this growing problem.

Many schools today appear to have more and more students who feel neglected and rejected by peers, groups, the school, or society in general. These students are often perceived as the "outsiders" and "different" from mainstream groups (Weintraub, Hall, & Pynoos, 2001). They are taunted, teased, and shunned by classmates from the mainstream crowds. The harassment toward the misfitting student is as old as history. However, the chance of the outcasted students to respond with extreme forms of violence or guns is much higher than in the past. According to Arnow (2001), high numbers of children are weaned on violent video games, toys, and media programming that teaches them how to conquer the "bad guys" through violence and aggression. In effect, these children have become desensitized to violence more than ever before.

Arnow (2001) has suggested that the fear of attack breeds more violence and that this fear of violence in the schools has major emotional and behavioral consequences for the students. These children experience more depression, anxiety, a sense of meaninglessness and emptiness, loss of self-esteem, and humiliation. There is also a sense of impotence from the perceived loss of control over certain aspects of life, psychic numbing, and emotional exhaustion in addition to sleep disturbances, irritability, and excessive aggression. Too many of these students spend too much of their energy on survival, energy that otherwise could be spent on academics.

Some programs, such as the Friends Council on Education (McHenry, 2000), have attempted to understand and prevent atrocities like those of Columbine by explaining the role of moral education. This team of researchers believe that moral growth means teaching children and adolescents to emphasize the necessity of attachments to the group (i.e., the value of community) across the human life span and to create communities that cultivate responsibility to their environment (McHenry, 2000). They thought that conflict in schools was a fertile ground to teach moral growth and to make individuals aware of their own attachments to the community. They reasoned that without this attachment, violence against the community (i.e., schools) becomes inevitable.

Another program called Attribution, Behavior, Life-skills Education (ABLE) aimed at improving students' self-concept (Hay, Byrne, & Butler, 2000). These authors defined self-concept as the descriptive and evaluative aspect of the self. They proposed that a positive self-concept is related to motivation, achievement and improved social relationships that include conflict resolution and problem solving. Research (Hay et al., 2000), has

demonstrated that low self-concept appears to be related to decreased cooperation, persistence on a difficult task, and expectations for future schooling, as well as to an overall negative attitude toward school. These researchers found that programs such as ABLE encouraged students to practice effective conflict resolution strategies, which improved their self-concept as well as their relationships to others around them (Hay, Byrne, & Butler, 2000). The improved self-concept of these children may be derived from identification with a social group. Later in this chapter we discuss how the sense of self in relation to a group influences positive and or negative ideas about oneself and others, based on social identity theory.

### **Conflict Resolution and Learning**

Although the previous programs have merits, they were not founded on psychological knowledge and principles relevant to the understanding of human interaction and conflict. Isenberg and Raines (1991) analyzed the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky dealing with how children construct knowledge of their social world based on their interactions in the environment. They hold that the social interactions and the understanding children get through these interactions have implications for the child's intellectual development, less egocentric thinking, and cooperation and reciprocity with others. Essentially, knowledge derived from social interactions enable children to construct and act on their own understandings of acceptable social behaviors with peers and adults. These authors observed that children who had limited interactions were more likely to employ inappropriate social skills when dealing with a dispute.

Learning to manage conflict is a developmental task in which children become less egocentric and learn perspective taking as well as empathy to arrive at a collaborative way of solving their conflicts. Cooperation is one type of social interaction that includes conflict resolution and mutual respect and allows children to operate in terms of the other's needs and desires. According to Piaget (1965) children gradually move away from egocentric thinking and begin to consider another's points of view through the process of cooperation (Isenberg & Raines, 1991).

### ***The Consequences of Destructive Conflict in Schools***

The failure to develop skillful conflict resolution skills may lead to many negative consequences in learning and education. First, the conflict situation can escalate to a level of extreme violence such as that illustrated by recent incidents of school violence in the United States. Other consequences may be less atrocious, but still create problems in the schools. In the early 1990s approximately 282,000 students were attacked each year.

These were mostly victims of bullying and gang violence (Isenberg & Raines, 1991). According to statistics from sources such as the U.S. Department of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Fisher & Kettl, 2001), in 1995 gangs contributed to 28.0% of the delinquency in schools. That same year, there were 190,000 reported fights without weapons, 115,000 cases of theft, 98,000 incidents of vandalism, 11,000 physical attacks with a weapon, 7,000 robberies, and 4,000 cases of rape or sexual battery in school settings.

These problems continue to exist today, in addition to troubled teens slaughtering their classmates with bombs and machine guns. Two years after the tragedy at Columbine, more teenagers who feel isolated have identified themselves with the killers and yearn for the attention they received (Weintraub, Hall, & Pynoos, 2001). Since then, approximately 20 other schools have been plagued with new violent attacks (some foiled others not).

### **Psychological Processes and Conflict**

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explain all of the psychological processes operating in the minds of these youthful killers. It is, however, important to understand that there are several relevant psychological factors that contribute to the escalation of destructive conflict (other than poor self-concept or lack of group-belonging) that may sometimes lead to various problems in school. The rest of this chapter will deal with some of these psychological processes and related cultural factors as a way of illustrating how these influence conflict and can serve to prevent violence. Specifically, it deals with the role of cognitive (attribution) processes and related interpersonal emotion, and how cultural values (e.g., collectivism and individualism) influence these psychological processes and the development and resolution of conflict. Of course, there are many other psychological and cultural variables that are pertinent to these phenomena and the proposed factors are not necessarily the most relevant to conflict and violence in educational settings. These variables represent the interests and expertise of the authors and are intended to illustrate how such factors may be relevant to the understanding and prevention of destructive conflict and its resolution in multicultural educational settings.

Cognitive processes such as attributional thinking and related interpersonal emotions (e.g., anger and empathic feelings) have been found to influence pro-social behavior (for a review see Weiner, 1995; 1996). These processes have also been identified in response to provocation in conflict environment (Betancourt, 1991, 1997; Betancourt & Blair, 1992). In gen-

eral, it has been observed that the attributions one makes about another person's actions, its causes and outcomes influence one's decision to help or how to respond to that other person. For instance, when one attributes a needy person's behavioral outcome to something uncontrollable, one might be more likely to help the person in need than if the outcome was attributed to something more controllable. The willingness to help, according to Betancourt (1990), is mediated by empathic emotions. Hence, in the previous case, attributing the behavioral outcome to less controllable causes elicits higher levels of empathic emotions and lower levels of anger than attributing it to more controllable causes, which in turn mediates the higher probability of helping. According to this approach (see Betancourt 1991, 1997; Betancourt & Blair, 1992), the intentionality ascribed to a person's negative or frustrating action (e.g., bullying, offending, or attacking someone), and the perceived controllability of its cause influence violence of responses directly and through mediating interpersonal emotions. Individuals who perceive the actions of the individual as unintentional and its causes as uncontrollable are expected to respond with less violence.

Since these attribution processes are subject to the influence of cultural factors (see Betancourt, Hardin, & Manzi, 1992; Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Betancourt & Weiner, 1982), the role of culture is thought to be particularly relevant in understanding conflict and violence in multicultural settings. This becomes essential especially in school environments with increasingly diverse student populations.

### **Multiculturalism and Conflict**

The United States is one of the largest multicultural countries in the world. For instance Arnow (2001) reported that by the middle of the twenty-first-century, Anglo Americans will be the numerical minority, and the "average" American will be able to trace his or her origins to Africa, Asia, and Latin America—anywhere but Europe. Moreover Asian Americans make up about half of all new immigrants. In 25 of the largest school systems, students from current minority (non-dominant) ethnic groups are expected to become the majority. Currently, children from non-dominant ethnic groups make up about 30% of the youths under age 18.

Regardless of whether we recognize it or not, these changes in demographics are real and accelerating (Arnow, 2001). As ethnic and cultural diversity increases, various group identities become more salient and these groups tend to split. As they divide, there is the potential for them to come into competitive conflicts with each other. However, it is possible for such diverse groups to realize that cooperation and interdependence are essen-

tial to peaceful society. Hence, learning about conflict and how to deal with it is ever more critical for schools in diverse settings. Teaching these skills must begin as children enter the schools. In order for the learning environment to keep up with changes, educators bear the responsibility to acknowledge the increase in diversity and incorporate an understanding of it in dealing with conflict as well as with pedagogical techniques in the classrooms (see Arnow, 2001).

Past studies (e.g., Isenberg & Raines, 1991, Webster, 1991) emphasizing the positive effects of conflict on learning have failed to consider the vital role of cultural factors relevant to conflict environments. There is harm in ignoring cultural factors because of the growing multicultural nature of interactions in educational settings. Of course, this by itself can result in misunderstanding or igniting disagreements among teachers, students or groups. However, even more critical than this is the influence that cultural factors may have in psychological processes that are relevant to the origin and resolution of conflict. Such psychological processes and related cultural factors are relevant not only to the understanding of conflict in educational settings but also to social learning, motivation, and education in general.

An important consideration in the study of culture in relation to psychological processes and behavior, such as in the case of conflict in educational settings, is that cultural differences do not only exist among different ethnic groups. In fact, according to authors in this area (e.g., Betancourt & Lopez, 1993), often there are more cultural differences within than between ethnic groups. Cultural variations are not only associated with ethnic groups but also other grouping factors, such as gender, religion, and political ideology, all of which have demonstrated to play a role in major destructive conflicts around the world.

The case of Andy Williams, from Santee, California, exemplifies the transition from a more traditional and rural culture in Maryland to a large school, within the context of the notoriously individualistic Anglo American suburban culture of Southern California. Williams was repeatedly rejected, ridiculed and bullied by classmates while ignored by other schoolmates and teachers. Another instance is the case of Columbine. It has been reported that prior to the disaster, there were conflicts between different social groups that helped create a tense climate at the high school (Weintraub et al., 2001). The conflicts occurred between those who were a part of the mainstream "popular" crowds and those who were cast off as the "outsiders" or the "culturally different". If these differences are present even within the dominant culture, it becomes even more imperative to understand how cultural factors that originate from various SES and ethnic groups become mixed into the already existing multicultural environment. Each culture, particularly mainstream culture, carries within it the values, norms and expectations concerning interpersonal and group behaviors

associated with conflict. These norms and conceptions oftentimes dictate the way in which conflict is to be handled. The method one adopts to resolve a conflict can at times be taken offensively by members of non-dominant cultural groups.

### *The Biases of the "Invisible" Dominate Culture*

So far, the discussions regarding conflict and its resolution mostly come from articles written by authors influenced by perspectives based on the dominant mainstream (Anglo-American) culture. Often, individuals from dominant cultures tend to be particularly ethnocentric and ignore the fact that their views and ways of approaching phenomena such as social relations is heavily determined by their cultural background. This reality, which naturally results in cultural bias, can be exacerbated by the low level of exposure to non-dominant cultures observed among many researchers and policy-making individuals in education. For instance, the current mainstream dominant individualistic views in the United States regard conflict positively and it is considered an opportunity to renegotiate or to improve currently existing relationships. It is also viewed as "the greatest potential for learning" (McHenry, 2000, p. 223). In essence, conflict is welcomed and individuals on average confront or attempt to find constructive ways to face the conflict situation.

Other cultures, however, view conflict quite differently. Conflict in other cultures is considered a disruption to the natural harmony that exists among people. Individuals from this type of cultural background often use avoidance tactics in order to prevent conflict situations. An example of this is found in the research on *simpatia* as a cultural script for Latino Americans (Triandis, Lisansky, Marin, & Betancourt, 1984). These authors observed that in contrast to Anglos, Latinos valued and expected individuals and groups to minimize disagreements and negative feedback, and emphasized certain levels of conformity and respect in interpersonal relations.

These varying views about conflict and the approaches taken to handle the problem can lead to escalation of disputes between people from different cultures and or ethnic groups. The cooperative or competitive inclinations in dealing with conflict often arise from differences in cultural value orientations (Janssen & van de Vliert, 1996). In essence the same interpersonal or group responses may have quite different meaning and could result in eliciting opposite reactions from people of different value orientations.

When teaching conflict resolution skills, educators must be sensitive to the varying views on interpersonal behaviors and approaches for handling conflicts that different cultures prescribe. However, since clashes in a fast growing multicultural society are inevitable, the most sensible approach to

conflict is to develop and teach culturally based constructive methods for dealing with conflict. The prime time to begin training these skills is in the schools. According to some authors (e.g., Tatum, 2000), if educational institutions bring together students from various ethnic and racial backgrounds, they have the opportunity to disrupt the cycle of lifetime segregation that threatens the fabric of our pluralistic democracy.

The next section of this chapter will address how the individualism and collectivism value orientations serve to illustrate the role of cultural variations in conflict and social behavior in general. Then the role of cognitive (attribution) processes and emotions that have been found to mediate the effects of culture on conflict and conflict resolution will be discussed. The purpose is to provide an illustration of the relationships between culture and psychological factors as determinants of conflict resolution and its consequences for individuals and education in multicultural settings.

## **Culture and Social Behavior: The Case of Collectivism-Individualism in Conflict and Violence**

Betancourt and Lopez (1993) argued that the study of culture has been largely ignored in mainstream psychology and is often relegated to the domain of cross-cultural psychologists. Commonly, mainstream psychological theories do not include cultural variables and the results or findings in their studies are thought to apply to individuals of any cultural background. In effect, this suggests that psychological knowledge developed in the United States by Anglo-American scholars, using Anglo-subjects, is universal. On the other hand, cross-cultural researchers, normally segregated from mainstream psychology, have focused on comparative studies of culture without much regard for the specific measurement of the cultural variables and its implications for mainstream theory. Often they attribute to "culture" the differences observed between ethnic or racial groups, without measuring, testing, or even specifying the cultural factor that might be responsible for the differences. When culture is involved, it is not sufficient to compare ethnic groups and attribute to ethnicity the observed behavioral differences. According to Betancourt and Lopez (1993), it is important to define and actually measure the specific cultural elements that are predicted to account for changes in behavior. Moreover it is important to actually test whether the well-defined and measured cultural variables in fact account for variations in the corresponding psychological processes or behaviors.

A number of dimensions of cultural variation have been identified. A good example of cultural factors relevant to psychological processes associated with social learning, motivation, and interpersonal phenomena is the

collectivism-individualism value orientation. This is perhaps one of the dimensions of cultural variation that has received more attention than any other cultural factor from researchers in psychology during the last few years. In addition, the collectivism value orientation is one of the most distinctive cultural characteristics of Asian and Latino American immigrants, the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. Since this is also an important cultural antecedent of how individuals deal with conflict and its resolution, it serves well to illustrate the importance of culture in understanding and preventing destructive conflict and violence in multicultural educational settings. The following section briefly reviews the literature on individualism and collectivism, followed by an illustration of how this cultural variable influences conflict resolution.

### Individualism and Collectivism

According to authors such as (Triandis et al., 1993) generally, collectivism stemmed from agricultural societies. Common features of the construct include conformity, interdependence within a group, sacrificing individual goals for the collective good, and maintaining social harmony. Persons of this orientation tend to accept the rules and authority of the in-group without question. In-groups are "sets of individuals with whom a person feels similar" (Triandis, 1994, p. 43). In collectivist cultures, in-groups are ascribed and individuals are bounded to it by factors such as kinship, tribe, or religion. There is a strong maintenance of cohesive "in-groups." This perpetuates in-group favoritism and ethnocentrism. The strong emphasis on in-group loyalty often fosters out-group derogation and competition with the out-group. The firm group boundaries that sustain the in-group allow fluid boundaries between individuals to flow freely. There is an implicit understanding that individuals are to be concerned for the needs of others in the group as well as what they think or feel, without them having to openly express those needs. The characteristics of an individualist society are in general converse to those of the collectivist one.

According to Triandis and colleagues (1993) the essential features of individualistic cultures are rooted in societies that developed around economic activities such as fishing and hunting. Although cooperation was necessary among these groups, survival was not entirely dependent on other group members. The aspect of individualistic cultures that are particularly distinctive is the separation from the ascribed in-groups. Individualist in-groups are bounded together by factors such as similar beliefs, attitudes, values, action programs and occupation (Triandis, 1994). The thread that binds them is changeable and allows individuals to move from one in-group to another. Normally individuals tend to be detached from

family, relatives, and the community. They are encouraged to express their ideas freely and to assert their own needs over those of others.

The individualism and collectivism variables are not necessarily the opposite poles of the same dimension. Instead, each construct is unidimensional and aspects of one can coexist with the other. Even though it may sound contradictory, individualism can still be exhibited in a collectivist culture, and collectivism can be demonstrated in individualist cultures. For example, in an individualist culture like the United States, there may be a collective of people who share common interests, backgrounds, and beliefs. They may gather because they have similar needs. The members of these groups become interdependent on each other and behave more like collectivists. To clarify, Triandis and colleagues (1993) have used different terms to describe the within and between group variations. Corresponding to collectivism is allocentrism, whereby the individual defines himself in relation to others. Allocentrics are more likely to downplay their personal goals in relation to the goals of the collective. Concerning individualism, the corresponding construct is idiocentrism. This is the tendency of one individual to define oneself in terms of self-attributes rather than in terms of the attributes of the group.

### Collectivism-Individualism and Models of Conflict and Its Resolution

When explaining conflict resolution strategies, various authors have focused on two models. The first model is the dual concern model (Pearson & Stephan, 1998; Janssen & van de Vliert, 1996). Two axes depict this model (see Figure 4.1). The first axis is *self-concern*, while the second axis depicts *other-concern*. *Self-concern* places importance on one's own interests while *other-concern* places an emphasis on the interests of others. The

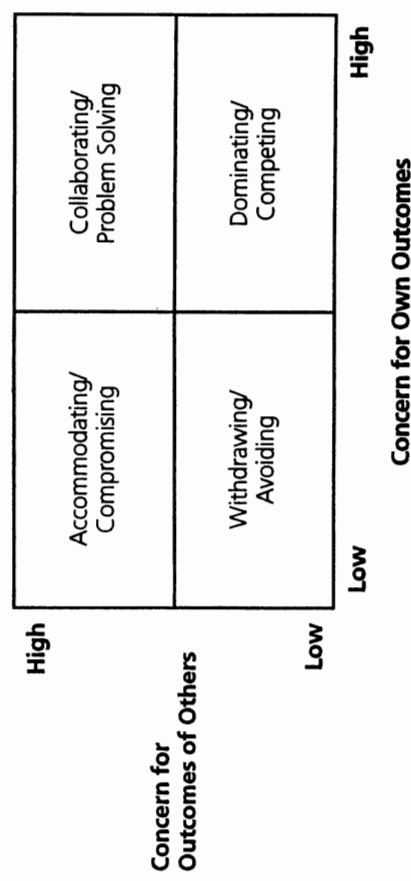


Figure 4.1. Dual concern model of negotiation. *Source:* Adapted from Pearson & Stephan, 1998.

dimensions of self and other concerns are determinants of conflict resolution behaviors and not necessarily the components of the behavior itself. According to Pruitt and Rubin (1986), the combination of these two can range from indifference (low concern for self or other) to very great concern (high concern for self or other). This model predicts four styles of conflict resolution, each of which can be located within these two axes: Accommodating, compromising, avoiding, and forcing.

Another model of conflict resolution involves the Cooperative-Competitive dimension (see Deutsch, 2000). This model focuses on the behavior or approach of individuals to the conflict. Specifically, while a cooperative style means that the individual has a concern for the welfare of their opponent, the competitive style reflects the individual's interest in doing better than the other does as well as doing well for him or herself. What these two models have in common is that the resolution tactics of conflict are manifold and can range from tactics that are totally self-centered to being very mindful of one's social environment.

The individualistic and collectivistic values fostered in cultures are likely to influence social interaction and behaviors such as conflict resolution. In most Western cultures, most of which tend to be individualistic, conflict is accepted as a useful process in which almost anything is negotiable. Concern for others is not necessarily a major consideration when dealing with conflict and individuals are more likely to engage in competitive than cooperative strategies. Characteristics of the competitive strategies include the use of threats and coercion, downplaying the intentions and behaviors of others, asserting opposing interests, and enhancing rather than diminishing power differences between the parties (Janssen & van de Vliert, 1996). Whereas individualistic societies allow for negotiations in conflict situations, a competitive style for dealing with conflict tends to be practiced even though it may not always be most adaptive.

In collectivist societies, conflict tends to be perceived as a disturbance to the natural harmony within the group. Members in a collectivist community are expected to adjust to the system, more than in the case of an individualist society. These are highly interdependent cultures that demand more conformity so that differences and conflicts tend to be minimized (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Since individuals must yield to traditional patterns, negotiations can at times be difficult. There is a strong focus on concern for others and this motivation usually results in more cooperative strategies in handling conflicts. The cooperative tactics involve an emphasis on common interests, the exchange of information to solve the problem or to meet each other's goals, being helpful in the exploration of the conflict issues, showing trust in the intentions and capabilities of others, searching for solutions that are mindful of the needs and interests of both parties (Janssen & van de Vliert, 1996). Although this may seem ideal in handling

conflict, collectivists engage in this type of conflict resolution tactics more with members of their own in-groups than with others. It appears that the group boundary that ties collectivists encourages the members of the in-group to maintain harmony among them, while behaving more competitively and aggressively toward members of out-groups.

Research evidence (Itoi, Ohbuchi, & Fukuno, 1996) indicates that collectivists use more mitigating and less competitive styles when dealing with an individual perceived to be a member of an in-group. For example, Itoi and his associates (1996) observed that that Japanese subjects preferred to make apologies rather than to provide a justification to assert their side. However, when these same collectivist students had to deal with solutions to a conflict involving people belonging to an "out-group," they showed a tendency to avoid it altogether, which was an indication of their lack of concern for behaving cooperatively. In contrast, the individualistic students showed no significant differences in tactics used based on perceptions of individuals as being in-group versus out-group members. Similar results by Pearson and Stephan (1998) found that individualist students were less likely to discriminate between perceived "in-group" versus "out-group" members. More specifically, the study showed that when Brazilians had to negotiate with members from an in-group, they made more accommodations or avoided the conflict to preserve the relationship with the individual. However, when they had to make decisions concerning out-group members, such as in the case of dealing with a stranger in a business transaction, they were more likely to behave competitively and act in their own self-interest.

### Collectivism-Individualism and Attribution Processes in Conflict and Violence

Thus far, we have focused on the influence of culture (e.g., value orientations) on conflict and its resolution. However, the direct relationship between culture and conflict is only one piece of the puzzle in understanding the role of culture in conflict environments. Interpersonal and intergroup phenomena, such as conflict and its resolution, have also been found to be at least in part a function of psychological processes, such as social cognition and related emotions. For example, Betancourt and colleagues (e.g., Betancourt, 1991, 1997; Betancourt & Blair, 1992) have documented the role of cognitive processes, such as attributional thinking, and related interpersonal emotions as determinants of violent behavior in conflict environments. In addition, a number of studies (see Betancourt, Harding, & Manzi, 1992; Betancourt & Lopez, 1998; Betancourt & Weiner, 1982) have found that these same attribution processes, which play an

role in conflict and violence, are in part a function of cultural factors such as cultural beliefs and value orientation. Moreover, as observed in the section on collectivism-individualism and styles of conflict resolution, research evidence (e.g., Guthrie & Betancourt, 2001) indicates that, at least in the case of competition in intergroup environments, attributions of controllability and intentionality are influenced by the in-group versus out-group identity of the perpetrator. Hence, intergroup biases appear to be a factor to consider in understanding conflict and its resolution not only in relation to its influence in the way collectivists and individualists relate to their in-groups and out-groups, but also as a direct influence on attributional thinking itself.

#### *Psychological Processes and Conflict: The Case of Attributions*

Concerning the role of attribution processes in conflict environments, a number of studies (e.g., Betancourt & Blair, 1992), have examined the way in which attribution processes influence violence in conflict situations. Specifically, attributions concerning the intentionality of a frustrating or instigating action and controllability of its cause were found to influence violence of responding both directly and through mediating anger and empathic emotions. When the actions of a person were perceived as controllable and intentional, subjects experienced higher degrees of anger and lower degrees of empathic feelings than when the action was perceived as unintentional and its cause as uncontrollable. Higher degrees of anger and lower degrees of empathic emotions were in turn associated with a higher probability of violent responding, such as retaliation and punishment. Essentially, according to these findings, attributional thinking concerning intentionality of an action and controllability of its cause influence violence in conflict environments, both directly and through empathic emotions.

#### *Culture and Attribution Processes: The Case of Collectivism-individualism*

More recently, a number of studies by Betancourt and his associates (e.g., Campbell & Betancourt, 2001; Zaw & Betancourt, 2002) have examined the role of cultural factors as determinants of the attribution processes relevant to the understanding of conflict and violence. For instance, one of these studies (Zaw & Betancourt, 2002), found that the individualist value orientation was associated with attributing the opponent's behavior to more controllable circumstances which, consistent with previous research and theory in this area, is associated with lower levels of empathic feelings and preference for a more dominating approach to the resolution of a conflict. A plausible explanation for these results is that the individualist emphasis on the self influences the attributions individuals make (e.g., "I am in control of my life, therefore the other is also in control of her

life"). This may influence the preference for dealing with conflict more dominantly.

In the case of collectivism, these authors observed that subjects who scored higher on collectivism tended to engage in more compromising style of responding. However, given the fact that collectivists have been observed to approach conflict differently when dealing with in-group versus out-group members, in this case the relationship appears to be more complex. This complexity is consistent with previous research suggesting that attributions of controllability and intentionality are at least in part a function of the in-group versus out-group status of the perpetrator. The brief description of social identity and the formation of groups in general that follows is intended to provide a basis for a brief discussion of its importance in understanding conflict and its resolution in multicultural group environments from a cultural (collectivism-individualism) as well as a psychological (attribution processes and emotions) perspective.

#### **The In-group/Out-group Distinction**

Social identity is conceived of as the element of an individual's self-concept that is developed from knowledge of membership in a social group and the values and emotional significance attached to that membership (Cook-Huffman, 2000). Essentially, it refers to a sense of self in relation to the social environment, by which the individual defines himself or herself in relation to the group. Conceptually, individuals that come from a collectivist culture have developed strong ties to their social system based on family membership, religion, or community. Whereas in collectivist cultures, individuals have little choice in deciding the groups they belong to, in individualistic cultures a person can easily shift from one social group to another. Group membership in individualist cultures is based on beliefs, attitudes, action programs, or occupation, and any individual can change his/her mind and leave the group without major direct consequences.

#### *The In-group/Out-group Distinction and the Attribution Process*

The mere in-group versus out-group distinction appears to influence the attribution of intentionality and controllability. So appears to do the collectivist versus individualist cultural value orientation. Hence, to understand the attributional thinking of collectivists concerning conflict and its resolution, one needs to understand social identity formation, the way in which individuals of different cultural backgrounds relate to groups, and the influences these factors have in psychological functioning and social behavior. In this section we first illustrate how the in-group versus out-group distinction influences attribution processes in conflict situations.

Research in this area (see Betancourt, 1997) suggests that the role of attribution processes operating in conflict situations is influenced by the in-group/out-group distinction. For example, in a study conducted by Guthrie and Betancourt (2001), it was observed that when children of 3rd and 6th grade had to make judgments about the violent actions of other children, the in-group versus out-group identity of the perpetrator influenced their judgment. They made more intentional and controllable attributions for the frustrating aggressive behavior of out-group members than for in-group members. At the same time, consistent with previous research and theory in this area, they reported higher levels of anger and lower levels of empathic feelings toward the out-group than toward the in-group perpetrator. Also consistent with theory, judgments of retaliation and punishment were a function of perceived intentionality and controllability, both directly and through the influence of these attributional variables on anger and empathic emotions.

#### *The In-group/Out-group Distinction and Attribution Processes Among Collectivists and Individualists*

Since collectivists, compared to individualists, have stronger ties to their groups (in-groups), it is understandable that they show differences in the way they approach conflict with the in-group versus the out-group. Based on these and other features that differentiate collectivists from individualists, it is reasonable to expect that it may also influence their attributions of controllability and intentionality for in-group versus out-group members. In fact, there is evidence (Menon, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 1999) that when compared to individualists, collectivists tend to make more situational (external) attributions than individualists. Although these studies did not clarify the particular social situation or to which group (in-group or out-group) the attributions were being made, the influence of value orientation in the attribution process is clearly demonstrated. Also, as reported above, the research of Itoi, Ohbuchi, and Fukuno (1996) demonstrated that collectivists tend to use more mitigating and cooperative ways of responding to conflict when dealing with in-group member, while using more competitive strategies when dealing with the out-group. In sum, it appears that the in-group/out-group distinction may play a significant but complex role in the attributions collectivists make in multicultural/intergroup conflict environments.

#### **Implications for Multicultural Educational Settings**

Groups have a high need for a positive self-image and generally strive to maintain this positive social identity by comparing with other social groups

(e.g., Cook-Huffman, 2000). Making these comparisons allows for social categorizations to be made, which are the "consensual constructions that characterize and delineate boundaries of group membership" (p. 116). In every social system, there is always the dominant or mainstream group that holds the power, which is what makes a pluralistic society (Pruitt & Rubin 1986). Schools, particularly those within a multicultural society, are no exception to this. To be a member of the high status group provides individuals with positive self-concept and high self-esteem. However, for one reason or another, not everybody is part of the mainstream group. As a result the social system divides itself into separate groups in which the separated groups hold less power. Membership in these low-status groups is often associated with less positive and even negative self-concept (Cook-Huffman, 2000).

These social categorizations and the desire to maintain positive group distinctiveness can be a cause of many inter-group conflicts. Schools provide an excellent illustration of settings where group comparisons and categorizations are made. For example, in the case of Andy Williams, from Santana High School, the mainstream groups cast him off as different and relegated him into a lower status group, leaving him to feel unwanted and isolated. This experience was in stark contrast to his experience at his previous high school, where he felt accepted, within the context of a culture (the community) he felt part of. A similar case can be made about Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold from Columbine High School. Before the massacre, there were rising conflicts between the different social groups in the high school that helped create a tense environment among the students (Weintraub et al., 2001). Harris and Dylan were categorized as "outsiders" who did not belong to any desirable social groups. Their feelings of rejection and isolation, and the anger normally associated with such frustrating situations, may have been related to the realization of their low-status categorization in comparison to the more mainstream social groups. Also, it may have been the case that much of their anger was driven not only by their own isolation, but by the attributions of intentionality concerning the behaviors of their peers, controllability of the causes they attribute such behaviors to, and the responsibility they attributed to the teachers and the system in general. Of course, there are many conditions that may influence the occurrence of conflicts and whether or not these result in violence. The background of the individual, the cultural context, and the psychological processes involved represent only part of the picture—an important part though given the multicultural nature of schools settings in most of the United States today.

There is a broad literature dealing with the factors that have been identified as important conditions for the emergence of conflict in general. For example, according to some authors (e.g., Woehrle & Coy, 2001) there are

four specific conditions that must be minimally met for social conflicts to emerge. First, the parties must identify themselves as separate from one another. Then one or more of the parties must have a grievance. Third one or more of the parties must develop goals to change the other party in order to reduce their grievance. Finally, the distressed party must believe that they can be successful in changing the other party (Woehrle & Coy, 2001). Although this may be observed in society at large, it is particularly so in schools.

In order to be effective, the prevention of destructive conflict in multicultural educational settings requires a good understanding and consideration of the role of culture and relevant psychological processes. Specifically, rejected, excluded, or victimized students may recognize their separation from the mainstream groups. They are also likely to have grievances toward mainstream groups or kids they see as abusive. Of course, most of these students may find constructive methods to reduce their grievances, particularly when there is support from teachers, the school, home, or the social environment outside school. However, there may be other students who will find more destructive and violent ways to deal with such reality. What makes the difference between the former and the latter, may be the psychological processes, such as attributional thinking concerning why rejection, stigmatization, bullying, or any similar frustrating situation might have occurred. The attributions they make concerning the intentionality of those seen as responsible for their situation and negative outcomes, as well as attributional thinking concerning the privilege of others, the attitudes of peers, and the way teachers and the school deals with such situations, are likely to influence the degree of anger-related emotions, which will in turn influence the way they respond and cope. These thinking processes may in fact make the difference between choosing a constructive or destructive course of action.

From the perspective of the cultural diversity that is characteristic of multi ethnic and pluralistic societies, a full understanding of these psychological processes as well as the way individuals are likely to deal with such situations requires that we consider the cultural background of all students involved. Although there is little research on the role of ethnicity and culture specifically dealing with conflict and violence in multicultural educational settings, there are preliminary studies that have identified how value orientations, such as collectivism and individualism, and other cultural factors influence conflict and its resolution, both directly and through its influence on psychological processes such as attributional thinking and related emotions.

Cognitive processes such as attributional thinking concerning intentionality of actions and controllability of their causes are thought to account at least in part for the emotions relevant to destructive conflict and violence,

from anger and frustration to pity and empathic feelings (see Betancourt, 1991, 1997; Betancourt & Blair, 1992; Weiner, 1991, 1996). In addition, the fact that these processes, as well as the way individuals deal with conflict and its resolution, are influenced by culture makes the study of these factors an absolute priority for the study of conflict and intervention in multicultural educational settings.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the focus on psychological processes was intended to illustrate the role of psychological factors such as social cognition and emotion in conflict and violence. Similarly, collectivism and individualism were conceived as examples of the role of cultural factors such as value orientation in relation to both, conflict and the psychological processes it involves. In addition, given the multi-group environment of schools, biases associated with social identity and intergroup phenomena, as well as the ways in which these relate to culture and psychological processes, served to illustrate the complexities associated with understanding and dealing with conflict in multicultural settings. Of course, in no way do we intend to suggest that these are the main determinants of conflict. In fact, there is a large literature demonstrating the importance of other psychological factors. However, the role of culture in conflict and its resolution, both directly and through the influence on relevant psychological factors, has not received enough attention. This influential role is more critical when dealing with multicultural educational settings both at the national as well as international levels.

The emergence of conflict is especially inevitable when there are differences in culture (i.e., values and beliefs), power inequalities, resource distribution, lack of communication, and a strong sense of a collective identity. In an ever-increasing multicultural society, there is a stronger potential than ever for misunderstanding and mishandling conflict. The emergence of various in-groups creates a larger potential for segregated collectives to form and influence interpersonal relations, including but not limited to conflict. Just as an example, the formation of different groups in the competitive environment that dominate schools, makes in-group favoritism and out-group derogation more likely to occur and to have unpredictable consequences. Although the formation of in-groups can be used to promote socially positive outcomes, such as the creation of positive images, self-esteem, and a sense of community, it can also promote in-group favoritism, out-group derogation, and destructive conflict and violence. From the perspective of this chapter, awareness and understanding of the role of cognitive processes and cultural factors, which are amenable to change, are particularly likely to contribute to the control and prevention of destructive conflict and violence in the multicultural environments that are more and more characteristic of teaching and educational settings in the United States.

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