

# Consciousness in Culture-Based Conflict and Conflict Resolution

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*This article makes the case for bringing theory of consciousness to the understanding of individual transformation in conflict resolution practice. It does so by highlighting consciousness engaged explicitly and implicitly in many conflict resolution practices and consciousness dynamics considered in the emerging literature by conflict resolution practitioners. In particular, increasing awareness, consciousness structures, shifts in consciousness, transitional space, and embodied engagement are useful frameworks for understanding individual transformation within conflict resolution processes. The article concludes that the study of conflict resolution is incomplete without consideration of consciousness in conflict and conflict resolution. Furthermore, formally engaging consciousness dynamics as part of the study of conflict resolution holds promise for improving conflict resolution practice.*

What are the roles of consciousness in conflict and conflict resolution? Consciousness, dynamics of consciousness, and consciousness structures are fundamental to how we understand and engage in conflict and conflict resolution. Particularly in culture-based conflicts, conflict resolution processes support personal transformation of individual participants' consciousness structures, including conceptions of conflict and of self and other in conflict. The roles of consciousness in conflict and conflict resolution may be seen by focusing on culture-based conflict and conflict resolution, where cross-cultural dynamics are at play in the development of conflict and in the resolution processes. In reflecting on their work, conflict resolution practitioners are at the forefront of the emerging work in this area.

This paper presents consciousness as a useful lens for understanding personal transformation in conflict and conflict resolution. While consciousness dynamics may of course influence group and larger systemic transformation, and may do so in a variety of kinds of conflicts, the focus here is on individual transformation in the context of culture-based conflict. The paper argues that much of current conflict resolution practice can be usefully examined as methods for personal transformation through shifting consciousness structures. Conflict resolution practices as diverse as ritual, reframing, rehumanizing, analytical problem-solving workshops, confidence-building measures, nonviolent communication, and particular cultural ceremonies all shift consciousness structures. The enemy becomes the colleague in solving a problem; the returning child soldier again becomes a member of his or her community; the pie of options for settlement expands; the inhuman evil other again becomes human; everyone's needs begin to matter far more than one's own position; a weight lifts from the parties' shoulders. Each of these changes involves shifts in consciousness.

If we are to discuss shifts in consciousness meaningfully, we must first have some clarity about what consciousness is. *Consciousness* refers broadly to sensory and emotional perception, memory, volition, aversions and desires, cognition, and, especially, to awareness within each of these areas and beyond. As opposed to the unconscious, C. G. Jung (1959, p. 245) conceived of consciousness as "the function or activity which maintains the relation of psychic contents with the ego." In other words, a special quality of consciousness is the awareness of objects, such as sensory experiences, desires, thoughts, and the like.

Another key characteristic of consciousness is its dynamic manifestations. Consciousness is not a static phenomenon. As William James (1992, p. 153) put it, "within each personal consciousness states are always changing." Writing from 1878 to 1899, James was the first Western psychologist to describe the field characteristics of consciousness. He described "fields of consciousness" with a focal object and marginal objects, and with multiple kinds of shifts in these fields over time. The fields of consciousness contain:

sensations of our bodies and of the objects around us, memories of past experiences and thoughts of distant things, feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, desires and aversions, and other emotional conditions,

together with determinations of the will, in every variety of permutation and combination [James, 1992, p. 722].

Acts of consciousness are inherent in conflict and in resolving conflict. We are conscious of various objects: our conflicts, self, other, relationship of self and other, thoughts, feelings, sensations, and even consciousness itself. As our awareness is heightened, we become more conscious in conflict and conflict resolution. Conflict resolution processes encourage consciousness beyond the boundaries that shaped the conflict by shifting the objects of our consciousness, developing consciousness in conflicting and resolving, and extending awareness beyond the familiar.

This paper first explores the emerging conversation between consciousness and conflict resolution. The core argument is that *consciousness matters to the theory and practice of conflict and conflict resolution*. The roles of consciousness in conflict resolution are particularly visible in culture-based conflict contexts. Here, the consciousness lens is useful in highlighting the limits of outsider interventions in conflict and the particularly relevant roles for insider-partials (i.e., stakeholders in the dispute as opposed to an outside neutral intervener). Differences in structures of consciousness create fundamental differences in what conflict and conflict resolution are. Building on the overall argument that consciousness matters, the paper then focuses on five ways in which consciousness matters in conflict resolution:

1. *Increasing awareness* leads to greater freedom to act constructively in conflict and conflict resolution.
2. Much conflict resolution practice can be seen as supporting *shifts in consciousness*.
3. A *transitional space* allows shifts in consciousness supportive of constructive engagement in conflict and conflict resolution.
4. *Embodied engagement* can support individual shifts.
5. The consciousness lens points out ways we may *improve conflict resolution practice* to better support shifts in consciousness.

In conclusion, suggestions for further developing theory and practice of conflict resolution are offered.

## The Emerging Conversation between Consciousness and Conflict Resolution

Consciousness is a concept that informs much theory relevant to conflict analysis and resolution, broadly defined. Consciousness is explicit in concepts of class consciousness, legal consciousness, collective consciousness, group consciousness, and the unconscious. Consciousness is implicit in much conflict resolution practice. The authors of *Getting to Yes* (Fisher, Ury, and Patton, 1991) ask parties to develop an awareness of not only their positions but also of their interests and the other party's interests, and to act on this consciousness of interests. Bush and Folger's (1994, p. 93) transformative mediation model highlights the party's empowered and conscious "decision to expand his focus from self alone to include the other." The transformation story of mediation, which emphasizes the potential of mediation to "transform the character of both individual disputants and society as a whole," is a dominant narrative amongst practitioners (Bush and Folger, 1994, pp. 20–21).

Problem-solving workshops invite parties to analyze the problem, developing an awareness of the problem as analysts, and then incorporate this awareness in their actions as parties in the conflict. Basic human needs become salient when people are to some extent conscious of their needs, and satisfiers satisfy needs when people have some awareness or monitoring to tell them their needs have been met. The increasingly strong nonviolent communication (NVC) movement is based on language that acknowledges the needs of all; NVC is a practice based on consciousness of needs (Rosenberg, 2005). Reconciliation requires acts of consciousness. Trauma healing engages awareness of the trauma and its impact. Mediators bring an awareness of spirituality to their work (Jones, 2009).

As this list reflects, there are many strands of consciousness-related research relevant to conflict analysis and resolution. Indeed, consciousness can be seen as the base of much of conflict resolution theory and practice. Conflict manifests with a consciousness of seemingly incompatible goals, interests, or needs. The core of conflict resolution is a process of shifting consciousness or increasing awareness; parties develop increasing awareness of their own needs, the needs of others, and ways of meeting everyone's needs. When the parties act on their increased awareness, eventually they develop a consciousness of their needs being met. With all the entanglement of consciousness in conflict analysis and resolution theory and practice, we may further both theory and practice by engaging in a conversation about this base.

Using a consciousness lens to view conflict and conflict resolution helps illuminate the interior processes within people engaged in conflict and conflict resolution. Conflict engages our minds, bodies, hearts, and souls. Correspondingly, culture-based conflict can be a cognitive (mind), somatic (body), emotional (heart), and spiritual (soul) experience. Consciousness shapes our minds, bodies, hearts, and souls and their mutual entanglement.

The various treatments of consciousness thus far in literature related to conflict resolution reflect the wide variety of ways that conflict engages people. The literature includes consideration of:

- Consciousness of the self in relation to others in a group and outside a group (such as identity and class consciousness)
- Consciousness of discourse and our discursive minds (as found in narrative mediation approaches)
- Consciousness of interests as related to rights (as in legal consciousness)
- Consciousness of trauma, and the whole self that may be fragmented by trauma (as in trauma healing)
- Consciousness of interests (in principled negotiation)
- Consciousness of needs (in problem-solving workshops and nonviolent communication)
- Consciousness of the other as enemy, neighbor, or even connected to self (as in reconciliation)
- Interconnections between internal peace and external peace (as in principled nonviolence and spiritually based approaches to peace)

In short, “[d]eep rooted conflict is about interiority—the processes and dynamics that occur within a human person” (Neufeld-Redekop, 2002, p. 61, cited in McGuigan, 2006, p. 238). And that interiority is complexly multidimensional.

### Consciousness in Culture-Based Conflict Contexts

In culture-based conflict contexts, the role of consciousness in shaping our conflicts and conflict resolution processes is particularly clear. Culture is fluid and dynamic in the way it shapes an individual’s experience of conflict. “Culture is a derivative of individual experience, something learned or

created by individuals themselves or passed on to them socially by contemporaries or ancestors” (Avruch, 1998, p. 5). Culture develops in the context of consciousness.

Cultures differ in their understanding of the person, the community, agentive orientation, and conflict and conflict resolution. For example, John Paul Lederach learned in his work in conflict resolution in a Costa Rican community that the term *conflict* is seen as a highly academic concept there. Instead, nets of social relationships get entangled. “Families and [personal networks] are the context in which conflicts, or the daily ‘entanglements’ develop, are understood, and are managed” (Lederach, 1991, p. 168). These differences in conceptions of conflict are cultural and arise out of differences in consciousness structures. Consciousness is the base on which consciousness structures and cultures develop. Beneath the surface of every culture-based conflict is a consciousness-based conflict. Indeed, although the focus here is culture-based conflict, every conflict can be seen as consciousness-based.

Consciousness may be useful in a way the concepts of paradigm, worldview, discourse, and culture have not been, or are no longer. The term *paradigm*, as introduced by Kuhn (1961), was a very broad concept but has come to be utilized most often in reference to cognition, whereas *consciousness* is more multifaceted, incorporating not only cognition but also emotional, somatic, and spiritual experience. In other words, we might seek out new ways of computing within a quantum paradigm, engaging primarily our cognitive understanding. *Worldview* (Docherty, 2001) tends also to highlight the cognitive aspects of awareness, including the discursive mind and metaphorical thinking that shapes the realities we see. For example, loggers may see a forest as a farm, while environmentalists see it as an ecosystem. These are two different worldviews in relation to the forest. *Deep culture*, as described by Johan Galtung (1996), identifies the conceptions of nature, self, society, world, time, transperson, and episteme in comparing six civilizational worldviews. Galtung convincingly shows divergent understandings of development and peace, radically different from civilization to civilization. Presumably, these six civilizations would hold radically different conceptions of what conflict is, too, and thus conceive of self engaged in conflict very differently. Why introduce the consciousness lens, when these other lenses have already pointed to aspects of the interiority of conflict?

By focusing on the concept of consciousness, we focus on the base of our experience of conflict and conflict resolution. Previously, paradigms

were understood as fundamental to our knowing, but the concept of paradigms and paradigm shifts has been applied to little bits and pieces of our knowing. Worldviews were also seen as basic to our engagement with the world and conflict, but this concept of engagement also has been employed to refer to more surface aspects of our positioning ourselves in the world. While culture remains a useful concept to further our understanding of conflict and conflict resolution, consciousness is the base on which culture develops and thus, to return to the core thesis of this paper, consciousness matters to conflict and conflict resolution.

### Consciousness Structures in Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Different types of consciousness structures create differences as fundamental as cultural differences. Kegan (1994) and McGuigan (2006) illustrate these differences.

Kegan (1994) distinguishes between five “orders of consciousness.” These cognitively focused orders differ in terms of the subject and object of consciousness as well as the underlying structure of consciousness. In the first order, the object is sensation and movement with consciousness structured as a single immediate point. This is the consciousness we attribute to infants. Infants develop from this first order of consciousness to the young child’s second order of consciousness, in which durable categories emerge, including the self as having durable needs and preferences.

The third order of consciousness is highly relevant to conflict and conflict resolution. The child later matures to notice others’ points of view with a consciousness that Kegan labels cross-categorical or trans-categorical in structure. The child recognizes others’ subjectivity while separately recognizing her own subjectivity with self-consciousness. The child realizes there can be two different views of the same situation—a right view and wrong view, a front view and back view, and so on. (As he was about to turn three years old, my younger son had not fully developed this consciousness; he once tried to show me pictures in a book he held while he sat immediately behind me. I sat, focused forward, in the driver’s seat of a moving car.) Kegan labels this third order of consciousness “traditionalism.” Traditionalism is reminiscent of the narratives of many conflicts as treated in much conflict resolution literature. One party sees her own perspective as obviously right; the other party sees his own perspective as obviously right. Each party’s concept of self and identity is embedded in the obvious rightness of the perspective. The self depends on the perspective for existence.

Kegan also presents fourth- and fifth-order consciousnesses that offer much promise for conflict resolution. In the fourth order, labeled modernism, the object of consciousness is inner states, abstractions, and the self develops autonomy, self-regulation, and identity. The underlying structure is complex or a system. The self is not dependent on the security of traditionalism. Much conflict resolution practice requires parties to operate within this fourth order of consciousness. Thus, a critical component of these conflict resolution processes is providing space for the parties to move from third- to fourth-order consciousness. This transition to fourth-order consciousness can be seen in rehumanization processes, for example. Here the enemy may be rehumanized by a pairs discussion of personal life—shared family experiences, for example, of raising children—and thus the other becomes a complex other, embedded in multiple systems with multifaceted identities as the enemy, a mother, a sister, a parliamentarian, and so on.

Kegan's fifth order of consciousness can be seen more in particular strands of the conflict transformation literature, as distinguished from the more fourth-order traditions of modern conflict resolution just described. Kegan labels this fifth order of consciousness postmodern, where the underlying structure is trans-system and trans-complex. Here the object of consciousness is abstract system ideology, institutions, relationship-regulating forms, and self-authorship, self-regulation, and self-formation. Here the self, rather than being a fully separate fourth-order individuated self, becomes a self created through the interpenetration of self and other. At its best, conflict resolution engages fifth-order consciousness. It is here that the connectedness of self and other is clarified, that the identification of self in relationship to other becomes clear, and that empathy becomes multidimensional; fifth-order empathy engages others' subjectivity and others' systems. Ironically, conflict may decrease our ability to engage higher-order consciousness, and conflict resolution may require higher-order consciousness. In conflict, we are, as Kegan puts it, "In over Our Heads."

Richard McGuigan's (2006, p. 4) doctoral dissertation "investigates the evolving deep structures of consciousness and their relationship to meaning making in a conflict." In it, McGuigan builds on Kegan, Wilbur, Piaget, and Torbert to offer a typology of stages of conflict that distinguishes between five different deep structures of consciousness of conflict. In the first stage, one is unaware of conflict. Conflict does not exist. In the second stage, conflict is instrumental: I am my needs, and there is no shared reality. In the third stage, conflict is a threat: I have needs, I am my



relationships, there is a shared reality, and there is no separate self. In the fourth stage, conflict is collaboration: I seek to discover you and your needs, I have relationships, and I am self-authoring. In the fifth stage, conflict is a challenge: I engage in self-transformation and inter-individuation.

Kegan's efforts clarify that differences in at least the cognitive aspects of consciousness structures underlie differences in approach to conflict and conflict resolution. While Kegan focuses primarily on the cognitive aspects of consciousness, the emotional, somatic, and spiritual components of consciousness are also highly relevant to conflict and conflict resolution. Much psychologically based work acknowledges emotional roles in conflict, and some trauma-healing work highlights the somatic roles as well. The spiritual dynamic is acknowledged by religious-based peacebuilders and some participants in interfaith dialogue. The emotional, somatic, and spiritual are areas for further development in the conflict resolution field, particularly with regard to the consciousness dynamics involved. *In conflicts, we may not only be "In over Our Heads" but also emotionally exhausted, spiritually shattered, and physically frozen.*

Some consciousness structures serve us better than others as we engage in conflict and conflict resolution. Part of conflict resolution is the unfolding, or the deconstruction and reconstruction, of consciousness structures that allow more effective engagement in conflict. With this understanding, we now proceed to consider five ways the consciousness lens furthers our understanding of conflict resolution, specifically:

1. Increasing awareness allows greater freedom to act constructively in conflict and conflict resolution.
2. Much conflict resolution practice can be seen as supporting shifts in consciousness.
3. Transitional space allows shifts in consciousness supportive of constructive engagement in conflict and conflict resolution.
4. Embodied engagement can support individual shifts.
5. Improve conflict resolution practice to better support shifts in consciousness.

### *Increasing Awareness*

Increased awareness leads to more freedom to choose constructive conflict engagement.

Conflict decreases our awareness through increased stress, but conflict resolution requires increasing awareness and decreased stress. Much of conflict resolution practice acts to increase awareness. In addition, mindfulness practices may usefully increase awareness by decreasing anxiety and increasing the ability to learn and empathize.

Conflict resolution practices act to increase awareness. The consciousness raising of feminist rap sessions, the Black Consciousness Movement, or Marxist-inspired efforts to combat false consciousness by raising the consciousness of the workers are core parts of efforts to engage constructively in conflicts that are shaped by a dominant hegemony which fails to meet the needs of all involved. Foucault's work is based on the understanding that dominant narratives, or deep structures reflected in these dominant discourses, are usually invisible to those operating within them. These invisible forces privilege voices that fit the prevailing consciousness, and marginalize those that do not fit. Conflict resolution approaches seek to empower those whose voices are not privileged. Rather than leave discourse and the cultural ideas, symbols, and practices called memes by Dawkins (1976) to shape our worldviews unconsciously, perhaps in ways we would not choose. Conflict resolution approaches critically examine the discourse and cultures shaping conflicts, working at the individual, family, organizational, community, national, and global levels. Conflict resolution practices are based on the theory, usually not articulated, that increasing awareness can interrupt the reinforcement of discourses, memes, and associated behaviors.

The core of conflict resolution is increasing awareness. Typically, parties are asked to become aware of not only their own positions but also of their interests and needs as well as those of the other party. Trauma healing through somatic experiencing requires awareness of bodily sensations as well as other aspects of the experience of trauma (Levine, 1997). When parties accept their emotions in conflict without judgment, they are more able to be aware of their emotions and not be ruled by them. Parties can consciously choose their actions with an awareness of escalatory and de-escalatory conflict trajectories.

Increasing awareness is also considered essential for facilitator or mediator efficacy. Bowling and Hoffman (2003) emphasize practitioners' efforts to gain awareness of how their personal qualities—all that they bring into the room as they enter—impact the conflict resolution process. McGuigan (2009) offers guidance to practitioners who see their personal growth as connected to their growth as conflict resolution practitioners.

The focus on increasing awareness is particularly marked with regard to cross-cultural conflict. LeBaron (2003, chap. 3, p. 2) highlights the utility of increasing awareness of culture, or a greater consciousness of culture, as a support to more constructive engagement in cross-cultural conflict resolution. She writes:

Awareness of our selves as situated within boundaries drawn by our cultures, worldviews, and individual habits of attention contributes to cultural fluency. This awareness is essential to a complete understandings of cultural dynamics. We apply our understandings only as fluently as we are aware of the filters through which they pass.

Increasing awareness supports increasing fluency in cross-cultural conflict resolution.

#### *Shifts in Consciousness*

Much conflict resolution practice can be seen as supporting *shifts in consciousness*. We shift when restating the other's view if we manage to see that other perspective in an "aha" moment. We shift to see the other with compassion as opposed to as an enemy, we come to see expanded options beyond my way or their way, we become aware of our own roles in the conflict, we come to see the wisdom in the quest for justice that anger may prompt, and so on. Berenike Carstarphen (2003, p. 1) defined:

a *shift*—a positive, qualitative change in the relationship between conflict parties, including changed attitudes toward oneself and the other party, the conflict issues, and the conflict situation as a whole—that paves the way for reconciliation and conflict resolution.

The shift Carstarphen describes is at heart a shift in consciousness—the consciousness of self, other, conflict issues, and conflict situation all shift.

James (1992, p. 724) described the variety of ways in which shifts in consciousness can occur:

In the successive mutations of our fields of consciousness, the process by which one dissolves into another is often very gradual, and all sorts of inner rearrangements of contents occur. Sometimes the focus remains but little changed, whilst the margin alters rapidly. Sometimes the

focus alters, and the margin stays. Sometimes the focus and the margin change places. Sometimes, again, abrupt alterations of the whole field occur.

Both abrupt alterations and gradual shifts are described by conflict resolution practitioners.

A shift in consciousness theory of conflict resolution makes sense of much conflict resolution practice. Certainly the principled nonviolent theorists Gandhi and King presented theories of social change congruent with the consciousness conception of conflict and conflict resolution. Within principled nonviolence, a shift in consciousness drives actions for social change. The nested model of conflict (Dugan, 1996) is also congruent with this understanding—issues, relationships, systems, and intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict are indeed nested in other levels of conflict not only through structural means but also through consciousness itself. So, too, is our growing appreciation of the role of rituals, eating together, and building trust congruent with a consciousness conception of conflict and conflict resolution. Basic human needs drive conflict only when people become conscious of their basic human needs. Satisfiers of basic human needs are satisfying only when people are conscious of their needs satisfaction. The process of problem-solving workshops creates a transitional space by inviting the parties to analyze the conflict together, stepping back from decision making and negotiations into a new space of increasing awareness of the conflict dynamics. Parties gain increased awareness, empathy, and shifts in consciousness through their participation in such workshops. Even the simple emphasis of interests over positions is a reframing that requires a shift in consciousness. Like the structure of problem-solving workshops and the reframing from positions to interests to needs, the language of the increasingly popular NVC movement is a set of phrases and framing supportive of a consciousness of interdependent needs. Trauma healing, developing empathy with the other, reconciliation, forgiveness, and the conscientization (Curle, 1971, cited in Lederach, 1997) that moves conflict from latent to manifest all require shifts in consciousness.

Shifts in consciousness may be more gradual or more fundamental transformations. Both gradually increasing awareness and aha moments of transitions to higher-order consciousness are shifts in consciousness. Shifts in consciousness may be supported by a transitional space, a liminal state—which may explain the success of arts and role plays in conflict resolution and the importance of retreating to another geographic space for dialogues.

Shifts may also be supported by gradually developing awareness of problems with the current constructions of consciousness. Reflective practice is a process of considering one's own experience to develop understanding of practice. Experiential learning (Torbert, 1972) provides opportunities for developing consciousness. Torbert defines three ways experiential learning serves consciousness, depending on the developmental state of the learner:

[I]n a child in whom experiential learning is encouraged from the outset, feedback is used partly to form the levels of structure and behavior and to distinguish among qualities of attention; in a person who has internalized the mystery-mastery process, experiential learning will have a quality of breaking through into higher consciousness as well as of reorganizing the lower levels—a quality of sensualizing and spiritualizing his moment-to-moment perceptions; in a person fully formed at all three levels and in touch with consciousness, experiential learning will be a regular aspect of his action in the environment in fulfillment of his ultimate concern [1972, p. 135].

Torbert's developmental model of consciousness suggests a utility to developing consciousness so as to live a richer and more fulfilling life in touch with consciousness. Torbert's and Kegan's (1994) conclusions both point toward the desirability of shifting consciousness toward more developed consciousness. Kegan points out again and again ways in which the demands of adult life call for fourth-order consciousness, while, he argues, over half of U.S. adults today operate within third-order consciousness. Thus, shifts in consciousness are required. Kegan suggests these can be achieved by building bridges between orders of consciousness and by being explicit about what kind of consciousness is expected.

Practicing conflict resolution skills may also shift the consciousness of practitioners, not only the parties to the conflict with whom they work. Lane-Garon (2007) studied the educational value in peer mediation programs, focusing not on the commonly studied impact on discipline within schools but on the impact of these programs in students' perspective-taking abilities. Participation in peer mediation programs, Lane-Garon found, increases both mediators' and mediation participants' skills in perspective taking. In short, mediation impacts consciousness. Being a mediator improves perspective-taking abilities.

Returning to our consideration of culture-based conflicts, these can be seen as opportunities for shifts in consciousness structures during conflict resolution processes. When participants in culture-based conflicts come to see their culture as shaping the conflict, they gain an awareness of their culture that shifts the range of options available to them in engaging in the conflict. How can people become aware of culture, or any structure of consciousness, in the midst of conflict?

### *Transitional Space*

If increasing awareness is a key to freedom to choose constructive engagement in conflict, how can that increasing awareness be developed? If individuals are working within a hegemonic model of elite privilege, how does an alternative consciousness that better serves the individual develop? How do alternative group consciousnesses develop? At least at the individual level, it appears that some sort of *transitional space* allows shifts in consciousness supportive of constructive engagement in conflict and conflict resolution.

Transitional space builds on D. W. Winnicott's conceptions of potential space and transitional objects. Winnicott (1971) describes a subjective object and an object that is objectively perceived, and calls the space between these potential space (such as that found in play, creativity, psychoanalysis, transitional object relations, and cultural experience). Areas of potential space and transitional objects hold the potential for significant transitions. In transitional space, there is a base that is supportive of shifts in consciousness.

Rudolph Bauer (2007) describes transitional space as a useful support to individual transformations in psychotherapy. When we are aware of our own awareness, that awareness of awareness can serve as our base, our feeling of self. In that state, we are no longer ruled by thinking, feeling, sensation, memory, or fantasy functions but rather can employ these functions with agency. With awareness of awareness as our base, we can take as object our thoughts, emotions, feelings, sensations, memories, and fantasies, and make decisions on how to engage constructively in conflict without being driven by these functions toward particular actions.

Parties in conflict—indeed, all of us—tend to be organized by, preoccupied with, and living our lives according to one of our functions, whether thought, feeling, sensation, memory, or fantasy. Torbert (1972, p. 24) writes, “A higher level than thought—consciousness—is necessary to

integrate the elements at the level of thought.” Increased awareness of awareness allows for a greater stability and a greater freedom.

Consciousness provides a system with “ultrastability. . . . Ultrastability gives the system the possibility of making changes in its structure because the system’s essential coherence and integrity are not dependent on any given structure (Torbert, 1972, p. 15).

In short, shifts in consciousness require increasing awareness to allow: an objectification of the old structures of consciousness; integration of the old thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, and fantasies; the entering of a transitional space or liminal space; and then the creation of the new structures of consciousness, a new sense of self and self in context. Mindfulness practices and other contemplative traditions, as well as the creation of a holding environment, may help support that transitional space.

The transitional space concept makes sense of my recent experience facilitating a workshop with civil society leaders from both sides of a protracted interethnic conflict at a time when relations between the two sides at the official level were very poor. The mood in the room was very tense, and there was apparently either little interest or capacity to recognize the others’ perspectives. I asked the group to engage in a five-minute exercise of first breath awareness and then awareness of how it felt to be in the room with each other and what thoughts arose as they sat in the same room. The discussion shifted dramatically after that exercise. One participant announced, “I see how it looks that way to you,” and several others on both sides expressed similar shifts toward recognition of the other. The few moments of a simple mindfulness exercise seemed to have created a space for a shift in consciousness away from a view of the other as insanely wrong to a curiosity about the other’s views.

Transitions in view, self-image, and the like are possible when we no longer cling to a view, self-image, and so on as essential to our self-definition. This can be possible when we take that view, self-image, and the like as object of our awareness, realizing that we are not that view, emotion, or image but that there is a self beyond it. Moving from Kegan’s third-order traditionalism consciousness to fourth-order modern consciousness requires taking inner states, abstractions, and ways of thinking as the objects of consciousness rather than identifying these states, abstractions, and ways of thinking as our selves. This way of thinking creates a transitional space in which those inner states, abstractions, and ways of thinking can be shifted. The participants in the dialogue I just mentioned may have taken as objects their thoughts about the other. When sensing a self that

was not defined by those particular thoughts about the other, participants may have felt freer to shift to new thoughts about the other.

Similarly, moving to the fifth-order postmodern consciousness requires taking as the object of consciousness the abstract system ideology, institutions, relationship-regulating forms, and the processes of self-authorship, self-regulation, and self-formation. Doing this creates space for transitions in the ideology, institutions, and the like. When individuals in conflict develop an awareness of their conflict systems or relational patterns, they then are able to sense a self that is not defined by the systems or patterns and to enter a transitional space with the freedom to explore creating new systems or patterns.

Role-plays, the arts, transitional objects, and psychodrama may be utilized in conflict resolution processes to create or support a transitional space. In establishing a space for conflict resolution discussions, we know that we want to create a safe space. We often take parties to another location, outside of the conflict context. We ask parties to engage in exercises (such as analytical problem solving) that put them in a different mode of thinking from their usual roles as conflict parties. In teaching conflict resolution principles, we often present ambiguous figures (such as the old woman–young woman image) and encourage students to experience the transition from seeing one to seeing the other to seeing both pictures. Theater and other arts-based approaches can be understood as allowing entry into a transitional space.

Dialogue is designed to create a sort of transitional space through intentional process design that sets aside decision making with a focus on understanding. Dialogue processes create a space of community connectedness that is of a different quality than usual interactions and allows more open understanding of the other (Schirch and Camp, 2007). “Dialogue fosters, at a minimum, a basic level of human caring for all of its participants. . . . This experience of deep caring can expand people’s sense of community connectedness” (Schirch and Camp, 2007, p. 14). This space of community connectedness allows understanding of the other and gives rise to new approaches to shared problems.

Rituals are another way to create transitional spaces. It is during rituals that the former child soldier is again welcomed back into his or her former community. It is through rituals such as fosterage that former warring clans of the Caucasus can settle blood feuds. The rituals hold a transitional space in which the meaning of self and other can be transformed. The rituals serve as a holding environment for the objectification, reorganization, integration, and transformation of old functions.



*Embodied Engagement*

Consciousness includes a physical component. The sense of the physical body and its experience can act as a transitional space to support shifts. The practitioner's instincts to have a "walk in the woods," to take a stretch break, or to arrange seating so parties sit side by side and face a conflict together are all ways of engaging that physical component of consciousness in the conflict resolution process.

Conflict resolution literature has acknowledged the somatic or bodily engagement in conflict. LeBaron (2003, Chapter 4, p. 19) writes:

Somatic ways of knowing are essential to mindful awareness. We know ourselves—our feelings, meanings, identities—through our bodies. We feel in or out of alignment, stuck or fluid, tense or relaxed. Our bodies literally express these states, and they provide ways to shift into new states.

Our metaphors reflect this physical dynamic: We lift a weight from our shoulders, develop a knot in our stomach, or feel the tension in the room.

Reflecting the interest in the field of embodied experience of conflict and conflict resolution, conflict analysis and resolution instruction at George Mason University expanded in 2008 to include a one-credit elective course for graduate students in somatic skills for conflict resolvers. As the significance of consciousness in all its manifestations becomes clearer, embodied approaches may more often be presented as a complement to the cognitive approaches often emphasized in conflict resolution training.

*Toward Improved Conflict Resolution Practice*

The consciousness lens points out ways we may *improve conflict resolution practice* to better support shifts in consciousness in individuals, groups, communities, nations, and globally. More focused attention on ways of increasing awareness, developing transitional spaces, providing a balance of support and challenge, engaging physical awareness, and encouraging constructive shifts in consciousness hold promise for further developing conflict resolution practice. Perhaps most significantly, the consciousness lens points out the strengths and limits of outsider interventions in conflict and the roles for insider-partials.

There is a strong basis of consciousness-oriented conflict resolution theory and practice on which to build. Many conflict resolution scholar-practitioners discuss conflict resolution with much congruence with the consciousness

conception of conflict resolution. McGuigan and Popp (2007) highlight the instrumental, affiliative, and self-authoring mind-sets people bring to conflict and offer practitioner tips on how to engage individuals constructively with an awareness of their mind-set. Rachel Goldberg and Brian Blancke (2008) present a model of wisdom mediation that highlights ritual creation of a space for transition. Kenneth Cloke (2006) describes conflict as a crossroads. In his description, it is implied that parties can either choose to wake up to increased consciousness and richness of living or can choose to walk away from the opportunities of conflict. Daniel Bowling and David Hoffman's (2003) volume *Bringing Peace into the Room* considers how intervenors may bring peace when they engage in conflict resolution. The personal qualities of the intervenor are examined for impact on the conflict resolution process. Leonard Riskin (2004) and Erica Ariel Fox (2007) are only two of many who work with mindfulness in mediators and negotiators. Louise Diamond (2008, p. 1) defines "Deep Peace as a living experience of the interconnectedness of all being. It brings Spirit and consciousness into the conversation, as well as speaks to the relationship of peace to all the critical issues of today (injustice, poverty, environment, health, economy, etc.)." This understanding of Deep Peace builds on Diamond's (1996) work on conflict transformation as a heroic journey. Lederach (2005) highlights the transformative potential of a moral imagination that is grounded in the current realities and yet transcends those realities with an awareness of what might, in the future, come to be.

The focus in the last decade on narrative and discourse, how we make meaning, and how we name and experience reality within conflict resolution theory and practice is congruent with a consciousness conception of conflict resolution, although the emphasis within discursive theory is more cognitive than the more multifaceted conception of consciousness. Still, in a critical discursive theory of conflict, the way of resistance to dominant discourses is through awareness. Awareness allows objectification of discourse and freedom to reshape discourse. With awareness we see how our social and material world shapes our minds, we choose to reshape our minds, and then we act in the social and material world to effect change congruent with our desired reality. McGuigan (2006, p. 41) writes:

With every speech act, each group member reinforces a shared worldview, cementing the process through which we are socialized into an agreed-upon reality, one that we readily share with others from generation to generation. Relative to language, the individual's growth can be

seen to proceed along a continuum, first acquiring and being subject to language, and then moving toward taking language as object, coming to the awareness that language is the shaper and creator of our reality. Once we realize that we can inhabit many different realities, we become aware of the mechanics underlying reality creation and meaning making.

When we are aware of the discourse shaping our consciousness, we have the freedom to make shifts. We are no longer stuck in the hegemonic discourse.

All this suggests that conflict resolution practice can be more effective when it supports shifts in consciousness, both large and radical and small and incremental. As we learn ways to effectively invite conflicting parties to increase their awareness, and how to create conditions conducive to that increasing awareness, conflict resolution practice will mature. We may see more use of rituals, being in nature, eating together, engaging creativity, human to human connection, contemplative practices, metaphor dialogue, and the like. There may be many more techniques to engage shifts in consciousness. Thus, the consciousness focus may allow more flexibility and innovation in conflict resolution practice. Indeed, media and publications can be seen as conflict resolution practice, particularly when they encourage a new way to think about a conflict-related problem. For example, Richard Rubenstein's *Reasons to Kill* (2010) offers a new way to think about war that is more constructive than popular thought in the United States.

Building on Dugan's (1996) nested model of conflict, in which issues are contextualized in relationships, which are in turn located in subsystems and which are themselves within systems, we can create a nested model of conflict resolution based on consciousness. The consciousnesses of the issue, relationships, subsystem, and system all influence each other in a nested consciousness model of conflict resolution. Similarly, individual, family, organization, community, nation, and global consciousness all influence each other. Inner peace in the inner areas of the model is connected to outer peace in the outer layers, as consciousness provides the continuity across all areas in the model. Engagement in consciousness-raising activities in particular regions might be useful conflict resolution approaches supported by this emerging theory.

McGuigan (2006, p. 232) concurs with Kegan's conclusion that a fourth-order consciousness is "the minimum stage of consciousness required to support effective conflict resolution activities." The analysis in this paper supports that conclusion, at least with regard to the transformative conflict

resolution sought by peacebuilders today. Thus, the development of fourth-order consciousness is itself a contribution to conflict resolution by providing the basis for conflict resolution processes. McGuigan's research on one conflict case study suggests that developing fourth-order consciousness requires "a holding environment" that provides both support and challenges that allow growth that is within reach of each individual. Winnicott (1971) coined the term *holding environment* to refer to the nurturing context in which the mother cares for the child. In a "good enough" holding environment, a "facilitating environment," individuals find an appropriate balance of support and challenge.

It is important to provide an adequate "holding environment," a culture that balances support for individuals with challenges to increase their ability to comprehend and interact with multiple perspectives. . . . If an individual is overly challenged or contradicted in her meaning-making system, it may lead her . . . to resist her own growth [McGuigan, 2006, pp. 234–235].

The support in the conflict environment, or conflict resolution process, must be sufficient so that individuals feel a sense of security of the self that allows a stretching, including a shift in consciousness, to meet the challenges of the conflict and conflict resolution context.

Conflict resolution practice typically includes a balance of support and challenges for participants in the process. Some supportive components acknowledge each party and recognize the validity of each party's views. For example, a period that allows venting, or simply expressing each party's concerns with the other, may be constructive in the long run. Other supportive components acknowledge the ways in which participants are larger than the conflict, giving participants authorship of the conflict rather than the conflict authoring the participants. Such validation may allow participants to hold less strongly to the conflict dynamics as defining their senses of self. Support can be found in even a simple exercise in rehumanization in which participants learn each other's roles as parents, grandparents, professionals, and other components of the larger identity beyond the conflict identity. In the context of such support, challenging components can then invite participants into a transitional space to explore possible shifts in conception of the self–other relationship or related shifts in consciousness to more adaptive engagement in the conflict relationship. In order for participants to

grow in the conflict and conflict resolution environment, that environment must be a good-enough holding environment with sufficient support and challenge.

Several years ago I facilitated a portion of a conflict resolution workshop with professionals from two sides of a conflict zone and found that the workshop represented an adequate holding environment for all but one of the participants. That individual seemed to carry her traumatic experiences of war so close to her sense of self that she could not find the support she needed in the workshop context, despite significant attention from facilitators over meals and in the evening breaks. Other participants gave feedback on the ways the workshop had supported them in taking risks and learning about other perspectives that they found very challenging but very valuable to come to understand. But this individual found support only for one type of challenge, the challenge of greater psychological awareness of herself. With some guidance, she came to the conclusion that she would seek out psychological support upon her return home. Until she was stronger in her self, a group conflict resolution process would not offer enough support to allow her to grow through engagement with the other. (Here I learned yet again the importance of careful participant selection for group conflict resolution processes.)

The emerging theory of consciousness in conflict and conflict resolution presents conflicts as opportunities for growth. Conflicts are “a challenge to our pretence of completeness” (McGuigan, 2006, p. 21, quoting Kegan, 1994). It takes personal strength and consciousness to engage the challenges offered by conflicts. “The impingement of the multiple conceptual structures that are borne by the alternative discursive systems available in a society will create reflective tension within the subjectivity of one who stands at their intersection” (Harre and Gillett, 1994, p. 180). Participants in conflict resolution processes succeed when they learn from that reflective tension and create a more adaptive discursive system with which to engage the conflict.

“The conflict resolution field must wake up to the fact that conflict is an invented reality, a constructed world that at its very heart highlights not just the disputant’s and intervenor’s *skills*, but also their self-awareness and self-development” (McGuigan, 2006, p. 246). The impacts of conflict resolution processes are not limited to their effects on conflicts alone; conflict resolution processes may support individuals in developing lifelong conflict and self-awareness skills that will impact all of their future relationships too.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the many relevant movements in the field indicate that there is a growing interest in consciousness conceptions of conflict and conflict resolution. There has long been an effort to seek out a general theory of conflict and conflict resolution. If we wish to look for a general theory, consciousness may provide one for conflict and conflict resolution. Culture, that great impediment to other attempted general theories of conflict resolution, is built on consciousness. By examining culture-based conflicts and their resolution, we may identify effective ways to engage consciousness in support of constructive shifts in conflict and conflict resolution.

The consciousness lens is useful to the extent that it provides new ways of seeing our engagement in conflict—whether as external intervenors or as insider partials—and thus suggests developments of conflict resolution practices. Considering consciousness as fundamental to our experience of conflict and conflict resolution invites attention to the challenges involved in producing sustainable shifts in consciousness and the kinds of practices that might be needed to overcome those challenges.

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