

Psychology 410

Social Conflict

Syllabus

Date/Time: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. 2:00 - 3:50 PM, Jun 20 - Jul 15
Location: 105 Esslinger

Instructor:

Adam Kramer (Ph.D. student, Department of Psychology.

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Straub Hall 383 **Office Hours: 1-2 M, 4-5 U, by appointment, by chance**

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OVERVIEW

It may be easy to agree that we should all strive to act ethically and decently in our daily transactions with other people. But this is easier said than done when we come into conflict, when someone threatens our interests, shows disrespect, insults us or our values, frustrates our plans . . . or when push literally comes to shove.

As we know, conflict can be constructive as well as necessary. It can induce needed change and growth. Conflict is in any case unavoidable in life and in society. But the costs or benefits of conflict are very much a function of how we choose to deal with it. And we often have choices about that; we have alternatives. This course is about understanding the alternatives from a social psychological perspective: precursors and predictors of conflict escalation, de-escalation, and management. A heavy focus is placed on research and tactics for understanding the viewpoint and taking the perspective of the “other” in a conflict.

Theories of applied ethics are also considered in this course. Any process of conflict resolution entails inquiry into the underlying interests and values at stake as well as the ethical principles that govern the process itself. Conflict and conflict resolution are important testbeds for ethics in action in daily life. The course has three parts:

Interpersonal conflict: Conflict between individual people, on topics of personal interest. Social psychology research will be reviewed regarding interpersonal relationships, negotiation techniques and outcomes, perspective taking theory, and perspective taking techniques.

Social conflict: Conflict between homogenous groups of people, on topics of interest to the group. Conflict escalation and settlement will be studied via extension of interpersonal conflict phenomena to groups with similar views. One or more video case studies of historic conflict such as the Waco crisis will be used to exemplify the nature of some social conflicts.

Social controversy: Conflict between large, heterogeneous groups of people will be discussed. Social controversies include positions taken by group-members for different, often divergent reasons. Modern-day social controversies such as abortion, religion, and gun control will be deconstructed to understand the nature of, and difficulty inherent in, social controversy.

WORK LOAD

If you complete this course, you will earn 4 credits toward your degree. It is important to re-iterate that the requirements for this course are equivalent to those in the same course over 10 weeks during the regular academic year. This course flies by at 2.5 times the rate of a normal class, so there's a LOT more work per week: According to University principles governing credit and contact hours, each credit is equivalent to 30 hours of work. Your 4 credits for this course are equivalent to 120 hours of work over 4 weeks, which is 30 hours per week. You will spend 8 hours in class each week and as such should expect to spend up to 22 hours each week engaged in reading, studying, and writing papers outside of class.

GRADING

As this course attempts to understand social conflict and conflict resolution based on historical conflict and conflict-relevant research, the best way to express your knowledge and understanding of the topic is to integrate specific instances of conflict with conflict research. As such, three papers will be assigned during the course. Page lengths are recommendations; use of fewer pages will probably fail to properly treat the subject while use of more pages will likely stray from the paper's topic. Page lengths assume a double-spaced paper written in the Times font, 12-point size.

Paper 1. Interpersonal Conflict (30% of grade)

6-8 pages. **Due Thursday, June 30, IN CLASS.**

In this paper, students are assigned to deconstruct an interpersonal conflict. Any conflict is acceptable, including the Grand Canyon conflict or an interpersonal conflict known from personal experience. The paper should describe the conflict in sufficient detail to justify all conclusions drawn. The underlying interests of both parties must be elucidated, followed by an analysis of how these interests effect the positions taken and tactics used. The conflict must be outlined in terms of escalation, de-escalation, and settlement based on the perspective of both parties. Any knowledge the writer does not have regarding the interests and motivations of the conflicting parties may be assumed explicitly, with "what-if" reasoning.

Paper 2. Social Conflict (30% of grade)

8-10 pages. **Due Monday, July 11, IN CLASS.**

In this paper, students are assigned to deconstruct and provide “alternative endings” to a social (small-group) conflict. In a manner similar to paper 1, a **conflict discussed in class** should be chosen and described with an eye to the interests underlying the groups’ positions and how the groups’ interests *and the interests of the individuals within the group* elicit the positions taken and tactics used. Interactions between conflict structure and group structure should be discussed. The conflict should then be re-constructed in a “what if” sort of scenario, describing how the group and individual interests for both sides could have been settled, or clarifying why (and where) the individual interests are truly exclusive. Be wary: easy solutions may not exist!

Paper 3. Social Controversy (30% of grade)

8-10 pages. **Due Monday, July 18, 4 PM.**

In this paper, students choose a modern-day social controversy, discussed in class or not, and analyze the interests and positions of the groups on a societal level, on the level of each separate group within each position (e.g., “anti-gun-control” is a societal group, while “self-defenders” and “militia members” may be two distinct groups which both subscribe to the “anti-gun-control” position), and on the level of individuals within these groups. An attempt should then be made to describe how structural intra- and inter-group factors have brought the issue to the point of “social controversy,” and possible strategies for reconciliation (though you are not responsible for solving world conflicts).

Knowledge of perspective taking should be shown by the author, who should be able to take the perspective of both sides, and on the individual-within-the-group level, discussing what perspective they attribute to the other side(s), and how this might be biased.

Participation (10% of grade)

This class will include a large amount of open discussion. Participation in this discussion is an excellent way to ensure that your understanding of the subject is correct. Your questions and comments help your peers as well as yourself. For those not comfortable talking in class, participation can take the form of emailed questions, or office visits. Being present and awake in class will merit around 7/10, and it only goes up if you raise your hand and say something!

Extra Credit (Up to 2% added to overall grade)

If you participate in ongoing research, as a human subjects pool participant, you can earn extra credit towards your grade for this class. For every 30 minutes of participation, you will gain $\frac{1}{4}$ of a percentage point for your overall grade. This means if you participate in 4 hours of experiments, you can earn the full 2% extra credit. See the Human Subjects Handout (given out in class, and posted on blackboard) for information on how to gain extra credit in this way.

SCHEDULE

Required Textbook: P&K Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement (3rd Edition), by Dean Pruitt & Song Hee Kim (2004). McGraw-Hill: New York. ISBN 0072855355. Available in bookstore.

Other Readings: Readings not in P&K will be posted on Blackboard under “course documents.”

Week 1.

Monday, June 20

First day of class: nothing due.

Introduction, course description, value judgments

Tuesday, June 21

Read BEFORE CLASS: Baier (1958) chapter 2, P&K intro + chapter 1
Conflict overview.

Conflict of interest, moral conflict example: Dax Cowart

Wednesday, June 22

Read BEFORE CLASS: P&K chapters 2, 3, Clark & Chrisman (1994)

Prisoner's dilemma, interpersonal conflict.

Formal mediation/negotiation techniques.

Thursday, June 23

Read BEFORE CLASS: P&K chapter 4, Hodges, Johnson, & Scott (2002)

Perspective taking

Conflict analysis: Strategies and Tactics. Case study: Grand Canyon

Week 2.

Monday, June 27

Read BEFORE CLASS: P&K, chapters 5, 6, Cota et. al (1995)

Group cohesion

Conflict analysis: Escalation and structural change.

Grand Canyon, continued.

Tuesday, June 28

Read BEFORE CLASS: P&K, chapters 7, 8, Kerr & Tindale (2004)

Conflict analysis: Escalation encouragement. Case study: Waco

Wednesday, June 29

Read BEFORE CLASS: P&K, chapters 9, 10, Strentz (1997)

Conflict analysis: Stalemate, settlement. Resolution.

Waco, part 2.

Thursday, June 30

Read BEFORE CLASS: P&K, chapter 11, Noesner & Webster (1997)

Stein & Albro (2001), Fisher (1983)

Mediation, Negotiation, Argument

Paper 1 due in class.

No office hours.

Week 3.

Monday, July 4. **Independence Day, no class.**

Tuesday, July 5. No instructor, no readings. **Video: Ruby Ridge**

Wednesday, July 6

Read BEFORE CLASS: Gilmarten (1996), Romano (1998)

Understanding your Opponent: Isolated extremist groups (Militias, etc)

Thursday, July 7.

Read BEFORE CLASS: Jeurgensmeyer (2003), chapters 8-11

Understanding Your Opponent: Fundamentalist religious groups

Week 4.

Monday, July 11

Read BEFORE CLASS: Tversky & Kahneman (1974), Shafir (1993), Einhorn &

Hogarth (1978)

Biases within the individual

Paper 2 due in class.

Tuesday, July 12

Read BEFORE CLASS: Royzman & Cassidy (2003), Alicke et al. (1995)

Perspective taking biases

Wednesday, July 13

Read BEFORE CLASS: Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler (1986),

Kahneman et al. (1993), Copanzano, Goldman, & Folger (2003)

When perfect solutions aren't possible: Fairness

Thursday, July 14

Read BEFORE CLASS: Tyler & Sears (1977), Lewicki, Weiss, Lewin (1992)

Summary, overview, settling when you have to

TBA

Week 5.

Monday, July 18

Final paper due.