

COMM 512, Seminar in Interpersonal Conflict

Alan Sillars

345 Liberal Arts, 243-4463

Email: alan.sillars@mso.umt.edu

Office hours: Thursday 12-3 or by appointment (use email please)

Description of the Course

This is an intensive reading seminar that will survey conflict and dispute resolution literature relevant to communication. Our primary focus will be on interpersonal conflict, loosely speaking, but we'll also have a brief introduction to conflict occurring at the community level, for example, environmental conflicts and racial/ethnic conflicts. We will spend roughly an equal amount of time on intimate/family relationships and organizational/workgroup conflicts. Although each of these contexts has distinctive characteristics, there are many common elements as well. My goal for the seminar is to encourage integrative thinking about the basic properties of human conflict that affect and are affected by communication. Although this is primarily a theory/research course dealing with basic processes of conflict, there will be a number of opportunities to consider implications for conflict management and intervention.

Readings

We will read a number of chapters from *The Sage handbook of conflict communication*, so you should obtain a copy of this book (or at least arrange to share a copy). Other readings will be put in the file holder in the Communication Studies main office (LA 301), next to the window. I'll put more readings out every week or two. Please make copies and return the articles so that everyone has access. Most of the journal articles we will read can also be accessed through online data-bases of the Mansfield Library.

You should also have at your disposal a copy of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th edition) and consult it when writing your research paper.

Course Requirements

Grades will be assigned according to the +/- system, based on the following assignments.

Class Participation (25%): This is a graduate-level seminar in which most of the learning will take place through reading and discussion, so it is crucial that people come to class prepared. The most obvious requirement is that everyone must keep up with the readings. When people have not completed the readings or have read selectively, then the discussion suffers. You should also bring notes and be prepared to ask questions and raise issues. I hope that we will have lively discussions in which everyone is an active participant. Keep in mind, however, that the key to a good discussion is the quality versus sheer quantity of individual contributions. By this I mean that the discussion should be informed by the readings and serve to amplify and extend them.

Everyone gets one "free-pass." That is, you are allowed to slack (i.e., read superficially, make especially lame comments, or even skip readings) for one week of your choosing, for whatever reason. Please use it wisely.

Thought Papers (25%): You should submit six thought papers over the course of the semester. Papers should be about 2-3 pages and address a central issue in the weekly readings. The issue may be one I give you or one of your own choosing. It should be an issue that links at least a few of the readings. For example, for week 2 (“Basic assumptions and perspectives”) you might offer and defend a definition of conflict that identifies the most critical communication properties, discuss the nature of goals in conflict, or draw a distinction between types of conflict and explain why the distinction is important. For week 3 (“Conflict styles”) you could consider whether people have a stable conflict style, suggest an alternative way of conceptualizing “style” or offer an opinion about the usefulness of common measures of conflict styles (such as Kilman & Thomas, Rahim, Putnam & Wilson). The thought paper should take the form of an argument; that is, it should contain a thesis that reflects your own opinion on an issue, which is supported by reasons and developed by drawing from and/or contrasting your position with the readings.

It is up to you to decide when you will submit a thought paper, as long as you complete six. These must be turned in on the day of class, not afterwards, since they are designed to stimulate discussion. Be prepared to discuss your written ideas during the seminar.

I’ll grade the thought papers “plus,” “check,” or “minus.” You have the option of rewriting. Papers should be well edited, thoughtful, and show knowledge of the assigned readings. You are not expected to go beyond the assigned readings to support your arguments.

Research Paper (50%): This can be done alone or in teams so long as the size of the team corresponds to the ambition of the project. I suggest three possibilities, although I will consider other ideas as well. The first is to propose a research project that is grounded in the literature, promises to contribute to it and is feasible. This is a good way to set up an M.A. thesis or other research project. Possibly, you could do a pilot study for the proposed investigation. The second option is to actually do a study. This option is probably best pursued in teams. If it is not possible to complete the project in one semester, you can submit a partial report with preliminary data. This is a good way to experience the whole research processes and perhaps to get a chance to present your work at conferences. The third option is to write a synthetic/critical review of the literature that leads to a broader set of research questions and/or hypotheses without proposing a specific study.

As with any graduate-level paper, the research paper for this seminar should reflect original work and be supported by primary sources from academic journals and books – not popular literature or lower level texts. The topic of the paper should fit within the scope of the seminar. Please talk with me if you are unsure about this.

You will submit a proposal early in the semester, so that I can make suggestions and you can share thoughts with others in the seminar. Please talk with me at any time that I can be of assistance in recommending sources or discussing the direction of your paper. I also recommend that you submit a draft late in the semester, in time to receive comments and edit before submitting the final paper. The draft copy should be a good first draft (not a “rough draft”).

Deadlines

September 18 - Submit a 1-2 page proposal for your research paper. Be prepared to briefly discuss the proposal with the class.

November 27 – (Optional) Submit a first (but good) draft of your research paper.

December 11 - Submit your final research paper and present it to the class.

December 11-13 – Submit final paper

Reading Schedule

Aug. 28: Introduction and Overview

Putnam, L. (2006). Definitions and approaches to conflict and communication. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Sept. 4: Basic Assumptions and Perspectives

Hawes, L., & Smith, D. H. (1973). A critique of assumptions underlying the study of communication in conflict. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59, 423-435.

Rubin, B. D. (1978). Communication and conflict: A system-theoretic perspective. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 64, 202-210.

Deutsch, M. (2006). Cooperation and competition. In Deutsch, M., Coleman, P. T., & Marcus, E. C. (Eds.), *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice* (2nd. ed.) (pp. 23-42). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wilmot, W. W. & Hocker, J. L. (2001). *Interpersonal conflict* (6th ed.) (chapter 3, Interests and goals, pp. 63-84). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Sept. 11: Describing Communication 1 – Conflict Styles

Canary, D. J., Cupach, W. R., & Messman, S. J. (1995). *Relationship conflict* (chapter 2, Methods for studying conflict in close relationships). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Blake, R. R., & Mouton, J. S. (1973). The fifth achievement. In F. E. Jandt (Ed.), *Conflict resolution through communication* (pp. 88-102). New York: Harper & Row.

Yates, J., Kelly, C., Feingold, P. C. (Eds.). (1983). Communication and conflict styles in organizations [Special issue]. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 1. (excerpts from articles by Womack; Wiederhatfield; Wilson & Waltman).

Knapp, M. L., Putnam, L. L. & Davis, L. J. (1988). Measuring interpersonal conflict in organizations: Where do we go from here? *Management Communication Quarterly*, 1, 414-429.

Sept. 18: Describing Communication 2 – Engagement and Avoidance Patterns

Rausch, H. L., Barry, W. A., Hertel., R. K., & Swain, M. A. (1974). *Communication, conflict, and marriage* (chapter 6, Couples, stages, and scenes; chapter 7, Coping with conflict: Avoidance, and chapter 8, Coping with conflict: Engagement). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Roloff, M. E., & Ifert, D. E. (2000). Conflict management through avoidance: Withholding complaints, suppressing arguments, and declaring topics taboo. In S. Petronio (Ed.), *Balancing the secrets of private disclosures* (pp. 151-163). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Messman, S. J., & Canary, D. J. (1998). Conflict patterns. In W. R. Cupach & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.), *The darkside of interpersonal relationships* (pp. 121-152). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sept. 25: Conflict Frames

Kaufman, S., Elliott, M. & Shmueli, D. (2003). Frames, Framing and Reframing. Beyond Intractability. G. Burgess & H. Burgess (Eds.). *Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder*. Retrieved September, 2007 from the Beyond intractability Web site: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/framing/>

Drake, L.E., & Donohue, W.A. (1996). Communicative framing theory in conflict resolution, *Communication Research, 23*, 297-322.

Rogan, Randall G. (2006). Conflict framing categories revisited. *Communication Quarterly, 54*, 157-173.

Sillars, A. Roberts, L., Dun, T., & Leonard, K. (2001). Stepping into the stream of thought: Cognition during marital conflict. In V. Manusov & J. H. Harvey (Eds.), *Attribution, communication behavior, and close relationships* (pp. 193-210). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hample, Dale. The life space of personalized conflicts. *Communication Yearbook, 22*, 171-207.

Oct. 2: Cognition and Emotion in Conflict

Guerrero, L. K., & La Valley., A. G. (2006). Conflict, emotion, and communication. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Roloff, M. E., & Miller, C. W. (2006). Social cognition approaches to understanding interpersonal conflict and communication. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Thomas, K.W. & Pondy, L. R. (1977). Toward an "intent" model of conflict management among principal parties. *Human Relations, 30*, 1089-1102.

Schutz, A. (1999). It was your fault! Self-serving biases in autobiographical accounts of conflicts in married couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 16*, 193-208.

Oct. 9: Conflict in Personal Relationships.

Caughlin, J. P., & Vangelisti, A. L. (2006). Conflict in dating and marital relationships. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Sillars, A., Canary, D. J., & Tafoya, M. (2004). Communication, conflict, and the quality of family relationships. In A. L. Vangelisti (Ed.), *Handbook of Family Communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Caughlin, John P., and Malis, Rachel S. (2004). Demand/withdraw communication between parents and adolescents: Connections with self-esteem and substance use. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 21*, 125-148.

Oct. 16: Personal Relationships (cont.)

Roloff, M. E., & Johnson, K. L. (2002). Serial arguing over the relational life course: Antecedents and consequences. In A. L. Vangelisti, H. T. Reis, & M. A. Fitzpatrick (Eds.), *Stability and change in relationships* (pp. 107-128). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., & Davila, J. (2004). Forgiveness and conflict resolution in marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology, 18*, 72-81.

Gottman, J. M., Coan, J., Carrere, S., & Swanson, C. (1998). Predicting happiness and stability from newlywed interactions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60*, 5-22.

Oct. 23: Workgroup Conflict

Poole, M. S., & Garner, J. T. (2006). Perspectives on workgroup conflict and communication. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Kuhn, T., & Poole, M. S. (2000). Do conflict management styles affect group decision making? Evidence from a longitudinal field study. *Human Communication Research, 26*, 558-590.

Jehn, K. A., & Mannix, K. A. (2001). The dynamic nature of conflict: A longitudinal study of intragroup conflict and group performance. *Academy of Management Journal, 44*, 238-251.

Oct. 30: Workgroup Conflict (cont.)

Kirby, Wieland, & McBride (2006). Work/life conflict. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Lipsky, D. B., & Seeber, R. L. (2006). Managing organizational conflicts. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Bartunek, J. M. & Reid, R. D. (1992). The role of conflict in a second order change attempt. In Kolb, D. M., & Bartunek, J. M. (Eds.). *Hidden conflict in organizations: Uncovering behind-the-scenes disputes* (pp. 116-142). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Nov. 6: Community Conflict

Littlejohn, S. W. (2006). Moral conflict. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Peterson, T. R., & Franks, R. R. (2006). Environmental conflict communication. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Brummans, B., Putnam, L., Gray, L., Hanke, Lewicki, R., Wiethoff, C. (in press). Making sense of intractable multiparty conflict: A study of framing in four environmental disputes. Communication Monographs.

Nov. 13: Cultural Conflict

Ting-Toomey, S., & Takai, J. (2006). Explaining intercultural conflict: Promising approaches and future directions. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Lebra, T. S. (1984). Nonconfrontational strategies for management of interpersonal conflicts. In Krauss, E. S., Rohlen, T. P., & Steinhoff, P. G. (1984). *Conflict in Japan* (pp. 16-38). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Ellis, D. G. (2006). *Transforming conflict: Communication and ethno-political conflict* (chapter 6, Micro and macro communication issues and ethno-political conflict, and chapter 7, Resolving conflict)

Nov. 27: Managing and Transforming Conflicts:

Canary, D. J., & Lakey, S. G. (2006). Managing conflict in a competent manner: A mindful look at events that matter. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Ury, W. L., Brett, J. M., & Goldberg, S. B. (1988). Three approaches to resolving disputes: Interests, rights, and power. From *Getting disputes resolved* (p. 3-19). San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lewicki, R. J., Saunders, D. M., & Minton, J. W. (2001). *Essentials of negotiation*, 2nd edition (chapter 4, Strategies and tactics of integrative bargaining). Boston: McGraw Hill.

Putnam, L. L. (2001). The language of opposition. In W. F. Eadie and P. E. Nelson (Eds.), *The language of conflict and resolution* (pp. 10-20). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dec. 4: Mediation

Donohue, W. A. (2006). Managing interpersonal conflict: The mediation promise. In Oetzel and Ting-Toomey.

Donohue, W. A. (1991). *Communication, marital dispute, and divorce mediation* (chapter 6, Mediator intervention strategies, chapter 7, Lessons from the data, excerpts from chapter 8, The mediation of Ted and Betty Johnson). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bush, R. A., & Folger, J. P. (2005). *The promise of mediation* (Revised edition) (chapter 2, A transformative view of conflict and mediation). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dec. 11: Reports