

The Role of Conflict on the Individual and Society

Edited by Theresa MacNeil-Kelly

London, U.K.

Rowman & Littlefield,

2020

126 p.

\$95.00

Hardback.

ISBN: 978-1-7936-2066-8

Review DOI [10.1108/IJCM-08-2023-223](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCM-08-2023-223)

Conflict is ubiquitous. It has many forms from familial to intercultural. It also manifests in different ways from intrapersonal to international. Everyone experiences and manages conflict in their own ways. When people confront conflict, however, people tend to start exploring the conflict by asking themselves how they ended up in the conflict situation and how they can manage the conflict. To look for ways to constructively manage conflict, people may ask these kinds of questions: Would others in this type of situation experience the same as I did? Would others manage the conflict as I did? Those who are going through this process will find *The Role of Conflict on the Individual and Society* interesting and beneficial. This book is edited by Theresa MacNeil-Kelly, an Assistant Professor of Communication at Florida Southern College, whose research focuses on interpersonal and conflict communication. Following the perspective of [Oetzel and Ting-Toomey \(2013\)](#) that communication is at the center of understanding conflict research, MacNeil-Kelly edited this book composed of five chapters, written from accomplished communication scholars in the field, to explore conflict communication in various contexts using several different qualitative methods.

This book explores conflict experience and communication by describing how conflict manifests in people's lives and how they experience and manage the conflict in detail. According to MacNeil-Kelly, the first purpose of this book is to describe conflict experiences in personal and societal contexts to describe how they are managed and assessed differently in these two contexts. The second purpose of this book is to present conflict experiences and communication in novel ways – using several qualitative methodologies, such as autoethnography, phenomenology, thematic and case study analyses. By addressing these two purposes, the author aims to contribute to conflict research and to the field of conflict communication, in which previous research has often focused on identifying the conflict communication styles or arenas ([Putnam and Poole, 1987](#); [Kilmann and Thomas, 1977](#); [Rahim, 1983](#)).

This book is divided into two parts. The first part of the book, composed of two chapters, describes the personal account of interpersonal conflict (Chapter 1) and intrapersonal conflict (Chapter 2). The second part of the book, composed of three chapters, focuses on conflict at the society level, such as interracial relationship conflict (Chapter 3), racial conflict (Chapter 4) and conflict in the international sports arena (Chapter 5).



In Chapter 1, Mackie accounts of her sister being diagnosed and going through colon cancer. She describes her family communication – the psychological and behavioral process that family members go through – in detail with poetry, conversations and reflections. She also illustrates how this diagnosis led to her family conflict. Here, she recognizes the nature of conflict being inevitable and acknowledges the role of conflict as “a natural part of [her] family’s communication pattern” that “provides some semblance of normalcy” to her family (Mackie, 2020, p. 29). In doing so, Mackie applies autoethnography, “a research method that uses personal experience (‘auto’) to describe and interpret (‘graphy’) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (‘ethno’)” (Adams *et al.*, 2017, p. 1). She particularly chose this method since this method can allow readers to “feel in the moment of the events” (as cited in Mackie, 2020, p. 13). It is suitable “to articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience” of a cancered life (Adams *et al.*, 2017, p. 3).

In Chapter 2, Dykes also uses autoethnography to account for her conflict in a different context, intrapersonal conflict. She illustrates her story of reclaiming her career as a communication resilience researcher, going through personal trauma, and how this leads her to have intrapersonal conflict, and how she overcomes these challenges. She recognizes the common nature of intrapersonal conflict with everyone having their own insecurities and self-doubt to some degree. In managing this conflict, she emphasizes the importance of positive internal conversations on personal achievement and resilience. Again, by choosing autoethnography as a method, Dykes was able to provide enriched self-reflection that shows “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles” (Bochner and Ellis, 2006, p. 111).

Then, the book shifts its focus from personal to societal approaches to conflict. In Chapter 3, MacNeil-Kelly examines the role of conflict in heterosexual interracial dating relationships through a phenomenological approach, which allows participants describe their lived experiences and focuses on their experience of a phenomena (Neubauer *et al.*, 2019). Here, she uses a bioecological framework to look at how different environments, such as the microsystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, affect the couples. She found eight themes that help understand the functioning and conflicts in these couples: identity, racial and cultural differences, joking behaviors, family support, community support, acceptance/openness, majority race awareness/sensitivity and specific conflicts. While she found no overt conflict in the participants’ relationships due to racial differences, she discovered that the cultural differences were what participants discussed that contributed to their conflict and challenges to their relationships, which shows the interdependence between race and culture. She also found social support and stigma can potentially lead to the challenges and conflict in these couples and discusses how the couples have dealt with these challenges.

In Chapter 4, Keys examines racial conflict initiated by the alternative right (alt-right) group and the 2016 presidential election in the USA. She applies the symbolic convergence perspective to “reveal the shared reality used by [the alt-right group] to make sense of the world around them” in terms of the development of their political identity and alternate realities that ignited racial conflict in the society (Sellnow, 2017, p. 12). She employs a fantasy theme analysis of 10 documentaries in order “to identify, understand, and interpret those converged symbols” (Sellnow, 2017, p. 110). The analysis revealed that the three themes, “This is our country,” “white victimization” and “fear”, brought about a rhetorical vision to grow and maintain the racist ideology and position for the alt-right group to incite racial conflict and violence.

In Chapter 5, Loh studies conflict in the international sports arena as they relate to the intersection of athletes, conflict and diplomacy by applying conflict framing and sports

diplomacy. Conflict framing refers to framing a conflict as the way that a party illustrates and defines a conflict (Virani, 2015). Sports diplomacy is both the representative and diplomatic activities taken by athletes to create a favorable image to the foreign public (Murray, 2012). Using these two theoretical frameworks, Loh examines how three celebrity athletes – Pelé (soccer), Dennis Rodman (basketball) and Lyle Thompson (lacrosse) – take on the role as sports diplomat to influence discourse in race and politics through their individualized digital platforms.

Through these five chapters, *The Role of Conflict on the Individual and Society* successfully illustrates the conflict around us all and how people experience and manage their conflict. The applications of the various qualitative methodologies, such as autoethnography, phenomenology, fantasy theme analysis and case study, help readers deepen the understanding of the conflicting parties and be immersed into their conflict perspectives and experiences. Also, by including both individual and societal conflict in the text, the book enables readers to compare the differences in which how conflict manifests and can be managed differently in these two areas. The enriched personal and social accounts of conflict in the book help individuals and practitioners relate to the experiences, understand different perspectives and find a way to manage their own conflict in the differing perspectives and contexts. The use of various qualitative methodologies to present conflict allows academics, instructors and students to complement and supplement their research and courses by fostering interesting classroom discussions and examining the application of a particular methodology. Therefore, *The Role of Conflict on the Individual and Society* will appeal to various groups of readers, such as individuals, practitioners, researchers and graduate students, who are interested in conflict and communication.

Yeju Choi

*Department of Sociology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice,
New York, New York, USA*

References

- Adams, T.E., Ellis, C. and Jones, S.H. (2017), "Autoethnography", *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, pp. 1-11.
- Bochner, A.P. and Ellis, C. (2006), "Autoethnography", in Shepherd, G.J., St. John, J. and Striphas, T. (Eds), *Communication as . . . : Perspectives on Theory*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 110-122.
- Kilmann, R.H. and Thomas, K.W. (1977), "Developing a forced-choice measure of conflict-handling behavior: the 'MODE' instrument", *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 309-325.
- Mackie, C.T. (2020), "Negotiating chronic illness: a family's journey with cancer, control, and conflict", in MacNeil-Kelly, T. (Ed.), *The Role of Conflict on the Individual and Society*, Lexington Books, pp. 11-31.
- Murray, S. (2012), "The two halves of sports-diplomacy", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 576-592.
- Neubauer, B.E., Witkop, C.T. and Varpio, L. (2019), "How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others", *Perspectives on Medical Education*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 90-97, doi: [10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2).
- Oetzel, J.G. and Ting-Toomey, S. (2013), *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Communication*, SAGE Publications.

- Putnam, L.L. and Poole, M.S. (1987), "Conflict and negotiation", in Jablin, F.M., Putnam, L.L., Roberts, K.H. and Porter, L.W. (Eds), *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Sage Publications, pp. 549-599.
- Rahim, M.A. (1983), "A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 368-376.
- Sellnow, D.D. (2017), *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture: Considering Mediated Texts*, Sage Publications.
- Virani, F. (2015), "The art and science of re-framing in conflict resolution", *International Journal of Recent Research Aspects*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 35-37.

Further reading

MacNeil-Kelly, T. (2020), *The Role of Conflict on the Individual and Society*, Lexington Books.