# The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Communication

## Social Cognition and Conflict

**[p. 133 ↓ ]**

# Chapter 5: Social Cognition and Conflict

Michael E. Roloff and Courtney N. Wright

Perceived disagreement and goal interference are central characteristics of interpersonal conflict (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Consequently, conflict is influenced by how people construe it and conflict has an inherent cognitive component. Appropriately, scholars have investigated the social cognitive aspects of interpersonal conflict. The chapter in the first volume of *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Communication* focused on social cognition, and interpersonal conflict remains an excellent starting point for understanding research in the area (Roloff & Miller, 2006). We update that chapter and to establish continuity, we follow the same general outline. We first focus on research that examines the relationship between social knowledge and conflict and then move to an analysis of scholarship that informs as to the relationship between cognitive processes and conflict. The reader will note that new perspectives have emerged and some older perspectives not included in the earlier edition are now relevant. Finally, as in the earlier edition, we focus on recent research and evaluate strengths and weaknesses.

# Social Knowledge and Interpersonal Conflict

Social cognition research is focused on how people make sense of themselves, others, and their social activities. Such sense making is guided by and influences knowledge structures that are defined as organized sets of interrelated information about a person's experience (Fletcher & Fitness, 1996). Six types of social knowledge have been studied by conflict researchers: (1) beliefs, (2) scripts, (3) partner memory, (4) rules, (5) frames, and (6) problem appraisals (Roloff & Miller, 2006). To some degree, knowledge structures vary in the extent to which they reflect a person's general

conception of a conflict or individual aspects. Frames and problem appraisal often focus on how individuals generally understand their current conflict, whereas beliefs, scripts, rules, and memory structures are focused on specific features of conflict. We begin by examining the specific structures and then move to the more general ones.

**[p. 134 ↓ ]**

# Beliefs

Beliefs constitute descriptions of phenomena that individuals perceive to be accurate. Beliefs can influence perceptions and actions by making people sensitive to certain features of a focal object or action. Conflict researchers have focused on four sets of beliefs: other-related, self-related, relationship-related, and conflict-related.

## Other-Related Beliefs

Some researchers have studied whether beliefs about partners influence how individuals perceive and react to conflict. Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, and Rubin (2010) studied dyadic trust, which is the belief that one's partner is a dependable source of support and comfort especially in difficult times. Trust decreased the likelihood of negatively reacting to conflict, engaging in destructive behavior, making negative attributions about the partner's objectionable behavior, and responding in a way that could threaten the future of the relationship. Trust increased constructive conflict behaviors.

Perceiving that a partner is provocative does not always lead to a confrontation. Some individuals hold entity beliefs that reflect their view that human attributes are fixed and not easily changed, whereas others endorse incremental beliefs that indicate that human attributes are malleable and can change over time (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995). Individuals who hold incremental beliefs use voice during conflict and especially when angry, whereas those who endorse entity beliefs are less likely to voice their complaints as their anger increased (Kammrath & Dweck, 2006). This may indicate that believing that people cannot change reduces the likelihood of confrontation.

However, avoidance by "entity theoriest" may belie negative reactions. In a study of adolescent victims of bullying, Yeager, Trzesniewski, Nokelainen, and Dweck (2011) found that believing that traits are fixed was positively related to blaming the bully and experiencing negative self-feelings (e.g., shame) that stimulated a desire for vengeance. Of course, a key issue is whether trying to change a partner might be effective, and evidence indicates that it may not be. Overall, Fletcher and Simpson (2006) found that individuals were rarely successful at changing their partners in part because their regulation attempts signals to the partners that they are perceived to be deficient and that lowers their relational satisfaction.

# Self-Related Beliefs

Researchers who study self-related beliefs and conflict assume that confrontation is determined by a person's beliefs about himself or herself. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory assumes that to engage in an action, one must be confident that one can perform it, which is referred to as self-efficacy. Research indicates that self-efficacy is negatively related to withholding relational complaints (Makoul & Roloff, 1998) and positively related to being verbally assertive (Vera, Shin, Montgomery, Mildner, & Speight, 2004).

Conflict actions may also be related to self-determination. Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello, and Patrick (2005) argue that individuals who have a need for autonomy believe that their relationships afford them personal benefits and they have freely chosen to remain in them, whereas those with a low need for autonomy believe that they receive no personal benefit from being in relationships and remain in them due to the expectations of others or guilt arising from terminating them. Holding autonomy beliefs is positively correlated with engaging in conflict behavior that facilitates understanding and negatively correlated with defensive reactions that enhances relational satisfaction. Also, a partner's autonomy beliefs **[p. 135 ↓ ]** promote an individual's use of understanding actions and reduce the likelihood of engaging in defensive ones.

# Relationship-Related Beliefs

Researchers focused on beliefs about relationships mostly examine dysfunctional beliefs. Researchers have extended this research by examining the relationship between dysfunctional beliefs and conflict in non-Western samples. Hamamci (2005a) studied the association between dysfunctional relational beliefs and marital conflict in a Turkish sample. Holding dysfunctional beliefs was positively related to self-reports of the number and frequency of conflicts and the level of tension in the relationship, although interpersonal rejection beliefs showed stronger relationships than did unrealistic expectations and interpersonal misperception. In a subsequent study, Hamamci (2005b) examined whether dysfunctional relational beliefs were related to conflict resolution between Turkish adolescents and their parents. Holding dysfunctional beliefs was negatively related to engaging in actions that lead to conflict resolution (i.e., focusing on the other's needs).

# Conflict-Related Beliefs

Scholars have long noted that people have beliefs related to the consequences of conflict. Some research has focused on the antecedents of believing that conflict is always destructive. Campbell et al. (2010) found that the degree to which individuals trusted their partners was negatively related to believing that conflict is destructive.

Conflict beliefs are also related to a person's attachment style. Individuals vary with regard to the degree to which they perceive that establishing an emotional bond with another creates a secure relationship that will be supportive and caring (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Individuals who have a secure style report being less threatened by conflict and engaging in more effective arguing than do individuals who have a fearful attachment style (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Similarly, having a secure attachment style is positively related to positive beliefs about conflict and negatively related to expressing negative conflict beliefs (Ben-Ari & Hirshberg, 2009). In contrast, possessing an anxious style is positively correlated with expressing negative beliefs and negatively related to holding positive beliefs about conflict.

Research focused on beliefs provides valuable insights into conflict. However, researchers typically examine these beliefs separately and overlook the interrelationships that may exist between them. We noted that compared with individuals who believe that their partners are reliable, individuals who believe that their partners are untrustworthy monitor them to a greater degree and engage in negative behaviors designed to influence them. Such actions constitute regulatory behavior arising from the partner not conforming to beliefs about how a partner should ideally behave. Partners often resist such regulatory attempts, which could cause individuals to believe that their partner won't change and quit trying. This outcome could have long-term effects. Some individuals may generalize their negative experience to other relationships, believing all close relationships produce negative consequences and that conflict has few positive and many negative consequences. Alternatively, individuals who hold incremental beliefs are more willing to confront their partners and may do so in a way that gains their partners' compliance. In this case, they conclude that the partner can change, and relational quality is improved. Although this analysis is entirely speculative, by exploring multiple beliefs, researchers may gain new insights into their role in conflict.

[p. 136 ↓ ]

# Scripts

Cognitive scripts constitute sequences of goal-related actions that individuals perceive are expected and appropriate (Abelson, 1981). Researchers have investigated how cognitive scripts may lead to interpersonal conflict. Four patterns have been uncovered. First, some investigators have noted that actors within the same script may have incompatible goals and actions that stimulate interpersonal conflict. For example, research on the traditional cultural heterosexual sex script indicates that males are supposed to be initiators of sexual activity, while females are expected to passively acquiesce or resist (e.g., LaPlante, McCormick, & Brannigan, 1980). If so, males and females may find each other's scripted behavior to be incompatible and problematic. Indeed, males find their female partner's sexual withholding as being more annoying than do females, and females find their male partner's sexually aggressive behavior to be more annoying than do males (ter Laak, Olthoff, & Aleva, 2003).

Second, conflicts may result from two individuals who have scripts that do not include the same set of behaviors. Bartoli and Clark (2006) studied scripts for typical dates among undergraduates. Although script content was similar for both genders, upper-class students were more likely than first-year students to expect that sexual activity would occur and that women would limit sexual activity. However, divergent scripts may not always create conflict. Holmberg and MacKenzie (2002) examined whether the degree to which relational partners held the same normative or personal relational development scripts was correlated with self-reported interpersonal conflict. Neither of the correlations was statistically significant.

Third, disagreements may occur when two individuals apply different scripts to the same situation. For example, Littleton and Axsom (2003) studied rape and seduction scripts held by undergraduates. Both scripts involved a man and a woman who had minimal prior contact, the man used manipulative techniques to obtain sex, and the woman was not interested in having sex. The primary difference was that the rape script involved violence. If so, victims of nonviolent rape may find that others believe they were seduced rather than raped. Indeed, priming consensual and nonconsensual sexual scripts causes individuals to have different reactions to a description of a sexual encounter in which a man was persistent but not violent toward a woman who was consistently resistant to his advances before having sex with him (Littleton, Axsom, & Yoder, 2006).

Fourth, conflict could arise when an individual's personal script deviates from a normative script. Holmberg and MacKenzie (2002) studied whether the degree to which an individual's personal relational development script matched his or her conception of a normative relational script was related to interpersonal conflict. The correlations were positive but of low magnitude and not significant among females.

Although scripts could stimulate interpersonal conflict, it is possible that arguing may influence which scripts are active. Although increasing intimacy gives rise to interpersonal conflict, cognitive scripts related to relational escalation do not include clusters of behaviors focused on conflict (Honeycutt, Cantrill, & Greene, 1989). However, Honeycutt, Cantrill, and Allen (1992) found that aversive communication (e.g., fighting and antagonizing each other) was often included in descriptions of breakup scripts.

The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Communication:
Social Cognition and Conflict

Other research has examined the scripts people have about their interpersonal conflict. Individuals develop interaction scripts that reflect the typical statements and patterns that characterize a given type of interaction (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011). Most **[p. 137 ↓ ]** researchers have viewed interaction scripts as hindrances to resolving conflict in part because they direct attention away from what is currently being said to what individuals expect will be said. For example, some conflicts are not resolved in a single encounter, and as a result, partners may repeatedly argue over the same issue, which is referred to as serial arguing (Trapp & Hoff, 1985). A by-product of serial arguing is that some individuals report that they can identify the conditions that set off an episode of serial arguing, that they can predict what each other will say during these episodes, and that the arguments have become scripted (Johnson & Roloff, 1988). Indeed, having argued frequently over the same topic is positively related to believing that what will occur in an episode is predictable and scripted (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). Importantly, individuals who report that their serial arguments are predictable are less optimistic that the agreement will ever be resolved (Johnson & Roloff, 1988).

Research on cognitive scripts indicates that the construct is a useful way to study conflict. Much of the research indicates that cognitive scripts are problematic for conflict. However, cognitive scripts might have positive effects. For example, if relational partners encounter routine situations that require joint behavior, they may negotiate agreements for how to manage them, which eventually become a script. To the extent that such scripts provide an effective way of dealing with the situation, then not having to constantly negotiate what will be done would seem a personal benefit. Alternatively, although conflicts that have been scripted seem to cause hopelessness, it is possible that some individuals see them as a danger signal and take action to change them. Perhaps by communicating about the dysfunctional pattern, they may be able to control its negative influence or to break out of it.

# Partner Memory

Researchers have studied whether the manner in which individuals store partner-related information influences conflict. People vary in how they structure positive and negative information about their partner's traits. Some individuals have a compartmentalized structure in which positive and negative partner traits are clustered into separate

**SSAGE knowledge**

domains (e.g., the partner is an irresponsible and poor student but is a kind and caring lover), whereas others have integrated structures in which both positive and negative traits are clustered together in the same domain (e.g., the partner is a kind and caring lover but can also be irresponsible with regard to performing relational duties). These memory structures can become activated during interactions and thereby influence an individual's subsequent perceptions and actions. Some research suggests that having an integrative structure relative to a compartmentalized one may enhance conflict resolution and relational quality. When focused on a partner's provocative behavior, activated integrative structures bring to mind both positive and negative partner traits, whereas compartmentalized structures highlight only negative actions. The recalled positive actions help offset the impact of the current provocation. Murray and Holmes (1999) found that undergraduate daters with integrative partner structures were less likely to break up than were those with compartmentalized structures partly because they could see virtue in their partner's shortcomings. Holding compartmentalized structures is common among individuals who have difficulty with interpersonal conflict management such as those with low self-esteem (Graham & Clark, 2006) and those who are mistrustful of their partners (Campbell et al., 2010). However, Showers and Kevlyn (1999) found among undergraduate daters, who reported that their partners had generally negative traits, that individuals **[p. 138 ↓ ]** with an integrative structure reported loving/liking their partner to a greater extent than did those with a compartmentalized approach. Among those who perceived their partner as possessing mostly positive traits, those with a compartmentalized pattern reported more positive feelings. However, the aforementioned patterns were different when subjects reported the attributions they made when encountering their partner's negative behaviors. Among individuals in newer dating relationships who viewed their partner's traits as being mostly negative, a compartmentalized structure increased positive attributions for a partner's negative behavior more so than did an integrated one. On the other hand, among those in more established relationships who viewed their partner's negatively, holding integrated structures was associated with more positive attributions than was having complementary structures. Thus, the influence of memory structures on conflict processes was moderated by the stage of the relationship.

Showers and Zeigler-Hill (2004) examined how compartmentalization and conflict change over a 1-year period and interact to influence relational termination. Movement

toward greater integrativeness was observed among individuals who had primarily negative views of their partner's traits but reported little conflict and among those who viewed their partners positively but reported a great deal of conflict. However, a shift to compartmentalization was observed among individuals who viewed their partners negatively and were in frequent conflict and among those who viewed their partners positively and reported little conflict. In effect, when individuals perceived their partners in a way that was inconsistent with conflict, memory structures became more integrative, but if the perceptions were congruent with conflict, memory structures became more compartmentalized. When individuals reported little relational conflict, movement toward integration decreased the likelihood of termination, but when individuals reported a great deal of conflict, shifting to integration increased the likelihood of termination. Thus, adopting integrative structures may help preserve a relationship when there is little conflict, but could facilitate ending a relationship when there is considerable disagreement.

Campbell, Butzer, and Wong (2008) studied the influence of memory structures among married couples. Among wives who had been married for a short time, the type of memory structure was not significantly related to their self-reported ability to resolve conflict or to their actions observed during a conflict with their husbands. Instead, their conflict resolution abilities and positive conflict behaviors were only associated with how negatively they viewed their husband's traits. However, among wives in older marriages who viewed their husband's negatively, conflict resolution and positive conflict behaviors were greater among those having an integrative structure. On the other hand, among wives in longer marriages who viewed their husbands as having few negative traits, a compartmentalized structure was positively related to conflict resolution and positive conflict behaviors. Among husbands who had been married for a short time, their self-reported conflict resolution and observed conflict behavior were not significantly related to either their evaluations of their wives or memory structures. However, among husbands in lengthy marriages, having an integrative structure was positively related to enacting positive communication behaviors.

Campbell et al. (2008) also examined whether the degree to which spouses shared the same memory structure influenced conflict. Among wives, sharing an integrative structure with their husband was negatively related to enacting negative conflict behavior, but wives engaged in more negative behavior when their husband had a

compartmentalized structure regardless of whether they had one **[p. 139 ↓ ]** as well. For husbands who viewed their wives negatively, sharing a compartmentalized or integrated structure with their wives increased the likelihood of conflict resolution.

Research on partner memory structures has provided interesting insights into conflict. It demonstrates that conflict plays a role in the kind of structure that will develop over time as well as how structures can influence conflict resolution and behaviors. Although some research suggests that integrative structures should facilitate conflict resolution and relational well-being, other research indicates that this relationship is moderated by gender, similarity between partners' memory structures, and relational longevity. However, the research is not without limitations. In some cases, memory structures are not significantly related to multiple measures of the same construct (e.g., conflict resolution and positive and negative conflict behavior) nor is there clear evidence for why there are gender differences or differences across relational longevity.

# Rules

Rules constitute shared expectations for appropriate behaviors occurring within a given context. When rules are violated, victims may feel betrayed and transgressors may be subject to social sanctions. Current research on rules has focused on reactions to rule violations.

Feeney (2005) examined accounts of hurtful events and found that the majority involved a rule transgression, although not all rule violations were equally hurtful. Fitness (2005) asked individuals to describe the worst rule violations that could occur between parents and children and between siblings. For parents, abandoning a child or a father committing incest with his daughter was most frequently cited as the worst violations. For children, rejecting the parent, a daughter having sex with her father, and a son engaging in criminal behavior were the worst offenses. Among siblings, betrayal, deception, and sexual abuse were considered the worst violations. Respondents felt that some rule violations could result in exclusion from a family.

Although not a great deal of current research has been conducted on rules, rule violations can have serious consequences. However, the research has not explored

how individuals deal with the rule violations. Do victims always confront transgressors? For example, research conducted with victims of incest finds that they often delay disclosing their victimization and when they disclose as children, others are not always supportive (e.g., Roesler & Wind, 1994). Moreover, although some rule violations may be unforgivable, how can less serious offenses be forgiven? Research on forgiveness would seem to have important implications for research on rule violations (Waldron & Kelley, 2005).

# Frames

Frames and framing have been used to study a variety of conflict processes, including intergroup conflict (Brummans et al., 2008) and international conflict (Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2010). Within these literatures, some researchers have adopted a cognitive approach to framing that is focused on "the way that people experience, interpret, process or represent issues, relationships and interactions in conflict settings" (Dewulf et al., 2009, p. 160). For example, Rogan (2006) identified six frames individuals may use when framing interpersonal conflicts—(1) instrumental, (2) other assessment, (3) affect, (4) face, (5) affiliation, and (6) distributive frames. Some individuals held multiple frames. Although some gender differences were found with regard to frames, they were small.

**[p. 140 ↓ ]** Although individuals frame their interpersonal conflicts, researchers have not investigated how cognitive frames are related to communication. Certainly, there is ample research focused on how interaction frames emerge in intergroup conflicts, but Dewulf et al. (2009) note that this scholarship does not adopt a cognitive framework and works from assumptions that are incompatible with it (e.g., frames reside in discourse rather than within individuals). Sillars (2010) argued that the division between cognitive and interaction framing approaches ignores the possible interrelationship between the two (i.e., cognitive frames may appear in discourse and may be influenced by the frames enacted during an interaction).

The potential utility of an integrated approach is illustrated by an older article. Krokoff (1990) studied hidden agendas or feelings of insecurity about respect and love that are related to an issue about which spouses disagree but do not directly discuss. It

is possible that hidden agendas constitute frames that spouses bring into a conflict even if the issue at hand is not explicitly about them. If so, hidden agendas may be difficult to change. Vallacher et al. (2010) argued that ongoing disagreements may generate cognitive processes that provide a coherent explanation for the conflict as well as suggest courses of action. After a time, any cue related to the opposing party may automatically stimulate a conflict frame. In some cases, attempts by one party to reframe an intractable conflict (e.g., apologizing) may be momentarily successful, but over time, the action may be reinterpreted by the other party in a manner consistent with the original frame.

One way to overcome frames supporting intractable conflict may be to activate latent frames. Vallacher et al. (2010) noted that some adversaries have enjoyed times of harmony in the past, but while creating relatively simple explanations for conflict, such memories become latent. If parties refocus their attention on the good times, frames supporting intractability may become less active, and the conflict may be resolved.

# Problem Appraisal

Conflict arises because of a problematic action and how people make sense of it. One such problem is hurtful communication. Vangelisti and Young (2000) argued that a person's initial appraisal that a partner's hurtful action has been hurtful can cause individuals to distance themselves from partners. However, this tendency can be overcome when the hurtful action is perceived as unintentional. Their results indicated that individuals who believed that the hurtful communication was intentional reported more relational distancing, less relational satisfaction, and lower feelings of closeness to their partners than did those who felt the communication was unintentional. Also, the degree of hurt arising from a partner's statement was greatest when the victim felt that hurtful statement was intentional and infrequent but lowest when the hurtful statement was perceived to be intentional and frequent.

McLaren and Solomon (2008) argued that appraisals of hurtful messages could reflect primary and secondary appraisals. Using Lazarus's (1991) appraisal framework as a base, they asserted that the primary appraisal of a hurtful message is focused on the degree to which it communicates lack of worthiness in the eyes of the partner,

which increases how intensely a person feels hurt. This primary appraisal can lead to relational distancing. However, a secondary appraisal may take place during which individuals consider other relevant information before they act. This process entails considering intentionality, relational quality, and the frequency of the hurtful message. If so, the aforementioned **[p. 141 ↓ ]** three variables should moderate the relationship between the intensity of hurt arising from a message and relational distancing. Their results confirmed their basic notions but were more complex than anticipated. Only intentionality and frequency were moderators but only under certain conditions. For males in friendships and females in dating relationships, intensity of hurt was more strongly predictive of relational distancing when the message was perceived to be intentional than when not or when the message was part of a frequent pattern. However, for males in romantic relationships, intensity of hurt was not significantly related to distancing regardless of intentionality or frequency. For females reporting about friendships, intensity was positively related to distancing only when it was perceived as unintentional and infrequent.

Young (2004) examined three types of appraisals that individuals make when analyzing a hurtful message. She argued that hurtful messages could reflect the speaker's concern for the receiver, the emotional comfort experienced by the receiver, and the helpfulness of the comment for the receiver. The results indicated that only message intensity was related to the three appraisals, and in each case, the relationship was negative. Thus, the form of the communication seems to affect the type of appraisal more so than does the emotional reaction to it.

Priem, McLaren, and Solomon (2010) focused on the degree to which relational messages are related to perceptions of hurt and physiological stress. The results indicated that the degree to which the partner's communication was perceived to be affiliative (e.g., warm and caring) and informal decreased feelings of being hurt. Because being hurt was positively related to an increase in cortisol, the two perceptions should have resulted in smaller increases in stress. They also discovered that the degree to which a partner's message was perceived to be affiliative decreased the likelihood that cortisol remained stable, but the degree to which the message was perceived to be receptive (e.g., the partner was interested in talking) increased stability. Because hurt was not significantly related to the stability of cortisol, it is unlikely that the latter two relationships were mediated by feeling hurt.

Rather than focusing on how the message is perceived, Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, and Alexander (2005) investigated the explanations that individuals use to explain why a message was hurtful. The degree to which individuals were hurt by the message was positively related to relational denigration and humiliation and negatively related to ill-conceived humor. The receiver's self-esteem was negatively related to relational denigration, humiliation, and intrinsic flaw but positively related to being shocked. Individuals were most likely to relationally distance themselves when the hurt was due to relational denigration and an intrinsic flaw and least likely when the hurt arose from mistaken intent.

A second line of research has focused on how individuals understand problems arising from relational turbulence. Relationships are not static but go through transitions. Such transitions can be smooth but can often create feelings of turbulence that can be related to conflict. The relational turbulence model (RTM) provides useful insights into these processes (Solomon, Weber, & Steuber, 2010). Relational turbulence is the tendency to be cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally reactive to events during relational transitions (Knobloch, 2007). Relational transitions create turbulence by increasing relational uncertainty about how people view their own and their partner's involvement in the relationship as well as their understanding of the state of the relationship. A transition may also change an individual's perception of the impact a partner's behavior can have on his or her goals. **[p. 142 ↓ ]** Instead of facilitating the accomplishment of one's goals, the partner's behavior may be perceived to be interfering with goal attainment. The degree to which individuals report relational turbulence is related to their own and their partner's relational uncertainty and to their own perceptions of their partner's interference (Knobloch & Theiss, 2010).

Research using the RTM has provided insights into two areas of problem appraisals. First, some researchers have used it to understand how individuals respond to their partner's irritating behaviors. Solomon and Knobloch (2004) found that negative appraisals of a partner's irritating behavior (i.e., seeing it as severe and relationally threatening) were positively related to relationship uncertainty and perceptions of partner interference. In a follow-up study, Theiss and Solomon (2006) found that relationship and partner uncertainty were negatively related to directly confronting the partner about his or her irritating behavior, but perceiving partner interference was

positively related to direct communication because it increased negative appraisals of the irritation.

The RTM has also provided insight into appraisals of hurtful communication. McLaren, Solomon, and Priem (2011) found that relational turbulence was positively related to those individuals who reported feeling hurt, experienced negative emotions, and perceived the message to be intentional. However, some of the relationships between partner behaviors and uncertainty were different for males and females. For both genders, interference was positively related to turbulence. However, for males, the relationship between reporting that the partner facilitates goal attainment and turbulence was negative and significant, but the same relationship was not significant for females. For males, relationship uncertainty was not significantly related to turbulence, but it was positive and significant for females.

Theiss, Knobloch, Checton, and Magsamen-Conrad (2009) discovered that relational uncertainty and partner interference were positively related to the intensity of hurt and intentionality, and these appraisals were positively related to communication directness. However, relational uncertainty and partner interference were not significantly related to communication directness.

Research on problem appraisals is guided by theory and provides useful insights into how problem appraisals can influence the cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions to a conflict. The research has used both experimental and longitudinal survey designs. The statistical analyses are sophisticated. If there is a weakness, it is that multiple measures are often used to assess key constructs, and in some cases, only a few yield significant results consistent with expectations. Hence, the reader sees a strong pattern of hypothesized significant relationships that obscure those that are not. This may indicate that the theories need to become more parsimonious.

# Summary

The study of knowledge structures continues to provide important insights into conflict. Moreover, the methods being used are becoming more sophisticated (e.g., longitudinal designs are common as are dyadic designs), and research seems more theory based.

SAGE knowledge

However, each area remains segregated with little awareness of how the various forms of social knowledge might be interrelated. To some degree, the boundaries between the constructs seem fuzzy. For example, there are elements of beliefs embedded within cognitive scripts, and scripts might themselves be part of conflict frames and problem appraisals. Assuming that the constructs are indeed mutually exclusive, it is unclear how the various constructs might be **[p. 143 ↓ ]** related to one another. So we do not know the extent to which beliefs increase the likelihood that certain conflict frames and problem appraisals will emerge.

Figure 5.1 contains a tentative, descriptive model that demonstrates the interdependency among the structures. It has three important features. First, beliefs, scripts, partner memory, and rules constitute specific elements that should be related to general conceptions of a conflict, such as how it is framed and appraised. Second, all variables are intercorrelated. Hence, specific elements could influence and are influenced by each other (e.g., scripted actions can become part of partner memories, which in turn influence scripts), and the same is true for general conceptions (i.e., how a conflict is framed can influence how it is appraised, and vice versa). Finally, specific elements can influence general conceptions of a conflict, and the frame and appraisal of an interpersonal conflict are experiential elements that can influence beliefs, scripts, partner memory, and rules.

*Figure 5.1 Possible Interrelationships Among Knowledge Structures*
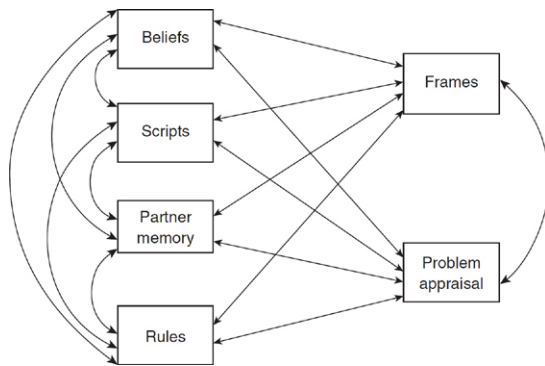
# Cognitive Processing and Interpersonal Conflict

Knowledge structures focus on the content of cognition, but conflict researchers have also been interested in whether the process of thinking might be related to conflict. In doing so, they investigated whether processes mediate the relationship between other variables (e.g., attachment styles cause individuals to ruminate more about a conflict, which influences their conflict actions), whereas other researchers have examined the direct relationship between cognitive activity and conflict behaviors (e.g., imagining a conflict influences how individuals try to resolve it).

## Cognitive Processes as Mediators

Researchers have studied six mediating cognitive processes: (1) expectation violation/confirmation, (2) attribution making, (3) accommodation, (4) influence goals, (5) sentiment override, and (6) self-regulation.

[p. 144 ↓ ]

## Expectation Violation/Confirmation

Individuals often develop expectations for how people will act in a given situation. Expectancy violation theory assumes that when a person's actions violate an expectation, individuals become aroused, search for explanations for the violation, and then react often by attempting to bring the person's behavior back into alignment with expectations (e.g., Afifi & Burgoon, 2000). This implies that a partner's action may prompt a conflict when it violates a prior expectation. Bachman and Guerrero (2006) used this framework to study how individuals respond to hurtful events. The degree to which individuals reported that their partner engaged in a hurtful behavior that was unusually harmful was negatively related to responding in a constructive manner and to their perceptions of relational quality but positively related to responding

in a destructive fashion and terminating the relationship. They also found statistically significant bivariate correlations between their measure of negative expectancy violation and relational uncertainty, perceived intentionality, and hurtfulness.

However, simply because a partner's behavior is consistent with expectations does not mean that conflict will be avoided. Some individuals form negative expectations that can lead to conflict when confirmed. Individuals with an anxious attachment style often expect that their partners may abandon them and monitor their partner's behaviors for signs of rejection (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Consequently, individuals who are anxiously attached may be especially sensitive to and possibly exaggerate cues of rejection. Anxiously attached individuals perceived more conflict in their relationships, are more distressed by relational conflict, and are more prone to escalate it than are those who are not anxiously attached (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). Among husbands and wives, attachment anxiety is positively related to the extent of conflict they report in their marriage, and the extent to which wives are anxiously attached is negatively related to their own and their husband's marital satisfaction, and this relationship is mediated by both spouse's perceptions of marital conflict (Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, 2009).

Domingue and Mollen (2009) focused on the degree to which both relational partners had an insecure or secure attachment style that influenced conflict. As expected, constructive responses to conflict were more common when both partners were securely attached than when only one was secure or when both were insecure. Also, destructive communication and avoidance were less frequent in dyads in which both partners were securely attached than when only one or neither was.

The results of research focused on expectations are somewhat complex. In some cases, if expectations are violated, then conflict will emerge, but in other cases, confirmed expectations seem to stimulate disagreement. In part, this may reflect the valence of the expectation. When positive expectations are *violated* (i.e., the partner acts negatively when expected to act positively or the action is more negative than usual), then intensely negative reactions occur. When negative expectations are *confirmed* (i.e., the partner acts in an expected negative manner), disagreement and negative reactions also result. It is possible that the two instances involve different mediating process. Violated positive expectations may cause individuals to feel

betrayed and uncertain about their partners. However, because the violation was infrequent, it might be possible to grant forgiveness. Confirmed negative expectations may have little effect or may actually increase certainty about the partner since he or she acted as expected, although some individuals may still lose patience with the constant provocations that increase their frustration and tendency to escalate the conflict.

[p. 145 ↓ ]

# Attribution Making

When events occur, individuals often try to understand their causes. In doing so, they attribute causes and responsibility for the action. Researchers have studied the degree to which attribution making might mediate the relationship between antecedent variables and conflict actions and consequences.

Pearce and Halford (2008) investigated the degree to which attributions mediate the association between attachment styles and negative communication. Having an insecure attachment style was positively related to self-reported negative communication and postdiscussion stress, but this relationship was most evident among females. Attributions partly mediated the associations between insecure attachment and negative communication and fully mediated the relationship between insecure attachment and postdiscussion distress. However, attribution making did not mediate the relationship between attachment and communication.

Kennedy and Pronin (2008) examined a different type of attribution. They reasoned that individuals are prone to see others who disagree with them as biased, and consequently, they allow conflict to escalate. They found that disagreement increases the tendency for individuals to attribute biases toward others, which increases the tendency to compete rather than cooperate. Moreover, the preference for competition further increases perceptions that an opposing party is biased. Hence, attributed bias seems to set off an escalation process that is self-reinforcing.

# Accommodation Processes

When individuals engage in a negative action, their partner's initial inclination is to respond in kind. However, when individuals care about the future of their relationship, they often stifle destructive responses and act constructively. Conflict researchers have investigated these accommodative responses, and recent scholarship has extended knowledge in two ways.

First, researchers have focused on how accommodation processes are associated with dependency dilemmas with close relationships. When partners confront one another about provocative actions, individuals who are highly dependent on their partners may feel they have little control and influence over the interaction (Overall & Sibley, 2007). Consequently, dependent partners face a dilemma. On one hand, their lack of relative power may cause them to feel less valued by their partners, and they may begin to question why they are in the relationship, but on the other hand, their dependency might prompt them to want to act in a way that promotes their relationship. Dependent partners might successfully resolve the dilemma by responding in an accommodative manner to their partner's interference. In that way, they do not endanger the relationship, and voicing their concerns may prompt a positive or at least less negative reaction from the partner. Among dependent partners, those who engaged in accommodation reported greater acceptance from their partners and greater intimacy in the interaction than did those who did not accommodate. However, when individuals reported a great deal of influence and control within an interaction, accommodation was unrelated to perceptions of the interaction. Thus, possessing power increases positive impressions, but among dependent partners, reacting in an accommodative fashion is associated with more positive impressions than reacting in a destructive manner.

Second, researchers have also investigated whether accommodation processes are influenced by culture and self-construal. Yum (2004) studied the degree to which members of collectivistic cultures engage in accommodation **[p. 146 ↓ ]** to a greater extent than do those from individualistic cultures and whether a member's self-construal (how individuals relate to the group to which they identify) influence accommodation. Yum recruited samples from South Korea, Hawaii, and the mainland United States and

asked them about how they responded to relational problems. Small cultural differences were observed with Koreans, and Hawaiians reported greater use of neglect than U.S. mainlanders. With regard to self-construal, individuals who were bicultural (i.e., felt both independent and interdependent with their culture) reported greater use of loyalty and less use of neglect than did individuals who were marginal (i.e., felt neither independent nor interdependent of the culture), independents (i.e., felt independent of the culture), or interdependent (i.e., felt strongly connected to the culture). Self-construal was not significantly related to voice or exit. Thus, cultural effects were only observed for the use of neglect, and self-construal effects were only evident for loyalty and neglect. This pattern indicates that culture and self-construal are only related to the passive components of accommodation. The degree to which individuals openly voice their concerns or leave the relationship appears to be independent of culture and self-construal. Thus, research focused on accommodation has continued and provide a more refined view of when it occurs.

# Influence Goals

Individuals can identify things about their relational partners that they wish would change (Heyman, Hunt-Martorano, Malik, & Slep, 2009). In some cases, they may decide to change their partners and their attempts are guided by influence goals as well as other objectives they wish to accomplish during an interaction.

Keck and Samp (2007) examined how goals are related to whether individuals have initiated a conflict or are resisting a partner's attempt to influence them. The results indicated that the degree to which initiators viewed self/instrumental goals as important (i.e., the person wanted to maintain a sense of self while influencing the partner to change) increased the likelihood that they would enact distributive actions (i.e., controlling the interaction while ignoring the partner). In contrast, initiators endorsing other/identity goals (i.e., supporting the partner's identity) were more likely to use partner-oriented integrative actions (i.e., validating the partner or his or her statements). When focusing on resistors, the same two patterns were significant, plus two additional ones emerged. Viewing instrumental goals as important (i.e., simply trying to change the partner) was related to being distributive, and seeing identity/relational goals as

important increased the likelihood of issue-oriented integrative behavior (i.e., problem solving).

Additionally, Keck and Samp (2007) found that an individual's conflict behavior predicted the partner's subsequent goal. When initiators acted in a distributive way, they increased the likelihood that resistors would form instrumental goals and decreased the likelihood that they would see other/identity, or identity/relational goals as important. In effect, pressure seemed to cause resistors to exclusively form goals aimed at influencing the initiators. On the other hand, initiators who engaged in issue-oriented integrative actions increased the likelihood that resistors would form identity/relational goals and decreased the likelihood that resistors would form influence goals. Distributive responses from resistors increased the likelihood that initiators would adopt self/instrumental goals while decreasing the likelihood that initiators would see relational goals as important. A resistor's issue-oriented integrative behavior was positively associated with the initiator's seeing relational goals as important and negatively related to the perceived **[p. 147 ↓ ]** importance of self/instrumental goals. The distributive actions by resistors seem to harden the initiator's commitment to creating change, while their issue-oriented integrative actions seem to soften it. Although the findings are somewhat complex, they indicate that individuals often try to achieve multiple goals during a disagreement, that some conflict behaviors flow from particular types of goals, and that a person's conflict behaviors can influence a partner's goals.

As noted in an earlier part of this review, partners sometimes are unable to resolve a conflict in a single encounter, and future argumentative episodes occur. Researchers have investigated the goals that individuals have when serial arguing. There appear to be seven primary goals that are sometimes clustered into positive and negative objectives (see Bevan et al., 2007; Bevan, Finan, & Kaminsky, 2008; Bevan, Hale, & Williams, 2004). Positive goals include seeking mutual understanding/resolution and positive expression, while negative goals include negative expression, deciding about relational continuation, dominating/controlling the partner, changing the partner, and hurting the partner/benefitting self-goals. The importance of the goals is generally stable across types of close relationships (e.g., parent–child, sibling, romantic) with positive expression, mutual understanding/resolution, and changing the target that is being viewed as most important (Bevan, 2010).

Bevan et al. (2007) found that the importance of serial arguing goals predicted self-reported conflict behaviors. Self-reported use of integrative conflict strategies is positively related to the importance of positive expressiveness and mutual understanding/resolution goals and negatively related to the importance of dominating and controlling the partner, changing the partner, and hurting the partner/benefiting self-goals. Distributive behavior is positively related to negative expression, dominance/control, changing the partner, deciding about relational continuation, and hurting the partner/benefitting self-goals and negatively related to the importance of positive expressiveness and mutual understanding/resolution goals. Finally, engaging in conflict avoidance is unrelated to many of the goals and is only positively related to the importance of negative expression, dominance/control, and hurting the partner/benefitting self-goals.

It is possible that during the course of serial arguing, a person's motivation to attain goals may change. Bevan et al. (2008) examined the factors that predict whether individuals remain motivated to achieving their serial arguing goals. When examining positive goals, they found identical indirect paths leading from attributing importance to mutual understanding/resolvability and positive expression goals to motivation. Seeing either goal as important was positively related to self-reported integrative conflict behavior that in turn was positively related to ruminating about the conflict, and rumination was positively related to being motivated to achieve goals. In a sense, positive goals stimulate active problem solving during the disagreement and continued thought afterward, which seems to keep individuals committed to their goals. However, there were no statistically significant indirect paths leading from negative goals to motivation. Instead, both integrative and distributive communications were negatively related to the motivation to reach goals because of their tendency to increase rumination about the conflict. Thus, negative goals may set off processes that lower motivation regardless of the type of negative goal.

Unfortunately, research has not investigated how people react when conflict goals are attained. The results of a study on aggression suggest that goal attainment could alter the future course of a conflict. Denzler, Forster, and Liberman (2009) found that after a transgression, individuals have aggressive thoughts that are easily accessible and make them **[p. 148 ↓ ]** prone to future aggression unless they have been able to directly or symbolically aggress against their antagonists. Simply acting in an aggressive

SAGE knowledge

manner was insufficient to reduce aggressive responding; the aggression must be against the transgressor. Importantly though, nonaggressive resolution of the conflict also decreased accessibility of aggressive thoughts. These findings could indicate that a conflict will continue until individuals feel that their goals have been achieved, which could include reciprocating the partner's behavior or achieving a resolution to the problem.

# Sentiment Override

Conflict researchers have focused on the degree to which relational satisfaction influences how individuals interpret their partner's behaviors, or what is known as the sentiment override hypothesis. In effect, individuals who are satisfied tend to interpret their partner's behavior in a positive way even if the behavior appears to be negative, while dissatisfied individuals seem to discount a partner's positive behavior.

The research on sentiment override has been extended in two ways. First, some research has focused on how relational satisfaction influences recall of a partner's traits and actions. Jose, Rajaram, O'Leary, and Williams (2010) reasoned that sentiment override might stem from schematic processing of information about partners. Individuals have conceptions of what their partners are like, which are related to their relational satisfaction. When their partner schemas are activated, they tend to remember partner traits that are consistent with their relationship satisfaction. The researchers report an experiment in which individuals indicated how applicable positive and negative traits were to their partners, and later after being distracted, they reported how many traits they originally felt were applicable and whether most were positive or negative. Satisfied individuals felt that more positive traits applied to their partners than did those who were dissatisfied, while the latter felt that negative traits were more applicable to their partners. In addition, satisfied individuals recalled more positive traits than did dissatisfied ones, but relational satisfaction was unrelated to recalling negative traits. However, regardless of relational satisfaction, individuals estimated that they had indicated that most of their partner's traits were positive. They found evidence for positive sentiment override when recalling traits but not for negative sentiment override.

SAGE knowledge

Halford, Keefer, and Osgarby (2002) examined recall of relational events occurring over a week. Relational partners kept diaries of everyday events, including disagreements, and at the end of the week, they were interviewed about how often positive and negative interactions took place. For males and females, their diary entries were significantly correlated with their global assessment of both positive and negative interactions, but martial satisfaction was a statistically significant predictor after controlling for daily assessments. Individuals showed a hindsight bias in that relatively dissatisfied individuals recalled a higher frequency of negative interactions and lower frequency of positive interactions than did satisfied ones.

A second area of research on sentiment override examined how it occurs during a disagreement. Story et al. (2007) wondered if sentiment override is related to age and to different interaction contexts. They had middle aged (40 to 50 years old) and older (60 to 70 years old) spouses discuss an issue about which they disagreed or engage in a problem-solving task focused on how to accomplish errands. The data indicated that older husbands and wives who had engaged in a disagreement rated their partner's behavior more positively than did outside observers and more frequently than did middle aged couples. **[p. 149 ↓ ]** When problem solving, the positive sentiment override was only observed for wives evaluating their husband's behavior. Moreover, the age differences in positive sentiment override were mediated by marital satisfaction. This seems to indicate that older spouses are prone to viewing their partner's actions in a more positive light than do others.

Waldinger and Schulz (2006) examined how sentiment override might be related to relational satisfaction and emotional reactions that individuals have during a disagreement. They found that attributions of a partner's intentions were weakly to moderately related to the partner's judgments of his or her own intentions, and these relationships were partly mediated by relational satisfaction. For both men and women, martial satisfaction was positively related to making attributions that their spouses were trying to be facilitative and negatively related to perceiving the partners as being dominating even after controlling for the partner's own intentions to be facilitative or dominating. Also, the relationship between relational satisfaction and sentiment override was mediated by the emotions that individuals reported feeling during the disagreement. Hence, sentiment override seems to be driven by the momentary emotional reactions occurring during a disagreement.

# Self-Regulation

Individuals often engage in behaviors that are automated, habitual, and/or innate. Such actions can be efficient ways of accomplishing goals. However, sometimes individuals find that their typical responses may be incompatible with other goals, and they need to engage in considerable self-regulation to control their behavior. In such cases, a person forgoes immediate gratification to achieve future goals. Self-regulation is a cognitively demanding task that depends on executive control, including inhibition, task switching, and updating memory (e.g., Miyake et al., 2000). Consequently, because of resource depilation, self-regulation may interfere with other concurrent or subsequent tasks.

Self-regulation may influence four aspects of conflict. First, self-regulation can influence the likelihood that individuals will engage in behaviors that create conflict. Romantic partners often derogate the attractiveness of alternative partners as a means of protecting their relationships (e.g., Karremans & Verwijmeren, 2008). Ritter, Karremans, and van Shie (2010) studied whether the derogation effect arises from self-regulation as individuals control their impulse to approach attractive individuals in order to preserve the long-term commitment to their romantic relationship. However, the ability to self-regulate in this manner will be difficult when resources are low. Consistent with this expectation, romantically involved individuals expressed less interest in pictures of attractive alternative partners than did those who were romantically uninvolved, but this difference was only statistically significant when individuals had not engaged in a cognitively demanding task prior to seeing the picture and when they did not have to make a quick judgment about the alternative partner. Pronk, Karremans, and Wigboldus (2011) studied similar processes among individuals who varied in their ability to engage in executive control. Individuals with higher levels of executive control reported having less trouble remaining faithful to their romantic partners, were less flirtatious with a member of the opposite sex, and had less desire to meet an attractive alternative partner than were those with low levels of executive control.

Second, self-regulation may be related to the actions that occur during a conflict. Mischel, DeSmet, and Kross (2006) speculated that conflict can be controlled by two systems. Cold systems are cognitive, deliberative, rational, and strategic, whereas hot systems are automatic, emotional, and appetitive. Cold **[p. 150 ↓ ]** systems promote

self-regulation, whereas hot systems undermine it. During a conflict, both systems are activated, and individuals often engage in self-control so as to reduce the likelihood of negative consequences associated with angry displays. However, when individuals are tired, distracted, or emotionally drained or have been ruminating about a provocative action, their ability to self-regulate is greatly diminished, and conflict often escalates.

Considerable evidence supports this analysis. Dispositional self-control increases accommodation independent of how committed individuals are to their relationship but resource depletion prior to an encounter decreases the likelihood of accommodation (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). In addition, individuals are more likely to respond aggressively to an insult when self-regulatory resources have been diminished prior to the affront, and this tendency is greater among individuals who are low relative to high in trait self-control (DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Galliot, 2007). Apparently, individuals who generally control their reactions can withstand resource depletion. Wilkowski and Robinson (2007) also examined individual differences in self-regulation and found that individuals who are easily angered are less likely to expend cognitive resources to control aggressive thoughts than are those who are low in trait anger. Thus, some individuals may not work as hard to control aggressive reaction to others.

Ruminating about an event can be cognitively demanding, which could lead to aggressive responding. After having been provoked, ruminating about the event decreases self-control, which increases the likelihood of aggressive responses, but bolstering energy levels by consuming a glucose beverage prior to ruminating increases self-control (Denson, Pedersen, Friese, Hahm, & Roberts, 2011). Thus, if individuals have reserves of energy prior to ruminating, then individuals may have sufficient resources to self-regulate even when focused on a negative event.

Finkel, DeWall, Slotter, Oaten, and Foshee (2009) found that self-control was related to intimate partner violence. Relational partners reported more violent impulses when arguing with their partners than they actually enacted. Individuals who were high in trait self-control were less likely to engage in intimate partner violence than those who were low in trait self-control, and individuals provoked by their partners were more likely to respond with intimate partner violence after having self-regulation resource diminished than when not. Importantly, individuals who underwent self-control training had less

violent inclinations than those who did not. Thus, through self-regulation, individuals can control their actions during a disagreement.

Third, research also suggests that self-regulation may influence recall of the conversation. When individuals try to regulate their emotions during an interaction, they are expending energy and focusing their attention away from what is being said to their emotional responses to it. Consequently, emotional regulation may decrease subsequent recall of the content of the conversation. However, Richards, Butler, and Gross (2003) argued that not all emotional regulation techniques reduce recall. They reasoned that emotional suppression during a disagreement distracts individuals from what the partner is saying, whereas cognitive appraisal (entering the conflict with a positive mindset) would increase recall. On the other hand, emotional suppression should increase recall of emotions. The results of an experiment verified their reasoning.

Finally, research indicates that self-regulation after a conflict is related to how people adjust to it. For example, postepisodic self-regulation of stress can influence relational quality. There is evidence that conflict can increase a person's stress hormones, especially when an individual or his or her partner has an insecure **[p. 151 ↓ ]** attachment style (Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006). Salvatore, Kuo, Steele, Simpson, and Collins (2011) reasoned that the ability of an individual to recover from conflict-related stress might be beneficial to the partner and the relationship. Continued stress indicates that the person does not believe that the conflict is over, which could increase the likelihood of continued fighting. Moreover, the researchers believed that the ability to recover reflects self-regulation. They found that individuals who were securely attached were better able to recover from the stress of a conflict, which also facilitated their partner's ability to recover and improved their relational satisfaction. However, a partner's ability to recover from the conflict also increased the likelihood that the relationships of insecurely attached individuals would remain intact rather than terminate. Thus, the ability to recover from stress seems to benefit partners and the relationship.

Hooker, Gyurak, Verosky, Miyakawa, and Ayduck (2010) examined how brain activity influenced self-regulatory activity after an interpersonal conflict. They cited evidence that activity within the ventral portion of the prefrontal cortex (VLPFC) enhances

emotional control largely through its impact on cognitive skills. Hence, such activity should increase the ability to self-regulate after an interpersonal conflict. Using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) scanning, they assessed the degree of VLPFC activity resulting from individuals viewing a picture of their romantic partner's positive, neutral, or negative facial expression. The responses were correlated with diary entries about how the individuals reacted with their partner the day after a conflict. They found that the degree of VLPFC activity occurring while viewing a partner's negative expression was negatively related to having a negative mood, ruminating about the conflict, and using drugs or alcohol one day after the conflict. Also, the degree of VLPFC activity was negatively related to having a negative mood one day after the disagreement. The researchers speculated that VLPFC may serve a protective function by directing resources to cognitive skills that can be used to self-regulate after a dispute.

Self-regulation may also protect relationships through forgiveness. Pronk, Karremans, Overbeek, Vermulst, and Wigboldus (2010) reasoned that individuals who had a high degree of executive control functioning would be better able to forgive their partner for a transgression largely because of their ability to control ruminating about the offense. The results of a series of studies confirmed their reasoning, although executive functioning only facilitated forgiveness when the transgression was severe.

# Cognitive Processes as Direct Influences on Conflict

The previous sections highlighted how some factors influence aspects of interpersonal conflict through cognitive processing. However, other research assumes that cognitive processing itself can influence features of interpersonal conflict. One area actively being researched is thinking.

# Thinking

Individuals engage in thought during the process of making sense of something, which may influence the conclusions they reach. Conflict researchers have studied two interrelated types of thinking: (1) ruminating and (2) imagined interactions.

Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, and Lyubomirsky (2008) defined rumination as "a mode of responding to distress that involves repetitively and passively focusing on symptoms of distress and on the possible causes and consequences of these symptoms" (p. 400). Nolen-Hoeksema et al. (2008) noted that rumination **[p. 152 ↓ ]** causes individuals to become fixated on their problems, and rather than take action to address them, they become passive.

Because interpersonal conflict can be stressful, some researchers have studied the effects of ruminating after a conflict. Nolen-Hoeksema et al. (2008) asserted that rumination leads to passivity through which individuals give up trying to solve problems and/or engaging in self-aggression. Conflict researchers have noted that rumination may also lead to aggressive actions toward another. Bushman (2002) found that after being insulted, individuals who ruminated while hitting a punching bag were angrier and later were more aggressive toward the person who insulted them than were those who were distracted while hitting the bag or did nothing after being insulted.

Research also indicates that rumination can aversely influence forgiveness for a transgression. Kachadourian, Fincham, and Davila (2005) looked at how rumination influences forgiveness among individuals who feel ambivalent about their relational partners. The results of their study indicated that ambivalence is negatively related to forgiveness when individuals frequently ruminate about the transgression but not when they avoid rumination.

Although research indicates that rumination has a negative influence on conflict, some research suggests that rumination may not be universally bad. Wenzel, Turner, and Okimoto (2010) found that right after a transgression, rumination decreased forgiveness but over the course of three days, it increased it. Thus, it is possible that in the immediate aftermath of a transgression, emotions are still hot and ruminating makes

individuals less forgiving. But after a cooling-off period, ruminating may help reframe the transgression in a less negative way that facilitates forgiveness.

Although not directly studying rumination, Bevan et al. (2008) reported correlations that imply that rumination may have both positive and negative effects on interpersonal conflict. Their path analysis showed that self-reports of both integrative and distributive tactics were positively related to rumination. In addition, they reported bivariate correlations that show positive relationships between holding a mutual understanding/ resolution goal and positive expression goal and engaging in both integrative actions and ruminating. Moreover, wanting to achieve these two goals was negatively related to using distributive tactics. This implies that holding positive goals can increase the use of positive conflict tactics and rumination while decreasing the use of negative tactics. On the other hand, holding a negative expression goal was positively related to using distributive tactics and ruminating and negatively (but not significantly) to being integrative.

In part, the effect of rumination may depend on the type. Martin and Tesser (1996) offered a broad conceptualization of rumination and noted that it involves ongoing self-focused thoughts concentrated on a single event or theme. They noted that rumination often results from blocked goals. Mikulincer (1996) noted three different types of rumination. Action rumination is focused on the task that includes thinking about why the goal failed, how failure might be overcome, and how failure might be avoided in the future. State rumination is focused on how a person currently feels about the failure and its implications for the future. Task-irrelevant rumination distracts individuals by focusing thoughts on events unrelated to the failure. Ciarocco, Vohs, and Baumeister (2010) argued that action rumination improves task performance by allowing individuals to understand why they failed and how to change their actions, whereas the other two types are likely to have minimal impact on performance because they provide no insights into failure or increase negative emotions. Across a series of studies, they demonstrate that action rumination **[p. 153 ↓ ]** improves performance to a greater degree than either of the other two types. Although none of their studies focused on conflict, it is possible that action rumination could facilitate understanding about why a conflict occurred, why it was not resolved, what might be done to resolve it now, and how future occurrences can be avoided.

In addition to ruminating about a conflict, some individuals engage in imagined interactions in which they replay a disagreement or plan what they will say in a future encounter (see Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011). Honeycutt (2004) created imagined interaction conflict linkage theory that describes how imagined interactions influence interpersonal conflict. He argues that interpersonal relationships are maintained through imagined interactions with one's partners and that some of these imagined interactions are focused on disagreements. Repeated conflicts, such as serial arguing, are maintained by individuals retrospectively thinking about prior argumentative episodes and prospectively planning future encounters. Imagined interactions can portray positive or negative encounters depending on the mood of the person at the time he or she is imagining the conversation. Constructive conflict is facilitated through positive imagined interactions. However, negative imagined interactions are powerful and can sometimes overwhelm an individual's ability to create positive ones. Moreover, imagined interactions may not reflect what actually transpires during a disagreement in part because people may imagine themselves being more bold or dominant than they typically are.

The theory provides insight into conflict escalation as it assumes that imagined interactions can sustain a conflict and perhaps escalate it. Individuals who are prone to construct negative imagined interactions may become physically aggressive. Honeycutt and Bryan (2011) found that individuals who reported that they engaged in verbal aggression with their partners also admitted that they had also been physically aggressive and that this relationship resulted from their tendency to imagine negative conflict interactions with their partners. This research also indicates that imagined interactions may sometimes be a mediator of effects rather than a direct cause. Moreover, Honeycutt and Bryan (2011) discovered that engaging in imagined integrations prior to a marital disagreement influenced an individual's physiological arousal after a subsequent interaction with the partner. Heartbeat increased when an individual's imagined interaction was discrepant from the actual interaction and if the individual did not rehearse what he or she would say in the actual interaction. However, arterial blood pressure was greatest when individuals imagined negative interactions with their partners.

# Online Processing

Assessing cognition occurring during a conflict provides important information about how cognition influences the course of a disagreement. We have already discussed two studies focused on online processing (Keck & Samp, 2007; Waldinger & Schulz, 2006). One additional study examined how individuals react to their partner's behavior in conflict versus supportive interactions (Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, De Clercq, & Peene, 2005). In this study, spouses engaged in a discussion of either their most significant relational problem or one partner's most significant personal problem. The behaviors were coded, and while viewing videotapes, spouses indicated at various points how they felt about the interaction. The type of interaction was not significantly related to cognition, and only one interaction was found between the type of enacted behavior and context. During a disagreement, the presence of a partner's facilitative behavior (e.g., humor, positive mind **[p. 154 ↓ ]** reading, and positive touch) increased positive online cognitions but had less effect during a supportive interaction. However, in both contexts, a partner's validating behavior (e.g., agreement), expressions of instrumental support (e.g., offering a specific plan or constructive feedback), and proposals for change (e.g., compromise) created positive cognitions.

The study of online processing is labor-intensive, and few researchers have studied it. However, the research has provided useful insights into a variety of cognitive processes. Unfortunately, the research in the area lacks a theoretical perspective that would guide research. In a sense, the study of online processing borrows theories from other areas and constitutes a method rather than a theory-driven area of inquiry.

# Summary

Research on cognitive responses continues to provide important insights into interpersonal conflict. Each of the areas we reviewed extended the literature in important ways. In addition, a new area of inquiry has developed focusing on self-regulation. This area of inquiry highlights how people cognitively control their responses

before and after conflict. Moreover, it shows how such control can be effortful and could exhaust recourses dedicated to other processes.

Just as research on knowledge structures focused on individual variables and processes, so does most inquiry on cognitive processes. There has been some improvement in this regard. For example, attribution making is often included in research focused on other cognitive processes, and the study of online cognitions has been used to study goals and sentiment override. These are important moves that hopefully will provide a more integrated view of how cognitive process relate to interpersonal conflict.

# Summary Critique

Our goal was to update an earlier review of social cognition and conflict communication (Roloff & Miller, 2006). Significant advances have occurred in the past 5 to 6 years. The following is a synthesis of what we found.

First, individuals are motivated to understand their social environment. As a result of their observations, experiences, and inferences, individuals form social knowledge structures about themselves, others, and the various relationships and interactions that connect people. The structures can take the form of beliefs, scripts, and rules and are stored in memory. When activated, they influence how people interpret and respond to their environment.

Second, beliefs can influence the degree to which individuals monitor their partner's behavior, interpret its meaning, and respond to it. Consequently, beliefs can influence how individuals appraise a problem and whether they should confront it. When individuals believe that people and, more specifically, their partners can change and they are confident that their partners will not leave them, they are willing to express their complaints and often form a goal to get the partner to change. However, some individuals are not confident that they can enact confrontational behavior and avoid it.

Third, individuals vary in how they enact confrontation based on their appraisal of the problem. When the partner's action has been intentionally hurtful and unexpected,

individuals may enact negative behavior, whereas in other cases, they may enact problem-solving behavior. Moreover, appraisals may be influenced by the general level of stability or turbulence in the relationship.

Fourth, during an argument, individuals monitor their own and their partner's actions and to some extent adapt to them. Their actions can depend on the degree to which their partner's behavior is expected, perceived **[p. 155 ↓ ]** to be intentional, and goal related. Processing a partner's actions may be influenced by an individual's emotional reactions during the argument, which are related to his or her relational satisfaction. Also, individuals will often try to control their negative responses and respond in a more constructive manner. Self-regulation is effortful, and individuals may be unable to control potentially negative responses when they are exhausted or have limited ability to engage in self-control.

Fifth, individuals can become aware through confrontation that they have failed to meet their partners' standards. Because confrontation can be hurtful and can create resistance, conflict may be unresolved and repeated. Consequently, arguments may become scripted, and individuals may develop frames that help them understand the ongoing dispute. In some cases, frames may make conflict intractable.

Sixth, the effect of conflict is evident after an episode has ended. Because conflict can be arousing, individuals often try to recover after an episode has ended, and their ability to do so influences their own and their partner's feelings about the conflict. Moreover, individuals often ruminate about their conflict and engage in imagined interactions about what happened and what may happen in the future. Although continued thought about the conflict often has negative consequences, in some cases, thinking may be helpful.

We also noted that research in the area has improved from the time that Roloff and Miller (2006) published their review. They noted a number of challenges facing researchers in their area, and there is evidence of successful adaptation. Although the bulk of the research continues to use U.S. samples of undergraduate daters, studies have been conducted in other cultures and on other forms of relationships. Many more longitudinal studies are being conducted and studies that analyze both members of the dyad. Although much of the research remains "siloed," there is some integration of constructs, most notably attribution making. And researchers seem more mindful of

the implications of their research for practice, particularly in the area of individual and couples' therapy.

We also identified some new areas of research. Physiological measures, including those associated with stress and with brain activity, are becoming more common. In addition, there is a growing area related to the role of self-regulation and conflict.

Recent research also provides insights into the difficulties that individuals experience when trying to manage conflict. Conflict inherently involves the interpretation of actions, and individuals use their past experiences to understand those actions. Consequently, individuals may not only engage in behaviors that interfere with one another but may also disagree as to their causes and solutions. When in conflict, individuals propose solutions that seem reasonable given their experiences and understandings, but their partners may find them to be unreasonable because their background and perceptions differ. In such cases, both individuals feel that their own position is legitimate and superior relative to the others. Unless the interpretative differences are resolved, it is likely that conflict will continue and could become intractable.

# References

Abelson, R. P. (1981). Psychological status of the script concept . American Psychologist , vol. 36 , pp. 715–729. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.36.7.715

Afifi, W. A., & Burgoon, J. K. (2000). Behavioral violations in interactions: The combined consequences of valence and change in uncertainty interactions outcomes . Human Communication Research , vol. 26 , pp. 203–233. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2000.tb00756.x

Bachman, G. F., & Guerrero, L. K. (2006). Relational quality and communicative response following hurtful events in dating relationship: An expectancy violations analysis . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 23 , pp. 943–963. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407506070476

SAGE knowledge

Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Barki, H., & Hartwick, J. (2004). Conceptualizing the construct of interpersonal conflict . International Journal of Conflict Management , vol. 15 , pp. 216–244. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/eb022913

Bartoli, A. M., & Clark, M. D. (2006). The dating game: Similarities and differences in dating scripts among college students . Sexuality & Culture , vol. 10 , pp. 54–80. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12119-006-1026-0

Ben-Ari, R., & Hirshberg, I. (2009). Attachment styles, conflict perception, and adolescents' strategies of coping with interpersonal conflict . Negotiation Journal , vol. 25 , pp. 59–82. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2008.00208.x

Bevan, J. L. (2010). Serial argument goals and conflict strategies: A comparison between romantic partners and family members . Communication Reports , vol. 25 , pp. 52–64. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08934211003598734

Bevan, J. L., Finan, A., & Kaminsky, A. (2008). Modeling serial arguments in close relationships: The serial argument process model . Human Communication Research , vol. 34 , pp. 600–624. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2008.00334.x

Bevan, J. L., Hale, J. L., & Williams, S. L. (2004). Identifying and characterizing goals of dating partners engaging in serial argumentation . Argumentation and Advocacy , vol. 41 , pp. 28–40.

Bevan, J. L., Tidgewell, K. D., Bagley, K. C., Cusaneilli, L., Hartstern, M., Holbeck, D., & Hale, J. L. (2007). Serial argumentation goals and their relationship to perceived resolvability and choice of conflict tactics . Communication Quarterly , vol. 55 , pp. 61–77. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01463370600998640

Brassard, A., Lussier, Y., & Shaver, P. R. (2009). Attachment, perceived conflict, and couple satisfaction: Test of a mediational dyadic model . Family Relations , vol. 58 , pp. 634–646. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2009.00580.x

Brummans, B. H. J. M., Putnam, L. L., Gray, B., Hanke, R., Lewicki, R. J., & Wiethoff, C. (2008). Making sense of intractable multiparty conflict: A study of framing in four environmental disputes . Communication Monographs , vol. 75 , pp. 25–51. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03637750801952735

Bushman, B. J. (2002). Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination, distraction, anger and aggressive responding . Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 28 , pp. 724–731. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167202289002

Campbell, L., Butzer, B., & Wong, J. (2008). The importance of the organization of partner knowledge in understanding perceptions of relationship quality and conflict resolution behavior in married couples . Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 34 , pp. 723–740. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167208315355

Campbell, L., Simpson, J. A., Boldry, J., & Kashy, D. A. (2005). Perceptions of conflict and support in romantic relationships: The role of attachment anxiety . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 88 , pp. 510–531. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.3.510

Campbell, L., Simpson, J. A., Boldry, J., & Rubin, H. (2010). Trust, variability in relationships evaluations, and relationship processes . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 99 , pp. 14–31. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0019714

Ciarocco, N. J., Vohs, K. D., & Baumeister, R. F. (2010). Some good news about rumination: Task-focused thinking after failure facilities performance improvement . Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology , vol. 29 , pp. 1057–1073. http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2010.29.10.1057

Denson, T. F., Pedersen, W. C., Friese, M., Hahm, A., & Roberts, L. (2011). Understanding impulsive aggression: Angry rumination and reduced self-control capacity are mechanisms underlying the provocation-aggression relationship . Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 37 , pp. 850–862. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167211401420

Denzler, M., Forster, J., & Liberman, N. (2009). How goal-fulfillment decreases aggression . Journal of Experimental Social Psychology , vol. 45 , pp. 90–100. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.08.021

DeWall, C. N., Baumeister, R. F., Stillman, T. F., & Galliot, M. T. (2007). Violence restrained: Effects of self-regulation and its depletion on aggression . Journal of Experimental Social Psychology , vol. 43 , pp. 62–76. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2005.12.005

Dewulf, A., Gray, B., Putnam, L., Lewicki, R., Aaarts, N., Bourwen, R., & van Woerkum, C. (2009). Disentangling approaches to framing in conflict and negotiation research: A metaparadigmatic perspective . Human Relations , vol. 62 , pp. 155–193. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726708100356

Domingue, R., & Mollen, D. (2009). Attachment and conflict communication in adult romantic relationships . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 26 , pp. 678–696. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407509347932

Dweck, C. S., Chiu, C., & Hong, Y. (1995). Implicit theories and their role in judgments and reactions: A world from two perspectives . Psychological Inquiry , vol. 6 , pp. 267–285. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0604_1

Feeney, J. A. (2005). Hurt feelings in couple relationships: Exploring the role of attachment and perceptions of personal injury . Personal Relationships , vol. 12 , pp. 253–271. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-4126.2005.00114.x

Finkel, E. J., & Campbell, W. K. (2001). Self-control and accommodation in close relationships: An interdependence analysis . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 81 , pp. 263–277. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.2.263

Finkel, E. J., DeWall, C. N., Slotter, E. B., Oaten, M., & Foshee, V. A. (2009). Self-regulatory failure and intimate partner violence perpetration . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 25 , pp. 483–499. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0015433

Fitness, J. (2005). Bye bye, black sheep: The causes and consequences of rejection in family relationships . In K. Williams, ed. , J. Forgas, ed. , & W. von Hippel (Eds.), The

social outcast: Ostracism, social exclusion, rejection, and bullying (pp. pp. 445–468). Hove, England: Psychology Press.

Fletcher, G. J. O., ed. , & Fitness, J. (Eds.). (1996). Knowledge structures in close relationships: A social psychological approach . Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R. (2000). Adult romantic attachment: Theoretical developments, emerging controversies, and unanswered questions . Review of General Psychology , vol. 4 , pp. 132–154. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.4.2.132

Graham, S. M., & Clark, M. S. (2006). Self-esteem and organization of valenced information about others: The "Jekyll and Hyde"-ing of relationship partners . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 90 , pp. 652–665. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.4.652

Halford, W. K., Keefer, E., & Osgarby, S. M. (2002). "How has the week been for you two?" Relationship satisfaction and hindsight memory biases in couples' reports of relationship events . Cognitive Therapy and Research , vol. 26 , pp. 759–773. http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1021289400436

Hamamci, Z. (2005a). Dysfunctional relationship beliefs in marital conflict . Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy , vol. 23 , pp. 245–261. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10942-005-0013-y

Hamamci, Z. (2005b). Dysfunctional relationship beliefs in marital satisfaction and adjustment . Social Behavior and Personality , vol. 33 , pp. 313–328. http://dx.doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2005.33.4.313

Heyman, R. E., Hunt-Martorano, A. N., Malik, J., & Slep, A. M. S. (2009). Desired change in couples: Gender differences and effects on communication . Journal of Family Psychology , vol. 23 , pp. 474–484. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0015980

Holmberg, D., & MacKenzie, S. (2002). So far, so good: Scripts for romantic relationship as predictors of relational well-being . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 19 , pp. 777–796. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407502196003

Honeycutt, J. M. (2004). Imagined interaction conflict-linkage theory: Explaining the persistence and resolution of interpersonal conflict in everyday life . Imagination, Cognition, and Personality , vol. 23 , pp. 3–25. http://dx.doi.org/10.2190/240J-1VPK-K86D-1JL8

Honeycutt, J. M., & Bryan, S. P. (2011). Scripts and Communication for Relationships . New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Honeycutt, J. M., Cantrill, J. G., & Allen, T. (1992). Memory structures for relational decay: A cognitive test of sequencing of deescalating actions and stages . Human Communication Research , vol. 18 , pp. 528–562. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1992.tb00571.x

Honeycutt, J. M., Cantrill, J. G., & Greene, R. W. (1989). Memory structures for relational escalation: A cognitive test of the sequencing of relational actions and stages . Human Communication Research , vol. 16 , pp. 62–90. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1989.tb00205.x

Hooker, C. I., Gyurak, A., Verosky, S. C. Miyakawa, A., & Ayduck, O. (2010). Neural activity to a partner's facial expression predicts self-regulation after conflict . Biological Psychiatry , vol. 67 , pp. 406–413. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2009.10.014

Johnson, K. L., & Roloff, M. E. (1988). Serial arguing and relational quality: Determinants and consequences . Communication Research , vol. 25 , pp. 327–343. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009365098025003004

Johnson, K. L., & Roloff, M. E. (2000). Correlates of the perceived resolvability and relational consequences of serial arguing in dating relationships: Argumentative features and the use of coping strategies . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 17 , pp. 676–686. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407500174011

Jose, A., Rajaram, S., O'Leary, K. D., & Williams, M. C. (2010). Memory for partner-related stimuli: Free recall and frequency estimation . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 27 , pp. 658–670. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407510369144

Kachadourian, L. K., Fincham, F., & Davila, J. (2005). Attitudinal ambivalence, rumination, and forgiveness of partner transgressions in marriage . Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 31 , pp. 334–342. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167204271595

Kammrath, L. K., & Dweck, C. (2006). Voicing conflict: Preferred conflict strategies among incremental and entity theorists . Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 32 , pp. 1497–1508. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167206291476

Karremans, J. C., & Verwijmeren, T. (2008). Mimicking attractive opposite-sex others: The role of romantic relationship status . Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 34 , pp. 939–950. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167208316693

Keck, K. L., & Samp, J. A. (2007). The dynamic nature of goals and message production as revealed in a sequential analysis of conflict interactions . Human Communication Research , vol. 33 , pp. 27–47.

Kennedy, K. A., & Pronin, E. (2008). When disagreement gets ugly: Perceptions of bias and the escalation of conflict . Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 34 , pp. 833–848. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167208315158

Knee, C. R., Lonsbary, C., Canevello, A., & Patrick, H. (2005). Self-determination and conflict in romantic relationships . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 89 , pp. 997–1009. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.89.6.997

Knobloch, L. K. (2007). Perceptions of turmoil within courtship: Associations with intimacy, relational uncertainty and interference from partners . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 24 , pp. 363–384. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407507077227

Knobloch, L. K., & Theiss, J. A. (2010). An actor-partner interdependence model of relational turbulence: Cognitions and emotions . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 27 , pp. 595–619. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407510368967

SAGE knowledge

Krokoff, L. J. (1990). Hidden agendas in marriage: Affective and longitudinal . Communication Research , vol. 17 , pp. 483–499. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009365090017004005

LaPlante, M. N., McCormick, N., & Brannigan, G. G. (1980). Living the sexual script: College students' views of influence in sexual encounters . Journal of Sex Research , vol. 16 , pp. 338–355. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224498009551090

Lazarus, R. S. (1991). Cognition and motivation in emotion . American Psychologist , vol. 46 , pp. 352–367. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.46.4.352

Littleton, H. L., & Axsom, D. (2003). Rape and seduction scripts of university students: Implications for rape attributions and unacknowledged rape . Sex Roles , vol. 49 , pp. 465–475. http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1025824505185

Littleton, H. L., Axsom, D., & Yoder, M. (2006). Priming of consensual and nonconsensual sexual scripts: An experimental test of the role of scripts in rape attributions . Sex Roles , vol. 54 , pp. 557–563. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9017-z

Makoul, G., & Roloff, M. E. (1998). The role of efficacy and outcome expectations in the decision to withhold relational complaints . Communication Research , vol. 25 , pp. 5–29. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009365098025001001

Martin, L. L., & Tesser, A. (1996). Some ruminative thoughts . In R. S. Wyer Jr. (Ed.), Ruminative thoughts (pp. pp. 1–47). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

McLaren, R. M., & Solomon, D. H. (2008). Appraisals and distancing response to hurtful messages . Communication Research , vol. 35 , pp. 339–357. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0093650208315961

McLaren, R. M., Solomon, D. H., & Priem, J. S. (2011). Explaining variation in contemporaneous responses to hurt in premarital romantic relationships: A relational turbulence model perspective . Communication Research , vol. 38 , pp. 543–564. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0093650210377896

SAGE knowledge

Mikulincer, M. (1996). Mental rumination and learned helplessness: Cognitive shifts during helplessness training and their behavioral consequences . In I. G. Sarason, ed. , G. R. Pierce, ed. , & B. R. Sarason (Eds.), Cognitive interference: Theories, methods, and findings (pp. pp. 191–209). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Mischel, W., DeSmet, A. L., & Kross, E. (2006). Self-regulation in the service of conflict resolution . In M. Deutsch, ed. , P. T. Coleman, ed. , & E. C. Marcus (Eds.), The handbook of conflict resolution (2nd ed., pp. pp. 294–313). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miyake, A., Friedman, N. P., Emerson, M. J., Wizki, A. H., Howerter, A., & Wager, T. D. (2000). The unity and diversity of executive functions and their contributions to complex "frontal lobe" tasks: A latent variable analysis . Cognitive Psychology , vol. 41 , pp. 49–100. http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/cogp.1999.0734

Murray, S. L., & Holmes, J. G. (1999). The (mental) ties that bind: Cognitive structures that predict relationship resilience . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 77 , pp. 1228–1244. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1228

Nolen-Hoeksema, S., Wisco, B. E., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Rethinking rumination . Perspectives on Psychological Science , vol. 3 , pp. 400–424. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00088.x

Overall, N. C., Fletcher, G. J. O., & Simpson, J. A. (2006). Regulation processes in intimate relationships: The role of ideal standards . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 91 , pp. 662–685. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.91.4.662

Overall, N. C., & Sibley, C. G. (2007). When accommodation matters: Situational dependency within daily interactions with romantic partners . Journal of Experimental Social Psychology , vol. 44 , pp. 95–104. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2007.02.005

Pearce, Z. J., & Halford, W. K. (2008). Do attributions mediate the association between attachment and negative couple communication? Personal Relationships , vol. 15 , pp. 155–170. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2008.00191.x

Pistole, M. C., & Arricale, F. (2003). Understanding attachment: Beliefs about conflict . Journal of Counseling and Development , vol. 81 , pp. 318–328. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00259.x

Powers, S. I., Pietromonaco, P. R., Gunlicks, M., & Sayer, A. (2006). Dating couples' attachment styles and patterns of cortisol reactivity and recovery in response to a relationship conflict . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 90 , pp. 613–628. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.4.613

Priem, J. S., McLaren, R., & Solomon, D. H. (2010). Relational messages, perception of hurt, and biological stress reactions to a disconfirming interaction . Communication Research , vol. 37 , pp. 48–72. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0093650209351470

Pronk, T. M., Karremans, J. C., Overbeek, G., Vermulst, A. A., & Wigboldus, D. H. J. (2010). What it takes to forgive: When and why executive functioning facilitates forgiveness . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 98 , pp. 119–131. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0017875

Pronk, T. M., Karremans, J. C., & Wigboldus, D. H. J. (2011). How can you resist? Executive control helps romantically involved individuals to stay faithful . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 100 , pp. 827–837. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0021993

Richards, J. M., Butler, E. A., & Gross, J. J. (2003). Emotion regulation in romantic relationships: The cognitive consequences of concealing feelings . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 20 , pp. 599–620. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/02654075030205002

Ritter, S. M., Karremans, J. C., & van Schie, H. T. (2010). The role of self-regulation in derogating attractive alternatives . Journal of Experimental Social Psychology , vol. 46 , pp. 631–637. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.02.010

Roesler, T. A., & Wind, T. W. (1994). Telling the secret: Adult women describe their disclosures of incest . Journal of Interpersonal Violence , vol. 9 , pp. 327–338. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/088626094009003003

Rogan, R. G. (2006). Conflict framing: Categories revisited . Communication Quarterly , vol. 54 , pp. 157–173. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01463370600650860

Roloff, M. E., & Miller, C. W. (2006). Social cognition approaches to understanding interpersonal conflict and communication . In J. G. Oetzel, ed. & S. T. Toomey (Eds.), The Sage handbook of conflict communication (pp. pp. 97–128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412976176

Salvatore, J. E., Kuo, S. I.-C., Steele, R. D., Simpson, J. A., & Collins, W. A. (2011). Recovering from conflict in romantic relationships: A developmental perspective . Psychological Science , vol. 22 , pp. 376–383. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0956797610397055

Shaver, P. R., & Hazan, C. (1993). Adult romantic attachment: Theory and evidence . In D. Perlman, ed. & W. Jones (Eds.), Advances in personal relationships (Vol. vol. 4 , pp. pp. 29–70). London, England: Kingsley.

Showers, C. J., & Kevlyn, S. B. (1999). Organization of knowledge about a relationship partner: Implications for liking and loving . Journal of Personality and Social Psychology , vol. 76 , pp. 958–971. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.6.958

Showers, C. J., & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2004). Organization of partner knowledge: Relationship outcomes and longitudinal change . Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 30 , pp. 1198–1210. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167204264077

Sillars, A. L. (2010). Interpersonal conflict . In C. R. Berger, ed. , M. E. Roloff, ed. , & D. R. Roskos-Ewoldsen (Ed.), The handbook of communication science (2nd ed., pp. pp. 273–291). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412982818

Solomon, D. H., & Knobloch, L. K. (2004). A model of relational turbulence: The role of intimacy, relational uncertainty, and interference from partners in appraisals of irritations . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 21 , pp. 795–816. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407504047838

SAGE knowledge

Solomon, D. H., Weber, K. M., & Steuber, K. R. (2010). Turbulence in relational transition . In S. W. Smith, ed. & S. R. Wilson (Eds.), New directions in interpersonal communication research (pp. pp. 115–134). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Story, T. N., Berg, C. A., Smith, T. W., Beveridge, R., Henry, N. J. M., & Pearce, G. (2007). Age, martial satisfaction, and optimism as predictors of positive sentiment override in middle-aged and older married couples . Psychology and Aging , vol. 22 , pp. 719–727. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0882-7974.22.4.719

ter Laak, J. J. F., Olthof, T., & Aleva, E. (2003). Sources of annoyance in close relationships: Sex-related differences in annoyance with partner behaviors . Journal of Psychology , vol. 137 , pp. 545–559. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00223980309600634

Theiss, J. A., Knobloch, L. K., Checton, M. G., & Magsamen-Conrad, K. (2009). Relationship characteristics associated with the experience of hurt in romantic relationships: A test of the relational turbulence model . Human Communication Research , vol. 35 , pp. 588–615. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2009.01364.x

Theiss, J. A., & Solomon, D. H. (2006). A relational turbulence model of communication about irritations in romantic relationships . Communication Research , vol. 33 , pp. 391–418. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0093650206291482

Trapp, R., & Hoff, N. (1985). A model of serial argument in interpersonal relationships . Journal of the American Forensic Association , vol. 22 , pp. 1–11.

Vallacher, R. R., Coleman, P. T., Nowak, A., & Bui-Wrzosinska, L. (2010). Rethinking intractable conflict: The perspective of dynamical system . American Psychologist , vol. 65 , pp. 262–278. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0019290

Vangelisti, A. L., & Young, S. L. (2000). When words hurt: The effects of perceived intentionality on interpersonal relationships . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 17 , pp. 393–424. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407500173005

Vangelisti, A. L., Young, S. L., Carpenter-Theune, K. E., & Alexander, A. L. (2005). Why does it hurt? The perceived causes of hurt feelings . Communication Research , vol. 32 , pp. 443–477. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0093650205277319

SSAGE knowledge

Vera, E. M., Shin, R. Q., Montgomery, G. P., Mildner, C., & Speight, S. L. (2004). Conflict resolution styles, self-efficacy, self-control, and future orientation of urban adolescents . Professional School Counseling , vol. 8 , pp. 73–80.

Verhofstadt, L. L., Buysse, A., Ickes, W., De Clercq, A., & Peene, O. J. (2005). Conflict and support interactions in marriage: An analysis of couple's interactive behavior and on-line cognition . Personal Relationships , vol. 12 , pp. 23–42. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-4126.2005.00100.x

Waldinger, R. J., & Schulz, M. S. (2006). Linking hearts and minds in couple interactions: Intentions, attributions and overriding sentiments . Journal of Family Psychology , vol. 20 , pp. 494–504. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.20.3.494

Waldron, V. R., & Kelley, D. L. (2005). Forgiving communication as a response to relational transgressions . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 22 , pp. 723–742. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407505056445

Wenzel, M., Turner, J. K., & Okimoto, T. G. (2010). Is forgiveness an outcome or initiator of sociocognitive process? Rumination, empathy, and cognitive appraisal following a transgression . Social Psychological and Personality Science , vol. 1 , pp. 369–377. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1948550610376598

Wilkowski, B. M., & Robinson, M. D. (2007). Keeping one's cool: Trait anger, hostile thoughts, and recruitment of limited capacity control . Personal and Social Psychology Bulletin , vol. 33 , pp. 1201–1213.

Yeager, D. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., Nokelainen, P., & Dweck, C. S. (2011). Adolescents' implicit theories predict desire for vengeance after peer conflicts: Correlational and experimental evidence . Developmental Psychology , vol. 47 , pp. 1090–1107. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0023769

Young, S. L. (2004). Factors that influence recipients' appraisals of hurtful communication . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 23 , pp. 291–303. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407504042833

Yum, Y. (2004). Culture and self-construal as predictors of response to accommodative dilemmas in dating relationships . Journal of Social and Personal Relationships , vol. 21 , pp. 817–835. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407504047839

http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452281988.n6