

CONFLICT:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON ANTHROPOLOGY AND CONFLICT
MANAGEMENT

by
Rachel Koch



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DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the thesis submitted by

Rachel Nicole Koch

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Rachel Nicole Koch, and they evaluated the student's presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

Shelly Volsche, Ph.D. Chair, Supervisory Committee

John Ziker, Ph.D. Member, Supervisory Committee

Kendall House, Ph.D. Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by Shelly Volsche, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved by the Graduate College.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all of those who have been in my corner through this endeavor. To my boys, thank you for making your own sandwiches and doing your own laundry. To my family, thank you for distracting me, commiserating, and laughing with me. My friends, thank you for your belief in me and indulging me while I bored you with the details. My mom, words cannot express how much you have helped me. For my dad, you may be gone but I have felt your love and encouragement every step of the way. To Dr. Volsche for being the best mentor and advisor and for believing I could do it when I did not. I would be remiss to not mention the caffeine, sugar, and dry shampoo combo, sure you made me go up a size in jeans, but you were an essential pillar in my framework.

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ABSTRACT

Anthropology has many goals, such as understanding our evolutionary origins, distinctiveness as a species, and vast diversity of social existence worldwide and through time. The current study looks at the feasibility of combining the theoretical and applied methods of anthropology and conflict resolution to help future anthropologists do better anthropology. I created an interdisciplinary mixed methods study to gauge the compatibility and possibility of integration. Recruiting participants from a conflict management course on having difficult conversations, pre- and post-discussion surveys were given to measure how well narrative inquiry can help those on differing sides of a difficult conversation understand one another. Additionally, participant observations were used to understand the facilitator's role during these difficult conversations and how that approach works for gaining an insider's perspective. Both the surveys and participant observations were evaluated to demonstrate the importance of theoretical definitions between the two disciplines. The results show that participants acknowledged the importance of understanding different cultures and experiences during difficult conversations. Many of the participants embraced the process of narrative inquiry by having curiosity during difficult conversations. Having these conversations and being able to have these conversations respectfully was valued. This research supports the value of cultural competency in conflict management training and facilitator participation, while also suggesting that anthropology needs to reframe conflict as a potential good.

Together, conflict management and applied anthropology can, and should, co-inform inquiry of and between groups in conflict.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Cognitive dissonance refers to the feeling individuals have when two or more modes of thought contradict each other (Festinger 1962). These modes include ideas, beliefs, or the knowledge that one has behaved in a certain way (Harmon-Jones and Mills. 2019). The significance of this occurred to me while pursuing my interdisciplinary undergraduate degree in anthropology and conflict management. My anthropology training used Tinbergen's four levels to show that conflict is present in the evolutionary history of *Homo sapiens* and applied theories like game theory to understand when it is necessary for individuals to engage in conflict (Nesse 2013). However, my conflict management training veered from the anthropological definitions and training I received of conflict, what it signifies, and what to do with it. To understand, I have had to work through my own cognitive dissonance with curiosity, and I have come to understand that anthropology and conflict resolution have much in common.

Two significant differences triggered my cognitive dissonance. The primary difference is the interpretation applied to understanding conflict and second is the training in applied methods. The first is complicated and I do not want to overgeneralize or underplay the complexity. Conflict occurs between individuals, violence is between perpetrator and victim, and peace is found between actors (Galtung 2010). There are a lot of moving pieces, so anthropology offers many rich insights for conflict and peace studies to utilize from ultimate to proximate levels (Nesse 2013). Anthropological theories and methods can be applied to understand human behavior better, gain cross-

cultural insight into the past, show similarities and differences in and between species, and give logical voice to the often highly charged injustices in the world. I love anthropology. I believe the world would be a better place if Anthropology was a course taught in high school. There is no job training that would not benefit from an element of cultural anthropology added to it. If nothing else, it makes individuals aware that they have their own culture and that that culture comes with biases. This brings me to two observations in anthropology and conflict management that need resolved.

Anthropology, like any discipline, rests on the understanding and work of its predecessors. Some robust theories and methods have remained throughout the years, and some things have needed to change. As Maya Angelou wisely said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." Anthropology has done very well with this idea as the entire discipline is built on providing an outside perspective and gaining the insider's perspective, which inherently gives way to understanding. This understanding leads to challenging assumptions, which is the hallmark of anthropology (Eltringham 2021). So, what, then, is the conflict that I am focusing on in anthropology? It is in how anthropology theoretically interprets conflict, how applied methods are underdeveloped, and how anthropology could borrow back from conflict management to transform these weaknesses into strengths.

These observations that caused my cognitive dissonance did not come all at once, but the last few years have led me down the rabbit hole, and I had to ask myself how anthropologists deal with conflict as a human behavior. How do anthropologists do conflict? Two specific experiences led me to my observations of the conflict of anthropology. The first was when I had recently updated a friend on my current

educational pursuits. She commented that she did not see how those two fields could go together. She was only being a good friend in inquiring about my post-graduation goals, but the fact remains that ultimately someone asked me the most dreaded question for undergrads: "What will you do with your schooling when you graduate?" That instance of conflict allowed me to reflect on what kind of anthropologist I wanted to be. I realized that anthropologists should be the best equipped to conceptualize conflict. After all, I went into my conflict management training with a strong understanding of cultures, cultural fluency, and the ability to gain an insider's point of view. So, I asked myself, "How do anthropologists handle conflict?" Committing yourself to a lifetime pursuit of interacting with and trying to understand behavior among all species will expose you to many inter- and intra-personal conflicts. So, are anthropologists prepared to practice anthropology amongst all the conflicts? Does anthropology know how vital it is as a discipline to conflict management? To date, the most common involvement of anthropology in conflict is forensic and judicial proceedings in a post-conflict setting which is a topic that will not be given attention in this paper as this is a paper focused on the working definition of conflict in anthropology and key changes to applied anthropological methods (Magistro 1997: Eltringham 2021).

There is also the theoretical side which uses fossil records, ethnographies, and research studies to answer ultimate and proximate explanations for the presence of violence and prosocial behaviors. Or instead, conflict is quite frequently thought of as synonymous with violence and is not equated to the vital evolutionary role that it plays. Theoretically, conflict has been confined to violence, and its position has been usurped by the name of evolutionary pressures, which takes the credit and is not as encompassing

as it could be (Wallace 2007). This is unfortunate as many theoretical arguments could be avoided, and conflict could be pursued from mediator and facilitator standpoints as anthropologists.

In summary, I have made two observations regarding the conflict of anthropology. The first is in the theoretical understanding of conflict in anthropology, and the second is in the applied ethnographic methods. Both led me to ask if the next generation of anthropologists would benefit from conflict management training. I propose that the future direction of anthropology requires an integration of conflict management theory and methods. This could open employment opportunities for anthropologists and streamline current theoretical and applied practitioners. Anthropology could allow the conflict of an increasingly international world and all the accompanying cultural pressures to transform it and maximize it as a discipline to maintain its vital role in the sciences.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will share my first observation in relation to the literature on conflict in anthropology. I have organized my discussion using the key subfields of cultural, biological, archaeological, and linguistic. Then I will share my second observation in relation to the applied side of anthropology. My research on the literature comes from database searches, recommended readings, and conversations with anthropologists.

First Observation

Observation number one occurred while researching ultimate and proximate levels of conflict (Nesse 2013). I quickly realized that cultural anthropological theory looks at violence, calls it conflict, and then uses it to determine that the presence or absence of violence suggests, as Sapolsky states, “a determination of humans' natural angelic or devilish blueprint” (Sapolsky 2017). Most researchers spend their time bickering with other researchers over definitions and presence of violence. Pulling largely from the work of Ferguson, there are arguments that warfare is less common the further back we investigate humanity's past, so humans must naturally be good and become corrupted with sedentarism and agriculture (Ferguson 2014). Others say that the presence of violence the farther back we look is evidence that humans have always been ornery, and civilization keeps us from regularly killing each other off in droves (Ferguson 2014). It must be noted that even the definition and presence of violence in the fossil record are disputed. Warfare's origins may have begun as early as two million years ago or as late as

six thousand years ago, depending on one's definitions and interpretations of data (Kissel and Kim 2019). Definitions of violence are divided into categories such as offensive and defensive warfare (Lopez 2007), physical and structural violence (Martin and Harrod 2015), primitive and civilized (Kissel and Kim 2019), reactive and proactive (Lieberman 2020), simple and complex (Ferguson 2014), small and large scale (Kissel and Kim 2019), and of biological and cultural origins (Martin and Harrod 2015). All are used to split hairs and argue conflicting hypotheses. Arguments for and against violence in human evolutionary history are often viewed as monocausal and state that the evidence of violence in the fossil record provides evidence that the human species is inherently violent (Ferguson 2014). Alternatively, other researchers suggest that violence only appeared after the advent of western colonization or agriculture (Ferguson 2014).

To add fuel to this fire is the presence of cooperation. Now, violence leaves more recoverable traces than cooperative acts, but much of the literature posits that prosocial acts have been selected for as well (Ferguson 2014). This other line of inquiry prioritizes cooperative or prosocial human behaviors, determines that cooperation is the opposite of conflict, and once again argues the evidence favoring human nature. Compared to our nonhuman primate ancestors, the human species is remarkably peaceful. Humans hold the record for adults engaging in play more than any other species (Lieberman 2020). In fact, the most antagonistic of humans studied are 250 to 600 times less frequently involved in violence than our chimpanzee relatives (De Waal 2006; Lieberman 2020). Even as human cultures have become increasingly global, humans' ability to cooperate has remained consistently present (Harari 2018). With the proper vantage point, we see that viewing human history across the millennia reveals a steady positive slope toward

unity (Diamond 2005; Harari 2018; Sapolsky 2017). Humans are capable of and selected for prosocial cooperation strategies regardless of relatedness in all categories of conflict (Harari 2018; Sapolsky 2017). Humans are notoriously cooperative creatures. From cooperative breeding to food sharing (Stiner et al. 2009), there is evidence that humans have relied on and selected for cooperation as far back as the split from our nonhuman primate ancestors (Martin and Harrod 2015). Cooperative breeding, by its name, suggests that human ancestors were selected to recruit and help raise their offspring to enhance reproductive success (Crittenden and Marlowe 2008). To demonstrate my point, I will cover each subfield's contributions to violence or as I like to call it - the conflict lens.

Archaeological Evidence

Physical violence is, of course, the most identifiable form of violence as it leaves the most discoverable traces (Ferguson 2014, Mathew 2015). Identifying violence in ancestral humans helps archaeologists paint a contextual picture of the period (Campbell 1986). Skeletal remains are analyzed for the presence of trauma from distinct patterns left on the bones (Ferguson 2014). Further, the presence and frequency of trauma on the bones are compared to the age and gender of the remains to determine physical combat versus accidents, and warfare versus individual disputes (Martin and Harrod 2015). For example, a massacre, determined by the presence and frequency of trauma to cranial bones, belongs to the Early Bronze Age in Anatolia, Turkey (Erdal and Erdal 2012). The "Iceman" of Otztal Alps was frozen in a glacier for 5,000 years before being discovered and identified as being shot in the back with an arrow (Lieberman 2020). It was discovered that during the Holocene, an entire band of hunter-gatherers, twenty-seven men, women, and children, were found to have suffered traumatic deaths evidenced by

bashed in skulls, puncture wounds, fragmented cheekbones, fractured ribs and knees, and broken hands which suggests they were also bound (Lahr et al. 2016).

Osteological evidence is not alone in determining the presence of violence in the human lineage; fortification, weapons, and art have also been analyzed to pinpoint the emergence of violence (Ferguson 2014). These tactics can be picked apart by themselves, so most researchers use a combination whenever possible to develop a complete picture of each site (Campbell 1986). These theories and methods are used between archaeologists, biological archaeologists, and forensic anthropologists and the focus is still the same in that identification of physical and structural violence is measured through osteological evidence. Archaeology uses this information to paint a picture of past human life, and biological anthropology uses the information primarily in medicolegal investigations.

Biological Evidence

Biological anthropology encompasses other realms of conflict, such as phylogenetic evidence for humanity's unique style of violence. A comparison across diverse animal taxa demonstrated that lethal violence emerged as an adaptive trait from multiple lineages, including the human line (Gómez et al. 2016). Their analysis revealed that the phylogeny of mammals holds higher rates of interpersonal violence. As humans fall in the mammalian lineage, an adaptive strategy selects these phylogenetic traits and violence (Gómez et al. 2016). The study also analyzed the percentage of violence found at eighty archaeological sites from the Paleolithic era, which in and of itself seems to support the belief that violence is found wherever ancestral human evidence is found. This is not surprising considering that conflict occurs when two or more individuals seek

the same thing simultaneously and both or all parties involved cannot be satisfied.

Likewise, disputes arise when individuals expect, anticipate, or want something from others who are unwilling or unable to comply. This suggests that conflict has existed as far back as there have existed two or more individuals in need of resources, and there will be evidence that conflict exists between all individuals at some point in time (Kissel and Kim 2015).

The fossil record shows that around two million years ago, *Homo erectus* evolved and underwent numerous selective pressures to develop bipedality (Sigmund and Nowak 1999). Bipedality brought with it shifts in the effectiveness of human violence. Though the ability to fight upright gives bipeds maximum force when hitting downward, the ability to use arms as weapons or shields is a loss in speed and stability (Lieberman 2020). In a fight, humans are clumsier, slower, and have no physical traits like fangs or claws to help give a competitive edge. This means that in a brawl between a human and a chimpanzee, the chimpanzee will more often be the victor (Sapolsky 2017).

Much like an evolutionary snowball, bipedalism enabled the development of our big brains (Lopez 2017). Then big brains allowed humans the physiological and cognitive capacity to make and use tools and weapons. Humans' big brains are expensive, but they also allow for cognitive development that shifts our violence style from reactive to proactive (Lieberman 2020). This means that humans can restrain their reactive anger to allow for the thought process and implementation of weapons in a way that will maximize the benefits and reduce the costs of fighting. Though the relationship is murky, there is evidence that humans' bipedality and complex cognitive ability have easily reduced the ability to engage in face-to-face combat (Sapolsky 2017). Humans are not as

stable on two legs during a fight, and mental health seems to deteriorate when individuals engage in face-to-face violence (Lieberman 2020; Sapolsky 2017). Finally, humans are unique in the world of violence with their inventions of weapons such as arrows, darts, guns, and bombs which make them alarmingly deadly (Lieberman 2020). Humans have adapted over the millennia to allow for more proactive versus reactive forms of violence, use weapons effectively, and recruit others to skew the outcome of violence in our favor (Lieberman 2020). Just as there have been physiological changes to select for humans' unique forms of violence there has also been selection for cooperation. In fact, the physiological changes have specific triggers that account for all the behaviors on the "conflict spectrum" i.e., violence - cooperation. There are external and internal triggers when in conflicting situations (Sapolsky 2017).

The internal triggers for cooperation and violence come from the sympathetic nervous system (Sapolsky 2017). Brains control and are controlled by the release of hormones. Interestingly, the sympathetic nervous system controls an individual's freeze, flight, or fight response to stress and fear, in that order (Bracha et al. 2004). The initial freeze response has been demonstrated to be of pan-mammalian origin and is the initial response when fear or stress is present (Bracha et al. 2004). The next step is flight; individuals will choose flight whenever possible (Bracha et al. 2004). Fight is the final response when that is the only option left (Bracha et al. 2004). That biological foundation helps us understand the relationship between hormonal causes and effects in conflicting situations. There will be hormonal evidence when individuals are placed in those situations (Sapolsky 2017). For example, a psychological research study was conducted among males in the Southern United States. A quantitative element of their research

involved measuring males' cortisol and testosterone levels from the North and South before and after insult scenarios to determine if an honor culture had developed physiological changes (Cohen et al. 1996). They found that males from the South were more likely to have high testosterone and cortisol levels when presented with insult scenarios (Cohen et al. 1996). The researchers determined that the culture of honor had been perpetuated for so long that it physiologically changed the internal triggers of males from that cultural group, making them more sensitive to insults of honor (Cohen et al. 1996).

External triggers are outside situations that are the physical manifestation of the conflict, usually present in access to resources and mates (Sapolsky 2017). Resource-gathering boundaries need to expand as group numbers grow, so if groups are restricted from those expansion opportunities, only two options are available; move or fight (Diamond 2005). Biological anthropology measures the outside and internal triggers of violent and prosocial behaviors, which are then theoretically placed into the categories of trade-offs, game theory, inclusive fitness, and Hamilton's relatedness equation.

Cultural Evidence

The development of violence over a lifetime is an interesting topic and is highly influenced by an individual's culture (Sterelny 2020). Expanding on examples used previously, the South has consistently been regarded as more violent than the North in the United States (Cohen et al. 1996). Many attribute this prevalence of violence to the heat, the history of slavery, and even high poverty levels (Cohen et al. 1996). Though each of these attributions can be shown to play a role in violence, the single best contributing factor is a culture of honor that is perpetuated (Cohen et al. 1996). Young boys are taught

to hold their honor in high regard and actively defend it to the point where affronts to their honor are met with swift disproportionate violence (Cohen et al. 1996). More importantly, the higher homicide rates in the South are only in homicides that are argument related (Cohen et al. 1996).

The Yānomamö border dwellers between Venezuela and Brazil have been the source of controversial research on cultural violence (Chagnon 2012). This Amazonian group settles disputes more violently than other groups, with the luxury of moving when fighting presents during conflict (Ferguson 2014). The Yānomamö get a bad reputation for the observed violence, but what has rarely been considered are the growing constraints placed on their ability to move away from competitive tribes (Chagnon 2012, Ferguson 2014). Most egalitarian groups maintain peace because they pack up and move when serious conflict arises with other groups (Diamond 2005; Ferguson 2014; Sapolsky 2017). In Northern Uganda, the Karimojong agropastoralists have developed a quirky practice of cattle raiding with AK-47s instead of stealthy night raids implemented by other agropastoralists (Gray et al. 2003). These militarized cattle raiders have embraced the use of AK-47s and created a cultural identity viewed more like warriors than raiders (Gray et al. 2003). For the Karimojong agropastoralists, violence becomes the cultural norm when competition for resources and mates is fierce (Gray et al. 2003). Swift and disproportionate retribution makes economic sense for cultures whose subsistence relies on pastoralist practices (Cohen et al. 1996). When entire wealth can be rustled away, and insufficient law enforcement is in place, herders need to use force to protect themselves and their property (Cohen et al. 1996). Across the world, current herding cultures, like the Karimojong, are more accepting of violent strategies (Sapolsky 2017). So much cultural

theory is used to draw a line in the proverbial sand separating violent and peaceful cultures and defining each in contrast with the other (Sigmund and Nowak 1999). Though this may be done with the best intentions, it only feeds modern ethnocentrism and leaves some anthropologists missing the cultural fluency mark.

Linguistic Evidence

Conflict and talk are found in any human culture. Though not the focus of most linguistic anthropologists, conflict is seen as an opportunity to observe the articulation of language and power (Jaquemet 1999). Conflict is viewed as an interruption to the "normal" course of social interactions, potentially leading to social breakdowns (Jaquemet 1999). The examples often used are offensive conflict talk such as U.S. adversarial cross-examinations, native song duels, or Trobriander *yakala* (Grimshaw 1992), which, yes, can be considered conflict resolution, but once again only focuses on a sliver of conflict resolution strategies employed by groups. This demonstrates that even in linguistics, there is a default to view the appearance of conflict as an automatic negative, which is then handled aggressively or passively. It is intriguing that it is acknowledged and still regarded as a conundrum among linguistics that conflict provides a central force for the constitution of social relationships (Jaquemet 1999). This, in my mind, takes us back to the original premise about conflict needing a more accurate definition to be able to correctly interpret the role it plays in cultural structures as well as the implementation of a conflict behavioral spectrum that includes the more aggressive forms and nonaggressive forms. For example, narrative inquiry is the opposite end of adversarial cross-examinations.

Narrative inquiry or storytelling exists in all cultures, suggesting it is an evolutionary adaptation (Gotschall 2012). To be fair, researchers acknowledge that relatively little work has been done on conflict and language (Jaquemet 1999). Sociolinguistics has done more in this realm and has brought interesting things to light. For example, a study comparing Italian and American preschoolers revealed that both cultural groups engage in disputes with peers with minimal resolution (Grimshaw 1992). They concluded that disputes are more frequent among Italian preschoolers but that in both cases, disputes are engaged in as a developmental exercise (Grimshaw 1992). Linguistics dances around recognizing that conflict occurs, in part to help sociocultural relationships grow. Still, there is strong evidence that conflict is a catalyst for human behavioral trait adaptation.

Is All Conflict Just Violence?

There are two theories that include options for cooperation when conflict occurs, conflicts of interest and bargaining theory. Conflicts of interest acknowledges that conflict is not entirely or wholly positive or negative but that the social outcomes reveal if the conflict led to positive or negative results (Nordstrom and Martin 1992). The more stratified a social structure is the more likely conflicts of interest occur, and the only way to reduce incidences of social conflict is to resolve the expressed grievances (Sluka 1992). Bargaining theory is when conflicting individuals will cooperate if there is a greater benefit to invest in cooperation than to incur the costs of not cooperating (Sosis, Feldstein, and Hill 1998). This is akin to conflict management in many ways. Like I have said before, the two disciplines are so similar which is why conflict management could be practiced by anthropologists so seamlessly.

In my experience researching, reading, and talking theory to understand conflict through an anthropological lens, I found the studies' currently emphasized regularly divide conflict into either violence or cooperative behavior. It was not until late in my studies that conflicts of interest and bargaining theory were presented to me. I found that anthropological theory has established that prosocial and violent behaviors occur across cultures and throughout time, that what this means for humanity is a source of debate, and that these misunderstandings lead anthropologists to become conflict-avoidant or conflict competitive. Essentially there are debates and conflicts about how to approach conflict.

The focus has not highlighted violence and cooperation as two sides of the same conflict coin nor that anthropologists could do anthropology as mediators and facilitators. Though many wonderful theories explain violence and cooperation, such as game theory, Hamilton's universe, inclusive fitness model, and tradeoffs, it is easy to get caught up in theoretical skirmishes and forget about the applied good that can be done. Returning to anthropology's core, "the scientific study of the human species, both past and present. Anthropologists seek to answer fundamental questions about human nature. Including answering questions about dynamic relationships between humans and the world in which we live, our development, our social relationships, our connection to the environment, and the ways we plan for the future." (Department of Anthropology).

What I believe is missing from anthropology's approach to conflict, can be pulled from conflict management theory. There are more similarities than differences between the two theoretical definitions. The most critical difference, which seems to be slight, can lead to a massive paradigm shift for anthropological researchers. This difference is

founded on a misunderstanding of what conflict is and its role in evolution and human behavior.

Conflict Management Theory

As hinted previously, it is essential to know what conflict is, and it is equally important to know what conflict is not. As mentioned earlier, anthropology builds on the theory of evolution defined as adaptation through natural selection, as it should (Wallace 2007). However, a paradigm shift needs to occur in anthropology regarding conflict and evolutionary pressures. Conflict is not violence (Avruch 2009, West and Ghoul 2019). Conflict is a competition by groups or individuals over incompatible goals, resources, or sources of power to acquire them (Avruch 2009). This competition is further compounded by groups' or individuals' perceptions of the goals, resources, and power which can vary widely (Avruch 2009). If conflict is competition and not violence, then the most logical conclusion is that conflict is the catalyst for adaptation by natural selection to occur. Conflict simply presents the opportunity for which behaviors including cooperation and violence are used (West and Ghoul 2019). Conflict is Darwinian theory's essential and most overlooked element. There is no natural selection if no conflict requires the benefit of one trait over another. Consider Darwin's finches. If harsh weather conditions did not lead to scarcity of resources, one beak over another would not matter and would not be selected for the next generation. Adaptability is only possible because conflict presents a situation that must be adapted to. Much like strength training, the muscles must have an opposing force that tears them and allows them to grow stronger. Likewise, cooperation does not exist if there is no conflict. There is no need to work

together if there are no conflicts between individuals. Conflict is the catalyst for change to occur.

Anthropologists have established that everyone has culture and that, in a very general manner, the definition of culture is the socially inherited, shared, and learned ways of living possessed by persons under their memberships in social groups (Avruch 2009). In fact, potentially, everyone has several cultures which inform an individual's actions daily (Avruch 2009; Eriksen 1994). It is all around, both seen and unseen. It is especially apparent when two very different cultures are combined, yet no one can verbalize the differences. Values, problem-solving, resources, and so forth are all measured by an individual based on the cultures with which they identify (Eriksen 1994). We cannot say why or how we do it; we just know that it is the way to do it.

There are two theories that conflict management uses to develop the theory of conflict. The first has obvious roots in anthropology and I only bring it up here because it is used in conflict management to build the “conflict is akin to transformation” theory. The first theory is an understanding that within the general definition of culture, there are two manifestations of culture that must be understood: *Generic* and *Local* (Avruch 2009). Generic manifestations are attributes that belong to humankind as a whole. Adaptive features of the species that have been around for over a million years or more and are universal (Avruch 2009). Local refers more to the specific traits that create complex social systems for a particular group at a particular time (Avruch 2009). Most conflict and peace studies are found within the apparent differences between groups, but it is important to note that conflict can and does occur because of similarities. Interestingly, similarities are found to be excellent building blocks when moving from conflict to

conflict resolution in a transformation process of "finding common ground" and then working through the differences (Avruch 2009).

The second theory takes the first as a launching point and assures that culture assigns meanings to conflict, such as telling us what the conflict is about (LeBaron and Pillay 2006). Conflict, in turn, stimulates cultural changes by shaping the cultural lenses through which we interpret the conflict. Culture and conflict are intertwined, constantly shaping and reshaping in an evolving interactive process (LeBaron and Pillay 2006). Hence, conflict is also a transformation process (LeBaron and Pillay 2006). It is not that anthropologists do not see this; there are simply insufficient pivots to proactive approaches. This is the sweet spot where anthropologists could thrive in cultural fluency and advocacy as ethnographers and researchers. This is not a suggestion of "out with old and in with new." But instead, an invitation to maximize what is already in place. No one grasps the concept of culture better than anthropologists, so giving them the edge with conflict management theory and training would transform anthropology and its future.

Second Observation

Observation number two is more concerned with applied methods of anthropology used during ethnography, policy, archaeological work, and advocacy. I was attending an Environmental Anthropology course when the instructor conducted a mini ethnographic exercise one day. Students who had been raised on a farm were to be interviewed by those who had not. The objective was for nonrural students to gain an understanding of rural life from farm-raised students. I cannot say that all of my other farm-raised cohorts had the same experience, but I realized only two questions into my interview that these city folk did not even know the proper questions to ask to truly

understand life on a farm. In all fairness, they asked me questions that they felt were relevant to understanding me from their point of reference. Their questions mainly revolved around comparing their social experiences growing up in the city with my social experiences on the farm. Comparing “us and them” differences, so to speak, but primarily from what their culture deemed important to know. They did nothing wrong, in fact, ethnographic roots developed by Malinowski come from a desire "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, and to realize his vision of his world" (Lamphere 2018), which is then used comparatively to document the range of human variability and compare us and them (Gewertz and Errington 2016), which is a terrific and necessary place to start. But I remember ending the class feeling like farm life was not grasped and reported correctly.

Fast forward one semester to my first mediation workshop when our instructor gave the class an active listening exercise with a few articulated boundaries. We were told not to offer any solutions, ask open-ended questions, and repeat/reflect back on what we heard when the other was done speaking. We were given 15 minutes, and by the end of that time, I can say that I felt understood and had learned more about my partner than I thought possible in that length of time. Open-ended questions allowed me to elaborate without being led, and repeating back gave me an opportunity to correct miscommunications and clarify any misunderstandings. What we did is anthropological ethnography so why did I have such a different experience?

Over the next few days, in addition to active listening, I learned about goals and values, listening styles, conflict styles, and about self-awareness while listening to others. Then I was given multiple opportunities to practice these techniques. The combination

opened my mind even further, and I realized that that mental exercise of putting myself in "another's shoes" through an understanding of conflict, along with the practice, took my understanding of anthropological methods to another level. Consider Malinowski's work with the Trobrianders. He pioneered ethnography which is a fundamental element of anthropology work to this day, but it was not until women were allowed to conduct their ethnographies that it was realized the human error that occurs in so much of the scientific world. Malinowski had a huge blind spot triggered by his bias toward his own gender, and an entire demographic was missing from all of his labors. It took the perspective of women to include women in the ethnographies of other cultures. For example, Annette B. Weiner's ethnography of the Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea, opened up another level of cultural understanding by making women's wealth her research focus. Not only did she expose the importance of grass skirts and yam exchanges it informed on the matriliney and the *kula* ring (Weiner 1988). I finished that workshop thinking that this training in unbiased information gathering, or reflexivity, is what was missing from anthropological methodology. Anthropology has the foundation for this, but modern takes need a bit of refinement and emphasis on training to realize reflexivity's full potential. In the hundred years since Malinowski's groundbreaking work, ethnography has come a long way. Still, a continual critique of anthropology is researcher biases, even for those that engage in more applied anthropology, such as activism, advocacy, intervention, and social justice (Lamphere 2018). My research aimed to determine if and how anthropology and conflict management could co-inform an application of methods.

During my research development phase, I experienced more cognitive dissonance than I had previously. I would dive into methodological approaches, sure that I had found

the thing that could explain what made them different. For example, narrative inquiry which “records the experiences of an individual or small group, revealing the lived experience or particular perspective of that individual, usually primarily through interview” (Padgett 2012). Sound familiar? That is because it is. Anthropologists call this ethnographic work (Bernard 2017). Many of the concepts I would explore would be the same, just called by a different name. This was not a shock as conflict management is interdisciplinary (Galtung 2010). Unsurprisingly, anthropological theory and methods have been used as a springboard for conflict management. It was more of a mental nuisance because I could not pinpoint the source of my intellectual discomfort. Conflict management methods are so similar to anthropological methods that if I had not chosen to research them, I might have chalked it up as disciplinary verbiage differences and gone on my merry way. After much reading, research, and practice, I had concluded that 1) anthropological quantitative analysis methods could be applied to better understand narrative inquiry used for conflict resolution, 2) conflict management methodological success is because conflict is culturally normalized, and 3) practicum is essential and built into conflict management studies.

There is no question that anthropology already has effective methods for gathering quantitative and qualitative data (Bernard 2017). So, the bridge must be built in the latter two conclusions. It is appropriate to share an insight from biologist Edward O. Wilson to help understand the struggle of humans researching other humans in hopes of understanding - “The real problem of humanity is the following: we have paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and God-like technology.” (Wilson 1929). Naturally occurring biases do not allow us to readily be aware of what is taken for granted in our

thought processes. Researchers must place themselves in a proper contextual space to take a less myopic approach to research. In order to do that, the researcher needs to be exposed to the idea and allowed to practice.

The first thing to understand is that conflict will happen (Kaner et al. 2007). The success of conflict management does not mean that conflict does not occur. There is no goal of conflict eradication. No carefully worded phrases or structural setups guarantee the absence of conflict between individuals. This diverges from anthropology where applied methods are underdeveloped. Even for mediators and facilitators, it is essential to know that there will be conflict in your role as a mediator or facilitator (Linabery 2021). Mediators and facilitators are not problem solvers for the involved parties. In fact, conflict management through mediation and facilitation are wonderful ways to get involved with out “taking sides.” Which, once again, is also what anthropology is set up to do. These are novel ways of using anthropology and ethnographic methods in subtle but effective ways. This means that the applied techniques used require the identification of personal and situational triggers and lots of practice managing them (Nichols 2020). Mediators and facilitators go into their work expecting differences in goals, values, and perspectives. This allows for the presupposition that evaluative understanding is a conflict in information gathering.

I have shared before that active listening, productive questions, and narrative inquiry are already a part of anthropological theory (Bernard 2017). Building on the framework that conflict is not inherently bad and that it will occur means that preparation for inevitable conflict is critical. Because conflict is normalized, applied methods of conflict management’s narrative inquiry such as active listening, asking productive

questions, framing and reframing, identifying personal listening filters, and picking up on non-verbal communication are not only theoretically taught, but time and space are provided to practice these skills (Nichols 2020). For example, all of the skills mentioned are introduced first with the curriculum, and then homework assignments include dividing into groups or pairs and actively listening to one another. The following week would also include asking productive questions and identifying non-verbal cues. Then the next week would add reflecting back and reframing. It starts with one skill, and each subsequent skill is added to reinforce the other and gets practiced multiple times. Furthermore, these skills come with reminders to self-identify during the activity so that there are opportunities to practice self-awareness. For example, when practicing active listening, students are instructed to identify what kind of listening they are doing. Are they trying to problem solve? Are they trying to evaluate what they are hearing? Are they just gathering information? Identifying the listening style helps the listener acknowledge how they approach the information they are hearing. Mediation and facilitation skills are a way to navigate inevitable inter and intrapersonal conflicts. This means that anthropologists could effectively conduct research and advocate without choosing sides.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Design

I used mixed methods to evaluate narrative inquiry and its effect on conflict and participant observations to help flesh out anthropological and conflict management techniques for gaining the insider's perspective. Students in Ashley Nichols' UF100: Foundations of Intellectual Life course at Boise State University were offered the opportunity to opt-in and consent to participate in data collection during discussion group activities already included in the course design. I observed student groups engaging in a narrative inquiry on current topics assigned by Nichols. Quantitative pre- and post-discussion surveys were incorporated on two different occasions. The first was week four discussion and week nine discussion. Pre- discussion surveys measured the participants' initial thoughts and attitudes on the given topic, followed by post-discussion surveys to capture whether any changes in perspective occurred after narrative inquiry, to test the influence of narrative inquiry for conflict management.

Specific Procedures for Data Collection

Focus groups were selected from Boise State University students enrolled in a UF 100: Foundations of Intellectual Life course titled "Difficult Conversations." In the first week of Fall 2022, enrolled students were informed of my research project and the option to participate in it as interviewees, discussants, and survey participants for five extra credit points in the course for each completed survey. The Institutional Review

Board approved the research at Boise State University (Approval #041-SB22-087). Students who did not want to participate in the survey could earn extra credit through a reflection assignment. I created pre-discussion and post-discussion surveys through the Boise State University-supported Qualtrics, and the surveys were assigned through the University learning management system, Canvas. All survey participation was anonymous. I did not collect usual demographics such as gender or ethnicity, because using such specific data could potentially lead to easy identification of participating students. However, the pre-discussion survey captured permission through initials to use direct survey quotes. This was an anonymity oversight, as initials could be compared to the course roster. This is unlikely as no one outside Dr. Volsche and I can access the data results minimizing participant risk. All participants confirmed that they were at least 18 years of age.

During the week four meetings, time was given to complete the surveys before and after the discussions. This was repeated in week nine. Data was exported from Qualtrics into M.S. Excel. In Excel, I cleaned and coded the data for export into Rstudio 4.1.2. I intended to run paired *t*-tests to measure the Likert-scaled questions and grounded theory for analysis of observations and open-ended questions. Additionally, observations were used to analyze the facilitator participation element and combined with autoethnographic reflection from my own conflict management training (Bernard 2017).

Pre-Discussion Survey

I first asked an open-ended question about the participants' knowledge of the topic. Then I asked two five-point Likert-scale questions designed to assess the participant's confidence in that knowledge and if they felt heard in their opinion. Those

questions included statements such as "How confident do you feel about your knowledge on the topic" or "Do you feel understood in your opinion on the topic." Options ranged from "1 = not at all" to "5 = very." Finally, I ended the survey with an open-ended question about their opinion on the values, beliefs, and knowledge of individuals on the opposing side. The pre-discussion survey finished with a code for the participant to input into their post-discussion survey so that I could accurately match the pre- and post-discussion surveys to the correct participant for data analysis.

Post-Discussion Survey

The post-discussion survey contained the same questions as the pre-discussion survey, with two exceptions. First, I added another question to the five-point Likert-scale questions designed to assess whether the participants felt they had gained any new knowledge on the subject after the discussion. Second, I did not ask the open-ended question about the participant's knowledge of the subject.

Participant Observations

In weeks nine and twelve of the semester, I attended each of the four discussion group sections of the course and observed the students while they participated in the difficult conversations. During those weeks, the topic was synchronized throughout each of the four discussion groups and selected from a list developed in the third week by the students. Week nine was the topic of guns, and week twelve was abortion. The four participating groups were randomly divided into groups of three to five. These discussions were conducted via Zoom, and I was given host status that allowed me to move between each of the breakout rooms and observe without having to go where the discussion group leader went or to stay in only one room. I observed each group at least

twice within the allotted 50-minute discussion time. I noted how many students there were in each group, observable genders, whether or not discussion was happening, if the discussion leader was present and/or participating, and if reflexivity was being practiced.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

A total of 79 people responded to the pre-discussion survey and 36 to the post-discussion survey. As I was beginning to clean the data, it was apparent that a data collection error had occurred. None of the random codes used for identifying pre- and post-discussion surveys matched. A closer look into the problem revealed a coding error. Instead of a one-time random code that participants would copy into their post-discussion survey, the random code was generated every time the results were viewed. This led me to discard the quantitative analysis and focus on the qualitative analysis. Hence, I did not include any pre-discussion surveys in my analysis. I cleaned the remaining data for incomplete surveys, automated responses, and incorrect matching codes. A total of 35 post-discussion responses remained.

Respondents shared a self-evaluation of new knowledge gained on the topic, confidence about the topic, and to what degree they felt understood as a result of the discussion. These questions included: 1) Have you learned anything new about the topic (2.9% - not at all, 14% - a little, 11% - neutral, 43% - somewhat, 31% - very much); 2) How confident do you feel about your knowledge on the topic (0% - not at all, 2.9% - a little, 23% - neutral, 57% - somewhat, 17% - very); and 3) Do you feel understood in your opinion on the topic (2.9% - not at all, 6% - a little, 14% - neutral, 23% - somewhat, 51% - very).

Table 1. Self-evaluation of knowledge

	Not at all	A little	Neutral	Somewhat	Very much
Have you learned anything new about the topic?	2.9%	14%	11%	43%	31%
How confident do you feel about your knowledge on the topic?	0%	2.9%	23%	57%	17%
Do you feel understood in your opinion on the topic?	2.9%	6%	14%	23%	51%

Respondents shared a self-evaluation of their opinion on the values, beliefs, and knowledge of individuals on the opposing side after the discussion had occurred. I collapsed their responses into categories reflecting conflict management techniques such as validation, curiosity, having a difficult conversation, and understanding. I looked for keywords like understanding, valued, agreement, disagreement, etc., and then examined them contextually. For example, respondents who stated things like, “It was good to see the other side of the conversation since I disagreed with a lot of opinions. People were very respectful and it made me respect their opinions despite not agreeing” or, “I respected them for their beliefs and in this case they respected me for mine so it was valuable” I placed in the "I felt heard/I valued hearing others" category. The next category was "I understood the other side." Participants stated, “Even though we had a disagreement we were able to comprehend our different beliefs.” The third category was

“I value being curious or listening to others.” Respondents said things like, “I still feel like even though I may disagree it is still important to learn or understand other people's point of view.” The final category was for participants that either used the last question as a platform to express their own opinion, expressed total agreement with their cohorts, or did not address the question. For example, “I believe that it is important for everyone to learn about,” “They believe that teachers should have guns, I disagree,” and “I feel that gun laws should be more carefully mandated. Teachers should not be armed, this is because I personally would not be comfortable sending my student to school when I know their teacher has possession of a gun (just for the sake of protection).” I categorized this as “Other/did not really answer the question.” 34% fell into the last category. 2.6% understood the other side's point of view. 2% felt heard/valued hearing others, while an additional 2% valued being curious or listening to others.

I next placed the open-ended question responses into thematic categories like “Culture,” “Talking disagreement,” “Understanding,” “Respect,” “Curiosity,” and “Resistance to process” to get an understanding of general attitudes toward the key elements of the narrative inquiry process. 34% expressed the importance of cultural influences shaping beliefs and values. 23% expressed the need for curiosity when discussing difficult topics and trying to understand those of differing opinions. 2% acknowledged disagreements during the discussion. 11% stated an understanding for those of differing opinions. 23% noted that during and after the discussions, they felt respected and respected others' opinions. Finally, 40% responded that they were either in a like-minded group, so discussion did not take place, or that they heard the other side but did not understand how the other side could believe how they believe. I considered this

last to be resistant to the process either because they all agreed and did not continue the conversation while considering the opposite side as instructed, or they disagreed and did not engage with curiosity as instructed.

Table 2. Thematic analysis of the open-ended question

Theme	Percentage
Culture	34%
Talking disagreement	2%
Respect	23%
Curiosity	23%
Resistance to process	40%

Participant observations occurred over four different discussion groups on two separate days. Each discussion group had 20-21 participants, plus a discussion group leader and me. Each was further divided into groups of about four students for the actual discussion. All sessions occurred over Zoom. The entire class would meet briefly at the beginning of class and go over the instructions for the discussion (see image below), and they briefly touched on the prep work assignment for this discussion topic. Then the discussion group leader divided everyone into breakout rooms. They were given 50 minutes for the discussion, and then the entire class came together again for a wrap-up at the end of each discussion. Apart from the week nine first session, I was able to observe each group at least twice.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL boisestatecarvas.instructure.com/courses/13913/assignments/436800?module_item_id=1404642. The page title is "Community Conversation Docu...". The browser tabs include "Community Conversation Docu...", "Music and Podcasts, Free an...", and "Week 7 Discussion...". The navigation menu on the left includes: Home, Announcements, Syllabus, Course Materials, Modules, Flipgrid, Grades, People, Zoom, Attendance, Discussions, Rubrics, Collaborations, Assignments, Quizzes, Files, Pages, and Outcomes. The main content area is titled "This weeks topic is Gun Control. For this weeks topic, use the following list to move through this conversation." and contains the following instructions:

1. Gun control - Laws
2. Gun control - Restrictions
3. School shootings - Armed Teachers

To start your conversation:

- 1) Share your thoughts on the topic you are discussing. Allow everyone to share their thoughts before discussing details of any one persons ideas.
 - First speaker - Person with the first name that is closest to the start of the alphabet
 - Second speaker - Next person in the alphabet
 - Third speaker - Next person in the alphabet
 - Fourth speakers - Next person in the alphabet
- 2) Reflect any similarities you heard across the ideas shared OR Ask questions about the ideas people shared/pose the questions you prepared in the prep document.

What do you do if no one is talking?

- Raise your hand for help
- Ask one of your questions from your prep document
- Bring up something you have seen around this topic that you either really agree with OR disagree with

What do you do if you all agree?

- Send each other a virtual high five!
- Consider other perspectives that do not exist inside your group. Who might disagree with you? What do they think/believe? Why might they think or believe that?
- Reflect your similarities AND discuss if you all agree, what makes this conversation so hard for society?

Directions:

1. Sign in to your Boise State Google Docs account, press "File" and then "Make a copy". This will make a copy of the document under your account that you can then use to take your notes.

Figure 1. Instructions for group discussions

First Observation Week Nine: Gun Control

I started the first observation by logging into Zoom. The discussion group leader was unfamiliar with how to give me the ability to roam between the breakout rooms, so for the first session, I went with her. Because I was with the discussion group leader, there was one group that I was not able to join. This meant that I got to observe the other four groups for a longer amount of time. There were two groups during this session that had all female participants, and it was interesting to note that one of the groups was not talking. The discussion group leader facilitated the conversation by asking for individual experiences with the topic, and the participants started to engage. They chose to discuss the registration process and restriction differences between states. The other all-female group talked nonstop about personal experiences with guns, such as hunting. They also began to talk about the fear attached to those on both sides of the topic. The other two

groups I observed had continual conversation flow. One group had differing opinions about restrictions, and the discussion group leader offered clarifying questions to help move the conversation along. The other group also had some differing opinions, and there were four males to one female. Still, they did a great job of facilitating the discussion themselves through productive questions and active listening, and the discussion group leader did not need to actively facilitate. Many of those on the anti-gun control side shared a lot of facts from the prep work assignment. During the wrap-up portion, I noted that multiple students from groups with more differences stated the importance of listening is vital to have these kinds of conversations. Also, no matter what position participants took, it was brought up that experiences, exposure, and culture all help form beliefs. Some admitted to being apprehensive even to attend class and have a conversation about gun control, but it surprised them how well it went. A few brought up the prep assignment that helped them research certain aspects about the topic.

The second session was set up the same, but the discussion group leader figured out how to add me as a host so I could move between breakout rooms myself. This had some advantages and disadvantages. First, I was able to get to all groups, some even multiple times. Second, I was able to stay with individual groups as long as I felt appropriate. The downside was I did not get to observe as many facilitator moments. I did still come across a few, but I did not get to document the facilitator role as much as I would have liked in hindsight. Many more females than males attended this session, so all of the groups had a female ratio bias. I noted that all groups had good continual conversation flow, with only a few observed interjections from the discussion group leader to encourage talking at the beginning. There were differing opinions, but I noted

that those groups did a great job facilitating themselves and asked great clarifying questions. It was interesting that all the groups found common ground within the argument and focused on mental illness. The wrap-up went much like the first session. Concern coming into this conversation and relief at how well it went—an acknowledgment of personal influences on opinions.

The third session again contained more females than males except for one group with two males and one female. I was able to check in with this group twice, and neither time was anyone talking. In fact, the female left the session entirely in the middle of my first observation and had not returned when I circled for my second round. I do not know if there was a connectivity issue or another reason. I was able to observe the discussion group leader in the role of facilitator once during this session with another group. When I joined, there was a lot of discussion on the importance of having difficult conversations. They mentioned that they were not in agreement (two females and one male). The discussion group leader was present and listening as students worked at getting each other's point of view and only interrupted to ask clarifying questions directed towards the whole group.

The last session was much like the others. A couple of groups were in complete agreement, so the conversation was turned toward other topics. The two groups that had disagreements did an excellent job facilitating themselves with active listening, clarifying questions, and ensuring each member got a turn to speak. One group (three females) was not talking, and the second time I joined them, the discussion group leader was using facilitator methods to encourage discussion. She would ask reflective questions about personal experiences, concerns, or the other side's concerns. The conversation flowed

when she facilitated like this. Something I found interesting for all the sessions was that each group focused on just one or two subtopics within the larger topic. It could be that this was a way for the students to find common ground within the difficult subject, not enough time to cover all aspects, or maybe it was evident of what was important for them. For some, it was restrictions, some mental illness, others public safety, etc. Another interesting thing I noted was that each of the groups finished their discussions by swapping from the topic of guns to personal stuff like plans for the weekend, home life, etc.

Second Observation Week Nine: Abortion

The second week of observations was set up precisely as the first time, but it went differently. I am identifying the topic of abortion as the attributing factor for those differences because many of the males in all the groups shared not feeling like they could have an opinion on abortions. I noted that regardless of the male-to-female ratio, the males that expressed this usually had at least one seemingly attractive girl in the group. This could also have been because many students generally want to engage as little as possible, multitask while on Zoom, etc., and this was an acceptable way to get out of engaging in the discussion. I observed the discussion group leaders actively facilitating more to get conversations going than in the previous observations. I also noted that those groups engaging in the conversation usually had differing opinions, so it was a great way to observe facilitation skills.

In two particular groups, there were dominating individuals. A female and a male from each group, to be precise, dominated the conversation, and the others seemed to be satisfied with letting them. The discussion group leaders had to ask open-ended and

reflective questions to the other members of the groups to get nondominant students to participate. I noticed that the groups that were in agreement used a lot of language like, "I don't understand why they think like that," or "Don't they get it?" After a few minutes of doing this back and forth, the conversation was changed, and then shortly after that, it was over. One of these "in agreement" groups even invited their roommates onto the Zoom call. The roommates agreed with everyone, naturally, and then the topic changed. Overall, this week offered the most instances of individuals dominating a conversation than I had previously witnessed. This may have something to do with the topic. When groups engaged in a discussion, it was interesting to note that they worked hard to get everyone's experiences and opinions. They asked clarifying questions. The discussion group leaders also jumped in on these conversations and would ask about the conversation process. Asking them questions like, "Have you heard from everyone in the group?" or "What seems to be the highlight of your conversation?" I noticed this seemed to help groups return to the goal of having the conversation. Normalize conflict and remember the tools they had been given to have the difficult conversation. Even in my own conflict management training, it is essential to remember that the goal is not to solve anything but to have the conversation with curiosity so that we can better understand each other.

Once again, during the wrap-up at the end of each session students mentioned apprehension before the conversation and relief at how well it went. I also noted that this topic, no matter what kind of conversation was happening, circled around to religion. Many students brought it up in a negative light as if religion is the real problem and not abortion, and others acknowledged that many of their opinions come from a religious or

lack of religious upbringing. Religion came up in every group in every session. What stood out to me is that no one specifically steered the conversation toward trying to understand the religious or lack of religious influence. They just acknowledged that it contributes to your opinions on abortions. Baby steps, I guess. This is a beginning class into having difficult conversations, after all. I was also interested to see how many, when confronted with disagreements, went back to the facilitator tools being taught in the class or utilized the discussion group leader as a facilitator. So, is the problem the conflict of difficult conversations or not feeling like we have the tools to engage in difficult conversations?

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The broad perspective of my results shows that anthropology and conflict management are highly similar and that an integration of the two is not only possible but necessary for future success in both fields. For conflict management, 34% of respondents reported the importance of cultural understanding on their experience. A particular statement made by one participant demonstrates this: "I think that hearing other people opinions on topics is a very important thing to do. I find it interesting to hear how different people think, and how our upbringings in life can have such a big impact on how someone views a topic." This is anthropology and shows how vital the anthropological viewpoint is to conflict management as a discipline. Another statement was, "I believe that their viewpoints are much more complex than what I previously thought, and that they may also be coming into a conversation with the same intention as me. People's perspectives are shaped by their backgrounds and it doesn't make their perspective invalid." Reframing the definition of conflict within anthropology would lead to a different mindset going into research that would benefit gaining the other's point of view. A statement from a survey participant demonstrates this nicely, "While I had some differing opinions, beliefs, and values than people on the other side of the topic, I still respected their opinions and asked them questions to gain clarification." Participants were given reflective listening and question-asking skills to help prepare for eventual conflict, and this resulted in students learning to meet others where they are with respect. For anthropology, asking the right clarifying questions and being trained in reflective listening/question asking gets the other's perspective and helps filter out researcher biases.

These results and my participant observations gave me a lot to chew on, so I will address them in relation to my two premises one at a time. Premise one is that anthropology would benefit from a different working definition of conflict. This definition would be pulled from conflict management theory, paired with the theory of evolution through natural selection, and used to inform understanding of the importance of conflict in human behaviors. After my participant observations, I noted that all four of the discussion groups had students share a wrap-up, and a common theme was student apprehension going into discussions on these topics. They mentioned being worried that they would not get to share their thoughts and opinions or that arguments would ensue. Looking at the results, we can see that the conversation did not result in every participant coming to an agreement. Yet the topics, which could be classified as high conflict, allowed participants to learn and practice interpersonal skills to navigate future conflicts. Participants were transformed through this experience. Some expressed learning about the individuals on the other side of the topic, and even those who reported coming from similar backgrounds still acknowledged the importance of having the conversation respectfully. Though they had expressed fear going into the conversations, they also emphasized their surprise at how well everyone engaged respectfully with each other. They mentioned disagreements, but even through the disagreements, there was respect for the experiences and opinions of each other.

Another observation to consider was during the discussions. When heated discussions occurred, I was impressed that so many would say things like, "I understand that you have more experience with this than I do," or "I understand your concerns." They would preface their statements with things like "In my experience" or "From my

perspective." If conflict was inherently bad or the embodiment of violence, then what would we call the opportunity for these students to disagree and then work through it? Conflict is constructive because it acts as a binding element through which conflicting groups revitalize cultural norms and values (Eltringham 2021). As mentioned earlier, conflict informs culture and culture informs conflict is a transformative process.

Furthermore, to demonstrate the purely catalytic nature of conflict, those that found themselves in like-minded groups were presented with the same conflict and also cooperated to complete the discussion. This is reflected in another statement, "In our conversation we all had very similar ideals and wants for the laws of guns. However, when the conversation first started we each didn't have an solid side that we stood on. As we conversed we each slowly started to form our own opinions. My opinions for the opposite side would be that you can't trust all people to be responsible enough to carry such a deadly weapon. While I don't think the removal of firearm would be beneficial, I believe that more restrictions and a longer grace period would be for the greater good."

The second observation is that applied anthropology needs the theoretical paradigm shift to implement training in applied methods beginning at the undergraduate level. Just teaching theory without training is like giving someone a tool but not teaching them how to use it. For example, anthropology courses teach the dangers of ethnocentrism and then move on to the next topic. Unfortunately, many only get training if they continue to graduate-level work. This leads to paradoxes within the discipline, such as researcher ethnocentric advocacy and cultural understanding without cultural fluency. This is an opportunity to sharpen tools to cut through researcher bias and implement reflexivity. Active listening, clarifying questions, and reframing are all tools

used by anthropologists and mediators, but the emphasis on reflective listening and question-asking utilized is the key. Both disciplines want to get the insider's point of view, but personal bias in interpretation or application is a significant critique of modern anthropology, and it takes a lot of practice and specific training to remove these from our work. My observations demonstrate the importance of training when trying to flesh out nuances of an individual's point of view. Maybe it is worth considering that conflict management methods are built on the premise that conflict will happen, and that conflict is natural, so the methods revolve around uncovering the party's experience.

Anthropology has historically emphasized the similarities and differences between groups from a theoretical launching point. This is important and conflict management would not be where it is today without these theories. The problem with confining anthropology and conflict to these theories is that it has boxed in applied methods. There is potential for anthropologists to work as mediators and facilitators if applied methods could be bulked up through conflict management.

During my observations, the discussion group leader acted in a facilitator capacity and would move in and out of different conversations interjecting comments as needed. For example, they would ask groups that were in consensus, "what might be the concerns for those of a differing opinion?" or "what might be something that is not being considered?" If there were disagreements, then they would ask group members to "unpack" opinions or "walk me through your thought process." There is a strong emphasis on remaining curious without judgment, and the tools taught include statements like those mentioned previously.

Furthermore, this training will benefit anthropologists when they encounter conflict in their respective fields. Ethnographers, archaeologists, human behavioral ecologists, forensic specialists, etc., will experience conflict while doing their work. As conflict management theory teaches, conflict is a sign that you are alive and a part of the world. So, how amazing is the thought that anthropologists would be able to have the tools to handle inevitable conflict and transform relationships through positive practices? Those who study the complexity of humanity also implement tools designed to navigate human experience. Because conflict management was born from an interdisciplinary need to navigate humanity, this is a fantastic tribute to the power of anthropology as a discipline. For example, suppose an archaeologist needs to excavate. These excavations do not exist apart from those living near the area. Conflict management training can help them facilitate a conversation where everyone is heard. If an ethnographer is having trouble getting individuals to participate actively, conflict management training can help them converse to validate while recognizing differing values and goals.

As with anything involving humans, my research has limitations. The first is the obvious data collection error. This error resulted in my inability to quantitatively measure differences in perceptions from before and after the difficult conversations. So, there is no measurable evidence for the potential for narrative inquiry to directly affect change. Though we can still see through observations that participants went in dreading the hard conversations and were pleasantly surprised by how well it actually went. Another thing to consider would be that this course was set up on an online platform. People may have felt "safer" to have those conversations in such an environment. Conversing through a

medium such as Zoom can give individuals an anonymity that being in person does not. In other words, Individuals will say and do things online that they would not in person.

Overall, my results show that mediation skills work, and these applied methods are successful because 1) the theory underpinning these skills does not label conflict as simply violence, and 2) there is training built into the courses at all levels. I observed that though this class took place online, students are having success learning these skills. Having a facilitator coach them during the process helped normalize conflict and remind them of the tools to navigate the conflict. The groups were assigned randomly, and it was interesting to note that age, gender, academic status, and culture did not prohibit anyone from learning these skills. For example, during the discussion on abortion, a few of the males in different groups expressed an understanding that the topic was more prevalent to the females in the group, but they still shared that opinion. One male even prefaced his comment that abortion *primarily* affects women, but that caution should be used when assuming that it *only* affects women. This is such a great insight into how important it is to be able to gain skills to have these conversations. And these are the kinds of conversations anthropologists have while doing research. They may not call it having difficult conversations, but they are discussing, frequently, taboo or hard topics and observing people during personal experiences. It could be argued that the inherent conflict that comes with differences in age, gender, status, etc., is where anthropology resides. Conflict is how anthropology can even exist.

So, the big questions are: Can we bring conflict management training into anthropology? How? What skills can be used? What are the strengths and weaknesses, and how can conflict management and anthropology inform each other? I propose that

conflict management training can be brought into anthropology in a relatively smooth transition. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is worth considering having anthropology majors include a conflict management course requirement. Some schools call it leadership training, or it is built into a communication course. An anthropological methods course could be created to include a conflict management practicum. This practicum would include active listening between classmates, personal conflict management skills like I-statements, and conflict reflecting. In fact, any anthropology course could be reworked to include theoretical and applied methods supported by conflict management style training. I know there are limitations sections in research papers, but future work could include conflict sections and how they were handled. An anthropology course on conflict could be a graduation requirement. Human behavior changes at glacial speeds, so what is most important is that some small action is taken and incrementally developed. Action is key. To quote English writer Rose Macaulay, “It’s a common delusion that you can make things better by talking about them.”

Another side to consider would be how anthropology could benefit conflict management. I have mentioned the use of quantitative methods, but I also want to touch on qualitative methods like those that I used for my research. I take for granted the fact that I went into conflict management with some years of anthropological training already under my belt, so my ease with concepts like cultural differences may not have been what my classmates experienced. I know that Boise State’s conflict management program includes a culture and conflict course where the importance of cross-cultural understanding is taught, but I do not know if that is included in the majority of mediator/facilitator training. As stated in my introduction, I believe no discipline exists

that would not benefit from some anthropological training, and conflict management is no different. I suggest that any and all conflict management training would do well to include a cultural anthropology class as part of licensing or certifying requirements. As my participant observations demonstrate, understanding that cultural differences exist helps individuals have difficult conversations without dehumanizing those that do not think like we think or see things how we see things.

Finally, my observations demonstrate that individuals want to learn how to have these conversations. I would even suggest that within this topic there is future ethnographic work for anthropologists. I will mention that it is impressive that so many students were able to have these conversations. That alone is a testament that individuals will have these conversations, and civilly, if given the tools and opportunity. Future work would benefit from observing how individuals have difficult conversations cross-culturally and how cultures train their young to engage in difficult conversations. For anthropologists, this would give a plethora of opportunities to study conflict with the suggested new definition in mind. For conflict management, it would give scientific insights into the narrative inquiry process.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In the introduction, I suggested reworking the anthropological definition of conflict and fine-tuning the applied ethnographic methods of anthropology by implementing conflict management theories and methods that could transform anthropology. I shared that anthropology is a discipline that contributes significantly to the academic world and other fields through the theoretical and applied methodology. I unpacked the similarities and differences between anthropology and conflict resolution and identified two significant pieces missing from the anthropological puzzle. These pieces are not foreign to anthropology but have been lost in the generational shuffle. I also suggest that applying quantitative anthropological analyses is exceptionally appropriate for measuring conflict management techniques like narrative inquiry. Though a data collection error prevented me from quantifying this, it is something that could be easily replicated in other studies. My participant observations yielded significant insight into the mediator and facilitator applied process. I propose that my results demonstrate how anthropology and conflict management fit together, along with future directions for integrating conflict management theory and methods into anthropology. Overall, my results show that mediation skills work, and these applied methods are successful because 1) the theory underpinning these skills does not label conflict as simply violence, and 2) there is training built into the courses at all levels.

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