Theories of Intergroup Conflict
A Report of Lay Attributions

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Lay theory has contributed fundamentally to understanding various phenomena; however, it has not yet been applied to intergroup conflict. Using a series of increasingly structured tasks, the authors allowed college student respondents to report their ideas regarding the varieties of intergroup conflict that exist in their world and the causes of these types of clashes. A general theory of the causes underlying all forms of intergroup conflict emerged, as well as several distinct group-specific theories.

Keywords: intergroup conflict; lay beliefs

In this article, we explore intergroup conflict through the unique lens of lay attributions. Although there are many reasons to study lay attributions, including the establishment of a foundation on which to develop more complete social scientific theories (see Furnham, 1988), the most compelling reason is perhaps that lay beliefs influence people’s actions. For example, people have misused equipment and broken windows because of their (mis)conceptions regarding the workings of a calculator and the physics of motion (McCloskey, 1983; Norman, 1983). In the case of conflict, what people believe about the etiology of a dispute will certainly influence their comportment and both their desire and their strategies for resolution; as Hong, Levy, and Chiu (2001, p. 102) state, “Lay theories play a pivotal role in guiding group perceptions and actions.” Thus, if people commonly believe that miscommunication is responsible for a given conflict, they will be more likely to monitor what they say and how they say it.

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than if they believe the dispute is innate or has developed for other reasons, such as economic conditions.

To this point, lay attributions have contributed widely to our understanding of various social and nonsocial phenomena, including relational satisfaction (Cole & Bradac, 1996), persuasion (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997), loneliness (Lunt, 1991), crime (Campbell & Muncer, 1990), thermostats (Kempton, 1986), heart attacks (Eiser, O’Looney, & Harding, 1987), social judgments (see Social Cognition, Vol. 16, No. 1 [1998]), and group perception (see Personality and Social Psychology Review, Vol. 5, No. 2 [2001]). However, one area where they have not yet been charted is intergroup conflict. It is our expectation that examining “everyday” ways of understanding intergroup conflict will offer fresh insight into how, when, and why people in groups compete with each other.

Because such an undertaking is novel, there is little basis for predicting what attributions will emerge here except to note that the comparability between lay theories and scientific theories tends to increase when the phenomena to be explained are more social and psychological in nature (cf. Kempton, 1986; Sternberg, Conway, Ketron, & Bernstein, 1981). Thus, because we expect lay attributions of intergroup conflict to be generally similar to formal theories, it is instructive to review extant conflict theories.

With some integrative exceptions (e.g., Enemy System Theory; see Montville, 1990), most formal theories of intergroup conflict can be classified as either “macro” or “micro” in orientation. So-called macro theories of conflict focus on factors manifest in the conscious, rational interaction between groups (e.g., a Realpolitik study), whereas micro theories are behaviorist in nature—focusing instead on the often unconscious and irrational motivation of individuals (e.g., a frustration-aggression analysis). Among macro theories, the most often cited explanation for intergroup conflict is known simply as conflict theory. Although there are many specific variations of conflict theory, such as realistic group conflict theory (see Jackson, 1993; Sherif, 1966) or social dominance theory (see Sidanius, 1993), they all view intergroup conflict as instrumental in nature (i.e., caused mainly by an opposition of goals or interests relating to the distribution of resources) and view social order as maintained by manipulation and control on the part of dominant groups.

A second type of macro theory rests on assumptions nearly opposite to those contained within conflict theory. Whereas conflict theory holds that group struggles are instrumental in nature, functionalist theory holds that conflict behavior is ultimately expressive. Structural-functionalism focuses on consensus within the social order; the existence of any society depends on cooperation. However, there are times when societies lack consensus; thus, conflict is seen as the attempt among groups to manage their disagreement over basic values and beliefs (see Hall, 1995; Johnson, 1966).

As both conflict and functionalist theory represent the predominant explanations developed by using a macro approach to intergroup conflict, social identity theory represents the predominant explanation using a micro approach (see Brewer & Brown, 1998). According to this theory, individuals define themselves largely in terms of their group membership and seek a positive social identity. To achieve and maintain this positive social identity, group members must make favorable comparisons with out-
groups. As a result, antagonistic relations often arise, leading to intergroup conflict. In contrast to comparable macro theories, a social identity approach emphasizes that the irrational and unconscious process of identification, not the rational competition over resources or values per se, leads to discrimination and conflict.

Despite the development of explanations for intergroup conflict, the literature still lacks explanations grounded in lay experience. Because a lay-theory approach can contribute significantly to our understanding of conflict, we sought to identify both the groups and the reasons that people perceive to be involved in conflict.

**Study 1: Eliciting Group Types and Conflict Reasons**

When investigating lay attributions for intergroup conflict, the first information that needs to be elicited regards both the groups engaged in and the reasons for conflict. The articulation of lay theory must start with the emic identification of categories not their etic imposition; thus, we began this investigation by addressing the following questions: What types of conflict-engaging groups do participants perceive? and What reasons do participants identify as potential causes of intergroup conflict?

**Method**

*Participants.* Ninety-nine lower division undergraduate students (42 men and 57 women, mean age = 22.7) volunteered to participate in the study. The sample included 69 Anglos, 13 Hispanics, 4 African Americans, 11 Asian Americans, 2 Other, and 1 who declined to state. They were enrolled in an introductory communication course at a large, Western university and received extra credit in exchange for their participation.

*Procedure.* Participants completed an open-ended survey, which consisted of two pages on which they were instructed to write down “as many different types of intergroup conflict” as they could think of, as well as list “as many possible causes for these conflicts” that they could imagine. Participants spent approximately 15 minutes completing the survey.

*Results.*

In response to our request to list different types of intergroup conflict, participants collectively produced 187 identifiable types. Of course, not all the types were distinct, nor were they described at comparable levels of abstraction necessary for subsequent study procedures; thus, a number of category-reduction practices were employed here. First, when it was obvious that a group type was listed at multiple levels of abstraction (e.g., “political conflict,” “Democrat vs. Republican,” “conservative vs. liberal”), we eliminated only the most abstract listing (e.g., “political conflict”). In rare cases where participants listed a type of intergroup conflict only at a high level of abstraction (e.g., “school conflict”), we created a corresponding and comparably con-
crete listing to use (e.g., “UCLA students vs. USC students”). Second, we excluded listings that were not clearly intergroup in nature (e.g., “friend” conflict). Third, we excluded redundancies (e.g., “Jews vs. Nazis” was retained, whereas “Jews vs. Germans” was omitted). Last, idiosyncratic group types listed by only one participant (e.g., “surfers vs. swimmers”) were excluded. By employing these procedures, we reduced our original listing of 187 identifiable group types to a list of 53 inductively derived group types suitable for subsequent analysis (for the complete listing, consult Appendix A, Figure A1).

Participants collectively produced 250 reasons for intergroup conflict. As with intergroup-conflict types, it was also necessary to employ several category-reduction practices. First, reasons were excluded if they clearly overlapped with other, more frequently listed reasons (e.g., “rivalry” was excluded; “competition” was included). Second, reasons that we judged as seemingly implausible causes of intergroup conflict were eliminated (e.g., “love”). Third, because the list needed to include fewer than 100 items so that participants in Study 2 could complete a sorting task, reasons offered by a one participant alone were dropped at our discretion (i.e., some infrequently listed items were nevertheless maintained here because they appeared particularly compelling). The result was a list of 87 inductively derived reasons purporting to explain why groups engage in conflict (Appendix A, Figure A2).

Discussion

As indicated by the length and variety of the lists, respondents clearly articulated many ideas regarding both the groups involved in and the causes of conflict. However, because this project aimed ultimately at identifying lay attributions of intergroup conflict—not just lists of groups and reasons—the number of identified group types and reasons for conflict still remained unmanageably large. For example, study participants would have to evaluate 4,611 group-reason pairings using the present lists. Thus, we reduced the generated lay-typology data based on the judgments of a second sample of respondents.

Study 2: Reducing the Typologies

We attempted to reduce the two typologies in a manner that preserved much of the meaning and variety produced by the open-ended listings. In this second study, we addressed the following question: What perceived similarities exist within the listings of group types and reasons to ground the construction of a parsimonious yet valid lay typology of intergroup conflict?

Method

Participants. One hundred forty-nine lower division undergraduate students (64 men and 85 women, mean age = 23.8) volunteered to participate. The sample included...
Anglos, 26 Hispanics, 13 African Americans, 14 Asian Americans, and 4 Other. They were enrolled in an introductory communication course at a large, Western university and received extra credit in exchange for their participation.

**Procedure.** Each participant was given a set of randomly ordered index cards and instructed to arrange them into different piles based on their similarity. Participants were told that they could make as many different piles as they liked, as long as all the cards placed in each pile were similar to one another.

Fifty of the participants were given 53 index cards, each with the name of one inductively derived type of intergroup conflict; they were then instructed to sort the cards into different piles based on how similar the types of intergroup conflict were. Ninety-nine of the participants were given 30 index cards, each with the name of one inductively derived reason for conflict, randomly selected from the list of 87; they were then instructed to sort the cards into different piles based on how similar they thought the reasons were to one another. This procedure of using only a subset rather than the entire set of reasons was implemented because a pretest showed that it was both difficult and tedious to classify all 87 reasons in this manner.

After participants completed the sorting task, the degree of similarity between each possible pair of group types and reasons was calculated by creating ratios reflecting the number of times that each pair had been placed in the same pile together over the number of all possible times that they could have been placed in the same pile. These ratios, one representing the perceived similarity among the group types, the other representing the perceived similarity among the reasons, were then placed into two separate matrices and submitted to hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward’s method, a technique designed to optimize the minimum variance within clusters (Ward, 1963).

**Results**

Based on both the relative increase in homogeneity and the interpretability of the resulting clusters (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995), an 8-cluster solution was deemed most appropriate for the group-type data and a 14-cluster solution for the reason data (see Appendix A, Figures A1 & A2). These results were validated internally through the calculation of cophenetic correlation coefficients: .79 and .72, respectively. These values confirm that the dendrograms reasonably represent the pattern of similarities or dissimilarities among the objects (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984).

A name and a descriptive definition were then developed for each cluster (see Appendixes B & C), and the external validity of these reduced typologies (i.e., general types) was assessed through a classification task. A sample of 47 participants (18 men and 29 women, mean age = 22.1) drawn from the population described above was asked (in exchange for extra credit) to sort random samples of specific intergroup conflicts and reasons according to the general type of conflict and the reason they perceived it to represent (e.g., the specific reason “because of a lack of education” is best represented by which general type of reason? See Appendix C). Participants routinely succeeded in identifying the general types of conflicts and reasons that the specific
examples were intended to evoke (72% accuracy for group type; 78% accuracy for reason type); thus, we concluded that the developed typologies were representative of the emic listings and of a more general classification schema employed among this population of undergraduate students.

Discussion

Based on the judged similarities among specific, inductively derived intergroup conflicts and reasons, a parsimonious yet representative lay typology of intergroup conflict was developed. Although informative by itself, this typology was established only as necessary preparation for the main study: the identification of lay attributions for intergroup conflict as manifest in the judged associations among group types and reasons.

Study 3: Assessing the Perceived Causality Between Group Types and Conflict Reasons

Following from the first two studies, the main study asked the following question: To what extent do participants use the 14 general reasons to explain each of the eight different types of intergroup conflict?

Method

Participants. Two hundred twelve lower division undergraduate students (72 men and 140 women, mean age = 23.1 years) volunteered to participate. The sample included 140 Anglos, 29 Hispanics, 15 African Americans, 19 Asian Americans, 7 Other, and 2 who declined to state. They were enrolled in an introductory communication course at a large, Western university and received extra credit in exchange for their participation.

Procedure. Participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 0 to 4, the extent to which they believed each of the 14 general reasons was responsible for conflict occurring among each of the eight types of groups: 0 indicated that the reason was not at all responsible for conflict, 1 indicated that the reason was minimally responsible, 2 indicated that the reason was moderately or somewhat responsible, 3 indicated that the reason was substantially responsible, and 4 indicated that the reason was mainly or mostly responsible for conflict.

Results

Reasons for generalized intergroup conflict. Although participants rated each type of intergroup conflict separately, we begin here by presenting the mean ratings of the extent to which each of the 14 reasons was judged to contribute to conflict across all
eight group types (see Figure 1). A within-subjects ANOVA revealed significant differences among these ratings, $F(13, 199) = 46.45, p < .001, \eta^2 = .75$. As depicted, participants estimated that “stubborn superiority” was the single greatest cause of conflict, rated on average as substantially responsible for all types of group disputes. The average rating of stubborn superiority was not only highest but also significantly greater than the average rating for all other reasons (Tukey HSD test, $p < .05$).

The next 10 reasons listed in Figure 1 (in rank order: “deep differences,” “emotional reaction,” “need for independence,” “communication problems,” “greedy domination,” “prejudice,” “narrow-minded ignorance,” “countering injustice,” “economic factors,” and “fear”) were judged between substantially and somewhat responsible for intergroup conflict.

Last, participants judged “following others,” “other problems,” and “natural disposition” as significantly less responsible for intergroup conflict than all of the other previously listed reasons (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$); they rated these three reasons between minimally and somewhat responsible for overall intergroup conflict. Moreover, natural disposition was rated as significantly less responsible for intergroup conflict than all other reasons, including following others and other problems. Viewed together, these means and the differences among them represent the participants’ general theory of the reasons for intergroup conflict: groups most often fight because of stubborn superiority and least often due to following others, other problems, and their natural disposition; all other reasons are judged to contribute at least somewhat to intergroup conflict.

Despite the significant differences found among the reason ratings, it should be noted that when arranged in rank order, the perceived impact of these 14 reasons on
generalized intergroup conflict decreases in a surprisingly linear fashion. A straight line captures nearly all the observed variability ($R^2 = .96$), and the shape of this mean progression cannot be distinguished from that of a straight line, $F(1,12) = 295.36, p < .001$.

Reasons for intergroup conflict according to group type. A within-subjects ANOVA was conducted to assess the interaction between intergroup conflict reasons and group type. As anticipated, participant attributions regarding the importance of reasons for intergroup conflict varied according to group type, $F(91, 86) = 12.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .93$. Rather than present each group type separately, we organize them here according to whether the conflict reasons attributed to the specific group type resemble the reasons attributed to generalized intergroup conflict.

Reasons for social issue, political, religious, and social-trait conflict. Four types of intergroup conflicts were found to adhere to the pattern of linearity established by participants’ general theory of reasons for intergroup conflict; when the mean ratings for social issue, political, religious, and social-trait group conflict are arranged in rank order of their judged contribution to generalized intergroup conflict, the shapes of these mean progressions cannot be distinguished from that of a straight line. Consequently, lay attributions are generally similar when it comes to evaluating intergroup conflict among all groups as well as among these four specific group types. Despite this general similarity in linearity, some differences do exist, so the attributions for each group type are summarized here.

First, participants judged one set of reasons as contributing substantially to social-issue group conflict. In rank order they are as follows: deep differences, emotional reaction, and stubborn superiority. A second set of reasons was judged to contribute at least somewhat yet significantly less than the first set (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$): need for independence, narrow-minded ignorance, communication problems, prejudice, countering injustice, and fear. Last, a third set of reasons was seen as contributing significantly less again than the second set (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$), less than somewhat but more than minimally responsible: greedy domination, following others, other problems, economic factors, and natural disposition.

Second, one set of reasons contributed substantially to political group conflict. In rank order they are as follows: stubborn superiority, greedy domination, deep differences, and economic factors. Following this, need for independence was judged to contribute nearly substantially, though significantly less than the first set of reasons (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$). Last, a third set of reasons was seen as contributing significantly less again than need for independence (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$), seen as somewhat responsible on average: communication problems, emotional reaction, prejudice, narrow-minded ignorance, countering injustice, natural disposition, fear, following others, and other problems.

Third, one reason contributed very substantially to religious group conflict: deep differences. A second set of reasons was judged to contribute nearly substantially yet significantly less than the first reason (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$): stubborn superiority and
emotional reaction. Last, a third set of reasons contributed significantly less again than the second set (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$), judged as somewhat responsible on average: communication problems, prejudice, narrow-minded ignorance, need for independence, countering injustice, fear, greedy domination, following others, other problems, economic factors, and natural disposition.

Last, with the exception of one reason, all reasons were seen to contribute somewhat on average to social-trait group conflict: stubborn superiority, communication problems, emotional reaction, deep differences, narrow-minded ignorance, need for independence, other problems, prejudice, greedy domination, fear, economic factors, countering injustice, and following others. One reason, natural disposition, was seen as contributing only minimally and significantly less than the first set of reasons (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$).

Reasons for international, racial, job, and favorite-team group conflict. Unlike each of the four types of intergroup conflict just described, these four types of intergroup conflict were found to deviate from the pattern of linearity established by participants’ generalized theory of reasons for intergroup conflict. When the mean ratings for international, racial, job, and favorite-team group conflict are arranged in rank order of their judged contribution to generalized intergroup conflict, the shapes of these mean progressions fail to be described by a straight line.

First, one set of reasons was seen as contributing substantially or nearly so to international conflict: economic factors, need for independence, stubborn superiority, deep differences, communication problems, greedy domination, prejudice, fear, and countering injustice. A second set of reasons was judged to contribute somewhat and significantly less than the first set (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$): narrow-minded ignorance and emotional reaction. Last, a third set of reasons was seen as contributing significantly less again than the second set (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$), just above minimally responsible: following others, natural disposition, and other problems.

Second, with respect to participants’ theory of racial group conflict, one reason was judged to contribute significantly more than any other (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$): prejudice. A first set of reasons was judged on average as substantially responsible: countering injustice, narrow-minded ignorance, communication problems, stubborn superiority, deep differences, emotional reaction, fear, and need for independence. A second set of reasons was judged on average as somewhat and significantly less responsible than the first set (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$): greedy domination, economic factors, other problems, and following others. Last, natural disposition was seen as significantly less than somewhat responsible for racial intergroup conflict (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$).

Third, with regard to job group conflict overall, participants viewed half of the reasons as contributing at least somewhat: economic factors, greedy domination, communication problems, stubborn superiority, need for independence, countering injustice, and emotional reaction. The other half of reasons were judged to contribute less than somewhat and significantly less than the first set (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$): deep differences, fear, narrow-minded ignorance, following others, other problems, prejudice, and natural disposition.
Last, stubborn superiority was the only reason seen to contribute substantially to favorite-team intergroup conflict. Following this, a set of eight reasons was judged to affect this type of intergroup conflict between (nearly) somewhat and substantially: emotional reaction, following others, greedy domination, natural disposition, prejudice, other problems, countering injustice, and narrow-minded ignorance. The remaining reasons were judged to contribute less than somewhat and significantly less than the previous set (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$): fear, deep differences, countering injustice, communication problems, and economic factors.

**General Discussion**

A general theory of the causes underlying all forms of intergroup conflict emerged from our analyses that downplayed the role of mindlessness (following others) or even biological (natural disposition) reasons and emphasized both a social identity cause (stubborn superiority) and a functionalist cause (deep differences). A variety of emotional (emotional reaction, fear), rational (greedy domination, economic factors), psychological (prejudice, narrow-minded ignorance, need for independence), ethical (countering injustice), and expressive (communication) causes constituted the rest of the general lay theory. This is a complex subjective structure, with an ontologically diverse set of elements. The substantive metaphors that guided our respondents’ thinking about intergroup conflict—or that they at least were capable of understanding—emerged from many domains.

This general theory is qualified by several specific types of intergroup conflict that emphasize one or more causes of conflict not highlighted in generalized intergroup conflict. Thus, for racial conflict, prejudice is emphasized. For international conflict, economic factors become relatively important, whereas the role of emotion is reduced. The role of deep differences and prejudice are diminished for job conflict, as are the roles of communication and economic factors for conflict between teams.

Our respondents could have produced a lay theory of intergroup conflict that was essentially unique. However, we did not expect this kind of outcome, because, as already noted, past research suggests that lay theories of human behavior typically closely correspond to scientific theories of human behavior. Of course, scientific theories are relatively precise, elaborate, logical, and so forth, but the two types of theories have some correspondence at the level of content. Thus, for example, when our respondents cited deep differences as the second most potent cause of intergroup conflict, they were invoking the most prominent explanation within functionalist theory.

Correspondingly, when respondents invoked both greedy domination and economic factors as notable but less potent causes of intergroup conflict, they indexed explanations featured prominently within conflict theory. According to the “private motivation hypothesis,” also known as the “greed hypothesis,” conflict provides benefits (as well as costs) that can motivate individuals to fight (see Hirshleifer, 1994; Keen, 1994). Relatedly, economic factors are discussed as promoting conflict through “structural violence”—unequal access to resources on the basis of group membership.
that fuels instability and fighting (Galtung, 1969). In fact, 8 out of 10 of the world’s poorest countries are suffering, or have recently suffered, from large-scale violent conflict (Stewart, 2002).

Like conflict theory, social identity theory also corresponded with two lay explanations that emerged in this study—explanations that diverged widely in their attributed potency, however. First, social identity theory overlaps with the other-problems explanation to the extent that groups are seen to fight as a means of improving their self-esteem. Interestingly, this highly abstract explanation emerged as the second least potent cause of intergroup conflict. Conversely, stubborn superiority, which also shares links to social identity theory through its correspondence with ethnocentrism, was rated as the most potent cause. This sort of “ethnocentric monoculturalism” (Sue, Bingham, Porche-Burke, & Vasquez, 1999) is thus not only an important scholarly explanation for conflict but also an important lay explanation that has emerged strikingly both here and elsewhere (see Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003, p. 184).

Although several lay explanations for intergroup conflict do correspond with well-developed formal theories, many do not. In fact, this is the case for three of the five most potent lay explanations. Emotional reaction is ranked third here but is rarely mentioned in the literature, except perhaps in the course of distinguishing between realistic and nonrealistic conflicts (e.g., Coser, 1956). Need for independence is often discussed in the context of ethnic conflicts (e.g., Horowitz, 1985) but rarely cited as a generalized cause for intergroup conflict. Last, communication problems corresponds to some aspects of functionalist theory (e.g., communication is seen to play a role in helping to shape and express the values and beliefs around which conflict centers), and it has a role to play in conflict theory with regard to the articulation of diverging interests (see Cargile, Giles, & Clément, 1995). Even so, it remains an underdeveloped explanation for conflict, even within the communication literature. As these differences illustrate, lay theories of intergroup conflict may be influenced by formal theories, especially for a sample of college student respondents as used here; however, lay theories are not synonymous with them. They diverge in significant ways, even here; thus, it is important to continue to seek to understand conflict from the point of view of “everyday people.”

**Conclusion**

Because the development of lay theory has contributed widely to our understanding of various phenomena, we undertook an exploration of lay attributions for intergroup conflict. Although this study has revealed ways in which student participant understandings both overlap with and diverge from various formal theories, much work remains to be done—including the comparison of these results to those drawn from other population groups such as police, government officials, or activists. It is our hope that by continuing to develop this terrain of lay attributions we will enrich our academic understanding of how human conflict both unfolds and persists.
Appendix A
Hierarchical Cluster Analysis Solutions

Figure A1
Hierarchical Organization of Respondent-Generated Group Types

Note: One cluster of group types was excluded from the final solution because respondents reported that most items in the cluster represented group-based persecution and not bilateral group conflict per se. The items included in this cluster were “KKK vs. Minorities,” “KKK vs. Blacks,” “Nazis vs. Jews,” “Crips vs. Bloods,” and “Citizens vs. Illegal Immigrants.”
Figure A2
Hierarchical Organization of Respondent-Generated Reasons for Conflict

Because of different morals
Because of different values
Because of different beliefs
Because of different views
Because of different lifestyles
Because of cultural differences
Because of different religions
Because of different interests
Because of the way they were raised
Because of tradition
Because their religions tell them to
Because of beliefs about the way things should be

Because of money
Because of oil
Because they love conflict
Because they want to gain control
Because they want to dominate
Because they are competitive
Because they are aggressive
Because of power
Because they like to abuse power
Because they want to gain something
Because of greed
Because of selfishness
Because they can
Because they are cruel

Because of misunderstandings
Because of miscommunication
Because of a lack of communication
Because they are misunderstood
Because they are oppressed
Because of language barriers
Because of different interpretations
Because of disagreement
Because of broken promises
Because of hurt feelings
Because of a history of conflict
Because of past experiences
Figure A2 (continued)
Appendix B

General Types of Groups in Conflict

1. National groups: Made up of people from the same country or nation.
2. Racial groups: Made up of people from similar racial backgrounds.
3. Social-issue groups: Made up of people sharing commitment to, or taking sides on, a particular social issue, cause, or movement.
4. Job groups: Made up of people who share the same job or who form groups related to someone’s occupational position.
5. Political groups: Made up of people sharing the same general political philosophy.
6. Religious groups: Made up of people with similar religious beliefs and/or practices.
7. Social-trait groups: Made up of people possessing the same social trait—characteristics (e.g., age), features (e.g., income), or behaviors (e.g., smoking) usually used to divide a population into different segments.
8. Favorite-team groups: Made up of people from or supporting the same region, team, club, or organization.

Appendix C

General Reasons for Intergroup Conflict

1. Deep differences: Groups engage in conflict because important and fundamental things (e.g., beliefs, values, religions, upbringings) are not shared in common.
2. Economic factors: Groups engage in conflict so that they can acquire or maintain control over economic resources, such as oil, money, or territory.
3. Natural disposition: Groups engage in conflict because it is in their nature to fight.
4. Greedy domination: Groups engage in conflict because they are selfish, want more power, and enjoy exercising the control they already have.
5. Communication problems: Groups engage in conflict because of a breakdown or difficulties in talk, communication, and information exchange.
6. Countering injustice: Groups engage in conflict because they have been “wronged” in the past or are presently deprived in some manner.
7. Fear: Groups engage in conflict because they are afraid or feel threatened.
8. Stubborn superiority: Groups engage in conflict because they think they are the best (or know what is best) and will resist any change or challenge to their position.
9. Need for independence: Groups engage in conflict because they want to win (or protect) their own (or another group’s) freedom and autonomy.
10. Following others: Groups engage in conflict simply because others are fighting.
11. Other problems: Groups engage in conflict because it improves their psychological shortcomings (such as self-esteem) and helps with their other problems.
12. Prejudice: Groups engage in conflict because they are prejudiced against other groups.
13. Narrow-minded ignorance: Groups engage in conflict because they are not thinking, do not know any better, or are simply intolerant.
14. Emotional reaction: Groups engage in conflict because they are provoked by their emotions, feelings, or gut responses.
References


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James J. Bradac is the mentor and scholar to whom this special issue is dedicated.

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