COSER   AND   DAHRENDORF

Conflict Theory: Lewis Coser (1913–2003) Ralf Dahrendorf (1929–)

We may only think of war or arguments as conflict, but the theorists want to point out is that society is rife with conflict—conflict is a general social form that isn't limited to just overtly violent situations. More than that, conflict doesn't necessarily rip society apart. In fact, it might be one of the most important ways that society holds itself together. Conflict theory has a long history in sociology. Without question, Karl Marx's work in the early to mid-1800s formed the initial statements of this perspective. As you know, Marx was centrally concerned with class and the dialectics of capitalism. He argued that capitalism would produce its own gravediggers by creating the conditions under which class consciousness and a failing economy would come into existence. In this juncture between structure and class-based group experience, the working class revolution would take place.

In the early twentieth century, Max Weber formulated a response to Marx's theory. Weber saw that conflict didn't overwhelmingly involve the economy, but that the state and economy together set up conditions for conflict. Of central importance to Weber's scheme is the notion of legitimation. All systems of oppression must be legitimated in order to function. Thus, legitimation is one of the critical issues in the idea of conflict. Weber also saw that class is more complex than Marx initially supposed, and that there are other factors that contribute to social inequality, most notably status and party (or power). Since that time, a number of efforts have combined different elements from one or both of these theorists to understand

conflict. Lewis Coser's work is interesting for two reasons. First, he intentionally draws the majority of his theoretical ideas from Georg Simmel rather than Marx or Weber. Coser uses Marx and Weber now and then to frame or elaborate upon what Simmel has to say,but by and large Coser (1956) presents "a number of basic propositions which have been distilled from theories of social conflict, in particular from the theories of Georg Simmel" .Keep this in mind as we talk about Coser's theory: we could easily substitute Simmel's name for Coser's. The second reason Coser is remarkable is that he is the first to consider the functional consequences of conflict—other than Simmel, that is. Before Simmel, conflict had been understood as a source of social change and disintegration. Simmel was the first to acknowledge that conflict is a natural and necessary part of society; Coser brought Simmel's idea to mainstream sociology, at least in America. From that point on, sociologists have had to acknowledge that groups require disharmony as well as harmony, dissociation as well as association; and conflicts within them are by no means altogether disruptive factors. . . . Far from being necessarily dysfunctional, a certain degree of conflict is an essential element in group formation and the persistence of group life.(Coser, 1956, p. 31)

In terms of the history of social thought and the layout of this book, it is interesting to note that Coser (1956) was motivated to consider the functional consequences of conflict to address a deficiency in Talcott Parsons's theory: "Parsons considers conflict primarily a 'disease' (p.21).In the same vein ,it is worthy of note that Coser was a student of Merton's. Our second theorist is Ralf Dahrendorf. He clearly blends elements from Marx and Weber and he sprinkles in elements from Coser to present a new understanding of conflict in society. From Marx

he takes the idea of dialectical change:"social structures . . . are capable of producing within themselves the elements of their supersession and change" (Dahrendorf, 1957/1959, p. viii). If you don't recall Marx's use of the dialectic, I encourage you to look back at Chapter 1. Dahrendorf also uses Marx's notion of political interests stemming from bipolarized social positions. Remember that Marx argued that capitalism contains only two classes that really matter: the owners and the workers. These two positions are inherently antagonistic and by their nature dictate different political interests; that is, all workers have the same political interests as do all owners. From Weber, <u>Dahrendorf takes the idea of power and authority</u>. Rather than seeing class as the central characteristic of modern society, Dahrendorf claims that power is the one unavoidable feature of all social relations. In light of the theorists covered in the previous chapter, it's worth noting that Dahrendorf (1957/1959) regards Merton's theories of the middle range as "the immediate task of sociological research"(p.x), and he sees his own theory as a necessary corrective of Parsons's "equilibrium approach." On the other hand, our third conflict theorist, Randall Collins, is much less concerned with orienting his work around Parsons's project.Rather,Collins (1975) draws on the work of Weber,Durkheim,and Goffman to argue that symbolic goods and emotional solidarity are among the "main weapons used in conflict" (p. 59). This micro-level orientation is a unique and powerful addition to the conflict perspective. Most other conflict theories are oriented toward the macro level. Stratification is generally understood as operating through oppressive structures that limit access and choices (the idea of the "glass ceiling"is a good example), and power is conceived of as working coercively through the control of material

resources and methods of social control.Collins also attunes us to a different level of analysis than either Coser or Dahrendorf—the global level of geopolitics where political conflicts are analyzed within the context of history and geography.

Defining Conflict Theory

In general, conflict theory seeks to scientifically explain the general contours of conflict in society: how conflict starts and varies, and the effects it brings. The central concerns of conflict theory are the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power. What these resources are might be different for each theorist, but conflict theorists usually work with Weber's three systems of stratification:class ,status, and power. Conflict theorists generally see power as the central feature of society, rather than thinking of society as held together by collective agreement concerning a cohesive set of cultural standards ,as functionalists do. Where power is located and who uses it (and who doesn't) are thus fundamental to conflict theory. In this way of thinking about things, power isn't necessarily bad: it is a primary factor that guides society and social relation.

Lewis Coser: The Functional Consequences of Conflict

The Essential Coser Concepts and Theory: Variation in Conflict Basic Sources of Conflict Predicting the Level of Violence Concepts and Theory: The Integrating Forces of Conflict Internal Conflict External Conflict Coser Summary

Biography

Lewis Coser was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1913. His family moved to Paris in 1933 where he studied literature and sociology at the

Sorbonne. Because of his German heritage, Coser was arrested and interned by the French government near the beginning of WWII. He later was able to get political asylum in the

United States and arrived in New York in 1941. Coser did his Ph.D. work at Columbia University, where he studied under Robert K. Merton. His dissertation, The Functions of Social Conflict, took conflict theory in a new direction and was later named as one of the best-selling sociology books of the twentieth century by the journal Contemporary Sociology. Coser also authored Masters of Sociological Thought, which became one of the most influential sociological theory books in the English language. In addition, Coser established the Department of Sociology at Brandeis University; founded Dissent magazine; served as president of the American Sociological Association (1975), the Society for the Study of Social Problems, and the Easter Sociological Association (1983); and is honored annually through the American Sociological Association's Lewis A. Coser Award for Theoretical Agenda-Setting. Coser died in July of 2003.

Passionate Curiosity

James B. Rule (2003), writing in memoriam for Dissent magazine, said of Coser,

he always considered himself an intellectual first and a sociologist second. His aim was always to make some sort of comprehensive sense of the human condition—a sense of the best that social life could offer and a hard headed look at the worst things human beings could do to one another, a vision of possibilities of change for the better and an assessment of the forces weighing for and against those possibilities.

Keys to Knowing

Crosscutting influences, absolute deprivation, relative deprivation, rational and transcendent goals, functional consequences of conflict, internal and external conflict, types of internal conflict, network density, group boundaries, internal solidarity, coalitions

Concepts and Theory: Variation in Conflict

Coser argues that conflict is instinctual for us, so we find it everywhere in human society.There is the conflict of war,but there is also the conflict that we find in our daily lives and relationships. But Coser also argues that conflict is different for humans than for other animals in that our conflicts can be goal related. There is generally something that we are trying to achieve through conflict, and there are different possible ways of reaching our goal. The existence of the possibility of different paths opens up opportunities for negotiation and different types and levels of conflict. Because **Coser sees conflict as a normal and functional part of human life, he can talk about its variation in ways that others missed, such as the level of violence and functional consequences.**

Basic Sources of Conflict

First, we want to consider what brings on social conflict in the first place. As I pointed out in the definition of conflict theory, most social conflict is based on the unequal distribution of scarce resources. Weber identified those resources for us as class, status, and power .Weber, as well as Simmel, also pointed out the importance of the crosscutting influences that originate with the different structures of inequality. For example, a working class black person may not share the same political

interests as a working class white person. The different status positions of these two people may cut across their similar class interests. Thus, what becomes important as a source of social conflict is the covariance of these three systems of stratification. If the public perceives that the same group controls access to all three resources, it is likely that the legitimacy of the system will be questioned because people perceive that their social mobility is hampered. The other general source of conflict comes from Marx. Marx's concern was with a group's sense of deprivation caused by class .This sense of deprivation is what leads a group to class consciousness and produces conflict and social change. Marx was primarily concerned with explaining the structural changes or processes that would bring the working class to this realization, such things as rising levels of education and worker concentration that are both structurally demanded by capitalism. Contemporary conflict theory has modified the idea of deprivation by noting that it is the shift from absolute to relative deprivation that is significant in producing this kind of critical awareness. Absolute deprivation refers to the condition of being destitute ,living well below the poverty line where life is dictated by uncertainty over the essentials of life (food, shelter, and clothing). People in such a condition have neither the resources nor the willpower to become involved in conflict and social change. Relative deprivation, however, refers to a sense of being underprivileged relative to some other person or group .The basics of life aren't in question here; it's simply the sense that others are doing better and that we are losing out on something. These people and groups have the emotional and material resources to become involved in conflict and social change. But it isn't relative deprivation itself that motivates people; it is the shift from absolute to relative deprivation that may

spark a powder keg of revolt. People who are upwardly mobile in this way have the available resources, and they may experience a sense of loss or deprivation if the economic structural changes can't keep pace with their rising expectations.

Predicting the Level of Violence

Simmel and Coser move us past these basic premises to consider the ways in which conflict can fluctuate.One of the more important ways that conflict can vary is by its level of violence. If people perceive conflict as a means to achieving clearly expressed rational goals, then conflict will tend to be less violent. A simple exchange is a good example.Because of the tension present in exchanges ,conflict is likely, but

it is a low-level conflict in terms of violence. People engage in exchange in order to achieve a goal, and that desired end directs most other factors.Another example is a worker strike. Workers generally go on strike to achieve clearly articulated goals and the strikers usually do not want the struggle to become violent—the violence can detract from achieving their goals (though strikes will become violent under certain conditions). The passive resistance movements of the sixties and early seventies are other examples. We can think of these kinds of encounters as the strategic use of conflict. However ,conflict can be violent, and Coser gives us two factors that can produce violent conflict: emotional involvement and transcendent goals. In order to become violent ,people must be emotionally engaged. Durkheim saw that group

interaction could increase emotional involvements and create moral boundaries around group values and goals. He didn't apply this to conflict ,but Coser does .The more involved we are with a group, the greater is our emotional involvement and the greater the likelihood of violent conflict if our group is threatened. Conflict will also tend to have greater levels of violence when the goals of a group are seen to be transcendent. As long as the efforts of a group are understood to be directed toward everyday concerns, people will tend to moderate their emotional involvement and thus keep conflict at a rational level. If, on the other hand, we see the goals of our group as being greater than the group and the concerns of daily life, then conflict is more likely to be violent. For example, when the United States goes to war, the reasons are never expressed by our government in mundane terms. We did not say that we fought the First Gulf War in order to protect our oil interests; we fought the war in order to defeat oppression, preserve freedom, and protect human rights .Anytime violence is deemed necessary by a government, the reasons are couched in moral terms (capitalists might say they fight for individual freedoms; communists would say they fight for social responsibility and the dignity of the collective). The existence of transcendent goals is why the Right to Life side of the abortion conflict tends to exhibit more violence than advocates of choice— their goals are more easily linked to transcendent issues and can thus be seen as God-ordained.

Concepts and Theory: The Integrating Forces of Conflict

Coser makes the case for two kinds of functional consequences of conflict: conflict that occurs within a group and conflict that occurs outside the group .An example of internal conflict is the tension that can exist between indigenous populations or first nations and the

national government. Notice that this internal conflict is actually between or among groups that function within the same social system. Examples of external group conflicts are the wars in which a nation may involve itself .When considering the consequences for internal group conflict, Coser is concerned with low-level and more frequent conflict. When explaining the consequences for external conflict, he is thinking about more violent conflict.

Internal Conflict

Internal conflict in the larger social system, as between different groups within the United States, releases hostilities, creates norms for dealing with conflict, and develops lines of authority and judiciary systems. Remember that Coser sees conflict as instinctual for humans. Thus, a society must always contend with the psychological need of individuals to engage in conflict .Coser appears to argue that this need can build up over time and become explosive .Low-level ,frequent conflict tends to release hostilities and thus keep conflict from building and becoming disintegrative for the system. This kind of conflict also creates pressures for society to produce norms governing conflict. For example, most of the formal norms (laws) governing labor in Western capitalist countries came about because of the conflict between labor and management. We can see this same dynamic operating at the dyad level as well .For example, when a couple in a long-term relationship experiences repeated episodes of conflict, such as arguing, they will attempt to come up with norms for handling the tension in a way that preserves the integrity of the relationship .The same is true for the social system ,but the social system will go a step further and develop formal

authorities and systems of judgment to handle conflict. Thus, frequent, low-level conflict creates moral and social structures that facilitate social integration. Coser also notes that not every internal conflict will be functional. It depends on the types of conflict and social structure that are involved. In Coser's theory, there are two basic types of internal conflict: those that threaten or contradict the fundamental assumptions of the group relationship and those that don't. Every group is based on certain beliefs regarding what the group is about .Let's take marriage as an example of a group. For many people, a basic assumption undergirding marriage is sexual fidelity. A husband and wife may argue about many things—such as finances, chores ,toilet seats, and tubes of toothpaste—but chances are good that none of these will be a threat to the stability of the "group"(dyad) because they don't contradict a basic assumption that provides the basis of the group in the first place. Adultery ,on the other hand, may very well put the marriage in jeopardy because it goes against one of the primary defining features of the group. Conflict over such things as household chores may prove to be functional in the long run for the marriage,while adultery may be dysfunctional and lead to the breakup of the group. However,I want you to notice something very important here: In Coser's way of thinking about things, adultery won't break a marriage up because it is morally wrong. Whether the relationship will survive depends on the couple's basic assumptions as to its reasons for existence .A couple may have an "open marriage" based on the assumption that people are naturally attracted to other people and sexual flings are to be expected. In such a case, outside sexual relations will probably not break the group apart. Couples within such marriages may experience tension or fight about one another's sexual exploits—

and research indicates that they often do—but such conflict will tend to be functional for the marriage because of its basic assumptions. Note also that conflict over household chores may indeed be dysfunctional if the underlying assumption of the marriage is egalitarianism, but the actual division of labor in the house occurs along stereotypical gender linesThe group structure will also help determine whether or not a conflict is functional.As Coser (1956) explains,"social structures differ in the way in which they allow expression to antagonistic claims"(p.152).To talk about this issue,let's make a distinction based on network density. Network density speaks of how often a group gets together, the longevity of the group, and the demands of the group in terms of personal involvement.Groups whose members interact frequently over long periods of time and have high levels of personal and personality involvement have high network density. Such groups will tend to suppress or discourage conflict.If conflict does erupt in such a group,it will tend to be very intense for two reasons.First,the group will likely have built up unresolved grievances and unreleased hostilities.Once unfettered, these pent-up issues and emotions will tend to push the original conflict over the top. Second, the kind of total personal involvement these groups have makes the mobilization of all emotions that much easier.On the other hand,groups whose members interact less frequently and that demand less involvement—those with low network density—will be more likely to experience the functional benefits of conflict.

External Conflict

The different groups involved in conflict also experience functional results,especially when the conflict is more violent.As a group experiences external conflict,the boundaries surrounding the group

become stronger, the members of the group experience greater solidarity, power is exercised more efficiently, and the group tends to form coalitions with other groups (the more violent the conflict is, the more intensified are these effects). In order for any group to exist, it must include some people and exclude others. This inclusion/exclusion process involves producing and regulating different behaviors, ways of feeling and thinking, cultural symbols, and so forth. These differences constitute a group boundary that clearly demarcates those who belong from those who do not. As a group experiences conflict, the boundaries surrounding the group become stronger and better guarded. For example, during WWII the United States incarcerated those Americans of Japanese descent. Today we may look back at that incident with shame, but at the time it made the United States stronger as a collective; it more clearly demarcated "us"from "them,"which is a necessary function for any group to exist. Conflict makes this function more robust:"conflict sets boundaries between groups within a social system by strengthening group consciousness and awareness of separateness, thus establishing the identity of groups within the system"(Coser, 1956, p. 34). Along with stronger external boundaries,conflict enables the group to also experience higher levels of internal solidarity. When a group engages in conflict, the members will tend to feel a greater sense of camaraderie than during peaceful times. They will see themselves as more alike, more part of the same family, existing for the same reason. Group-specific behaviors and symbols will be more closely guarded and celebrated. Group rituals will be engaged in more often and with greater fervency,thus producing greater emotional ties between members and creating a sense of sacredness about the group.

addition, a group experiencing conflict will tend to produce a more centralized power structure. A centralized government is more efficient in terms of response time to danger,regulating internal stresses and needs,negotiating external relations, and so on. Violent conflict also tends to produce coalitions with previously neutral parties.Again,WWII is a clear example. The story of WWII is one of increasing violence with more and more parties being drawn in. Violent conflict produces alliances that would have previously been thought unlikely, such as the United States being allied with Russia.

Coalition . . . permits the coming together of elements that...would resist other forms of unification.Although it is the most unstable form of socialization, it has the distinct advantage of providing some unification where unification might otherwise not be possible. (Coser, 1956, p. 143)

Coser Summary

• Contrary to the claims of most previous theorists, Coser argues that conflict can have integrating as well as disintegrating effects. Conflict functions differently whether it is between unrelated groups (external) or inside a group, between factions (internal). • For internal conflict, the question of functionality hinges on the conflict being less violent and more frequent, not threatening the basic assumptions of the group at large,and the group having low interactional network density.Under these conditions, internal conflict will produce the following functional consequences: conflicts will serve to release pent-up hostilities, create norms regulating conflict, and develop clear lines of authority and jurisdiction (especially around the issues that conflict develops). •

External conflict that is more violent will tend to have the following functional consequences: stronger group boundaries, higher social solidarity, and more efficient use of power and authority. Conflict violence will tend to increase in the presence of high levels of emotional involvement and transcendent goals.

Ralf Dahrendorf: Power and Dialectical Change

- We move now to Ralf Dahrendorf's theory of power and dialectical change. Like Coser, Dahrendorf sees conflict as universally present in all human relations. But Dahrendorf doesn't see the inevitability of conflict as part of human nature; he sees it, rather, as a normal part of how we structure society and create social order. In this sense, Dahrendorf is concerned with the same issue as Talcott Parsons: How is social order achieved? However, rather than assuming collective agreement about norms, values, and social positions, as Parsons does, Dahrendorf argues that it is power that both defines and enforces the guiding principles of society. Dahrendorf also follows Coser in talking about the level of violence and its effects, but Dahrendorf adds a further variable: conflict intensity.
- **Biography**
- Ralf Dahrendorf was born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 1, 1929. His father was a Social Democratic politician and member of the German Parliament who was arrested and imprisoned by the Nazis during WWII. The younger Dahrendorf was arrested as well, fortuitously escaping death by only a few days. His father continued in politics after WWII in the Soviet-held portion of Germany, but was again arrested, this time by the Soviets. He

eventually escaped and fled with Ralf to England. Young Dahrendorf later returned to Germany to study at the University of Hamburg, where he received his first

Ph.D. in philosophy; he earned his second Ph.D. (sociology) in England at the London School of Economics. Dahrendorf taught sociology at the universities of Hamburg, Tübingen, and Konstanz between 1957 and 1969. In 1969, Dahrendorf turned to politics and became a member of the German Parliament. In 1970, he was appointed a commissioner in the European Commission in Brussels. From 1974 to 1984, Dahrendorf was the director of the London School of Economics. In 1988, Dahrendorf became a British citizen, and in 1993 he was given life peerage and was named Baron Dahrendorf of Clare Market in the City of Westminster by Queen Elizabeth II. Sir Dahrendorf is currently a member of the House of Lords.

- Passionate Curiosity
- In describing his own intellectual search, Dahrendorf (1989) says that it is
- my firm belief that the regulation of conflict is the secret of liberty in liberal democracy. That if we don't manage to regulate conflict, if we try to ignore it, or if we try to create a world of ultimate harmony, we are quite likely to end up with worse conflicts than if we accept the fact that people have different interests and different aspirations, and devise institutions in which it is possible for people to express these differences, which is what democracy, in my view, is about. Democracy, in other words, is not about the emergence of some unified view from "the people," but it's about organizing conflict and living with conflict.

Keys to Knowing

Power, authority, imperatively coordinated associations, Hobbesian problem of social order, class, quasi-groups, interest groups, technical conditions, political conditions, social conditions, conflict violence and intensity

Concepts and Theory: Power and Group Interests

Power

It comes to this: dwarf-throwing contests, dwarfs for centuries given away as gifts, and the dwarf-jokes at which we laugh in our big, proper bodies. And people so fat they can't scratch their toes, so fat you have to cut away whole sides of their homes to get them to the morgue. Don't we snicker, even as the paramedics work?

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And imagine the small political base of a fat dwarf. Nothing to stop us from slapping our knees, rolling on the floor. Let's apologize to all of them, Roberta said at the spirited dinner table. But by then we could hardly contain ourselves.

Power

Power is an uneasy word, a word we don't like to acknowledge in proper company. Perhaps we may even shy away from it in improper

company, because to speak it is to make it crass. It is certainly a word that social scientists are uncomfortable yet obsessed with. Social scientists understand that power makes the human world go round, but they have a devil of a time defining it or determining where it exists. One of the reasons it is hard to define is that it is present in every social situation. Who has power,where is it located,and how is it exercised? Those questions have proven themselves to be quite difficult for social scientists to answer.Some theorists see power as an element of social structure—something attached to a position within the structure, such as the power that comes with being the president of the United States.In this scheme,power is something that a person can possess and use (see Janet Chafetz, Chapter 8). Other theorists define power as an element of exchange (see Chapter 10). Others see power more in terms of influence.This is a more general way in which to think of power, because many types of social relationships and people can exercise influence. Still other thinkers,as we will see when we get to Michel Foucault (Chapter 14),define power as insidiously invested in text, knowledge, and discourse (see also Dorothy E. Smith,Chapter 13).I want to encourage you to pay close attention to the way our theorists speak ofpower and how it is used in society and social relations.It's an extremely important social factor and one that is multifaceted in the ways it is used. For his part, Dahrendorf (1957/1959), here quoting Weber, defines power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (p.166).Dahrendorf also makes the distinction,along with Weber,between power and authority.Power is something that can be exercised at any moment in all social relations and depends mostly on

the personalities of the individuals involved.Because of its universal characteristic,Dahrendorf calls power "factual":it is a fact of human life. Power can be based on such different sources as persuasion and brute force. If someone has a gun pointed at your head, chances are good that the person has

the power in the encounter; that is, if he or she is willing to use it and you're afraid of dying, then chances are good you'll do what the person says—those individual features are where personality comes in. Persuasion works subtly as we are drawn in by the personal magnetism of the other person. Persuasion can also be based on skills: if someone knows how interactions work and knows social psychology, then she or he can manipulate those factors and achieve power in the interaction.Again, a specific personality is involved—knowing how to manipulate people and actually doing it are two different things. However, like Weber, Dahrendorf is more interested in authority than this kind of factual power.

Authority is a form of power, of course, but it is legitimate power. It is power that is "always associated with social positions or roles" (Dahrendorf, 1957/1959,p.166).Authority is part of social organization ,not individual personality.Please note where Dahrendorf locates authority—the legitimated use of power is found in the status positions, roles, and norms of organizations. Obvious examples are your professors, the police, your boss at work, and so on. Because of its organizational embeddedness,Dahrendorf refers to authoritative social relations as imperatively coordinated associations(ICAs).I know that sounds like a complex idea,but it actually isn't. If something is imperative, it is binding and compulsory; you must do it.So the term simply says that social relations are managed through legitimated

power (authority).While the term is straightforward, it is also important. As I mentioned before, Dahrendorf positions himself against Parsons, and here is where we can see the differences that he wants to accentuate. Dahrendorf (1968) makes the distinction between the "equilibrium approach" to social order and the "constraint approach"(pp.139–140).Parsons is concerned with what is commonly called the Hobbesian problem of social order,after the philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes felt that, apart from social enforcement, some kind of glue binding people together, society would disintegrate into continual chaos and confrontation. The problem, then, is to explain how selfishly motivated actors create social order. If all you care about is yourself, why would you cooperate with other people to achieve goals you don't care about? One solution to the problem is found in exchange theory (Chapter 10); another prominent idea is proposed by both Durkheim and Parsons. Functionalists argue for the equilibrium approach to the problem of social order: society is produced as individuals are constrained and directed through a cohesive set of norms, values, and beliefs. For Durkheim, this took the form of a moral collective consciousness that imposes its will on the individual members of the group. You'll remember that, for Parsons, the solution is found in modes of orientation, commonly held cultural belief systems, expressive symbols, value orientations, and recognizable types of action. Dahrendorf (1968) recognizes that "continuity is without a doubt one of the fundamental puzzles of social life"but argues that social order is the result of constraint rather than some consensus around social beliefs (pp.139–140).In the constraint approach, the norms and values of society are established and imposed through authoritative power. Be careful to see the distinction that's being

made. In the equilibrium model, the actions of individuals are organized through a collectively held and agreed-upon set of values, roles or types of action, expressive symbols ,and so on .In this Durkheim–Parsons model ,these cultural elements holds way because they are functional and/or they have moral force. These elements produce an equilibrium or balance between individual desires and social needs. Dahrendorf, however, points out that there is an assumed element of power in the equilibrium model. By definition, "a norm is a cultural rule that associates people's behavior or appearance with rewards or punishments" (Johnson, 2000, p. 209).Not all behaviors are normative—that is,not all are governed by a norm or standard. To bring out this point, let's compare normal (in the usual sense) and normative. Some behaviors can be normal (or not) and yet not be guided by a norm. For example, I usually wear jeans, T-shirts, and Chuck Taylor shoes to teach in. That's not normal attire for a professor at my school, but I'm not breaking a norm in dressing like that. There are no sanctions involved—I don't get rewarded or punished. I'm sure you see Dahrendorf's point: norms always presume an element of power in that they are negatively or positively enforced. Dahrendorf agrees with Durkheim and Parsons that society is created through roles, norms, and values, but he argues that they work through power rather than collective consensus. Here is where we can see the primary distinction between the functional and conflict theory approaches:Functionalists assume some kind of cultural agreement and don't see power as a central social factor; in contrast, conflict theorists argue that power is the central feature of society.Further,as a conflict theorist, Dahrendorf (1968) sees that the substance of social roles, norms, status positions, values, and so forth "may well be explained in terms of the interests of

the powerful" (p. 140). Like Marx, Dahrendorf argues that the culture of any society reflects the interests of the powerful elite and not the political interests of the middle or lower classes. It is also important to note that Dahrendorf sees class as related more to power than to money or occupation.Both of those might be important,but the reason for this is that they contribute to an individual's power within an ICA. Thus, for Dahrendorf (1957/1959), classes "are social conflict groups the determinant . . . of which can be found in the participation in or exclusion from the exercise of authority within any imperatively coordinated association"(p. 138). Keep this distinction in mind. It implies that Dahrendorf's concern with conflict is more narrowly defined than is Coser's. Coser is interested in explaining any internal and external conflict, while Dahrendorf's main interest is internal class conflict.

Latent and Manifest Interests

Like Marx, Dahrendorf sees the interests of power and class in dichotomous terms: you either can wield legitimated power or you can't.Now that I've said that, I need to qualify it. Remember that Dahrendorf calls the social relationships organized around legitimated power imperatively coordinated associations. One of the ideas implied in the term is that social relations are embedded within a hierarchy of authority. What this means is that most people are sandwiched in between power relations. That is, they exercise power over some and are themselves subject to the authority of those above them. However, this idea also points out that embedded within this hierarchy of power are dichotomous sets of interests.

For example, let's say you are a manager at a local eatery that is part of a restaurant chain.As manager,you will have a number of employees over whom you have authority and exercise power.You will share that power with other shift or section managers. In the restaurant, then, there are two groups with different power interests: a group of managers and a group of employees. At the same time, you have regional and corporate managers over you.This part of the organizational structure sets up additional dichotomous power interests. In this case, you are the underling and your bosses exercise power over you and others.If you stop and think about it, you'll see what Dahrendorf wants us to see: Society is set up and managed through imperatively coordinated associations. Society is a tapestry that is woven together by different sets of power interests. Okay, social relationships are coordinated through authority and power is everywhere. What's the big deal? What else does Dahrendorf want us to see? There's an important distinction and significant question that Dahrendorf wants us to become aware of. Using two terms from Merton, Dahrendorf argues that everyone is involved in positions and groups with latent power interests.People with these similar interests are called quasi-groups.Quasi-groups"consist ofincumbents ofroles endowed with like expectations of interests" and represent "recruiting fields" for the formation of real interest groups. Interest groups, Dahrendorf tells us,"are the real agents of group conflict"(Dahrendorf, 1957/1959, p. 180). Everybody is part of various quasi-groups. For example, you and your fellow students form a loose aggregate of interests opposed to the professors at your university.Here's the significant question that Dahrendorf wants us to consider:How do latent interests become manifest interests? In other words,what are

the social factors that move an aggregate from a quasi-group to an interest group?

Concepts and Theory: Conflict Groups and Social Change

Conditions of Conflict Group Formation

Before we get into these conditions, let me reemphasize an important sociological point. Every single one of us maintains different positions within social aggregates. An aggregate is simply "a mass or body of units or parts somewhat loosely associated with one another" (Merriam-Webster, 2002). For example, you have an economic class position; perhaps you're working or middle class. Yet, while you share that position with a vast number of others,you may not experience any sense of group identity or shared interests.When,why,and how these aggregates actually form into social groups is a significant sociological question.As an illustration, ask yourself what would have to happen for you and your fellow students to become an active social group that would rise up against the authority of your professors or campus administrators? More significantly, what are the conditions under which disenfranchised groups such as gays and lesbians (in the United States) would challenge the existing power arrangements? Dahrendorf gives us three sets of conditions that must be met for a group to become active in conflict: technical, political, and social conditions. The technical conditions are those things without which a group simply can't function.They are the things that actually define a social group as compared to an aggregate. The technical conditions include members,ideas or ideologies (what Dahrendorf calls a "charter"), and norms.The members that Dahrendorf has in mind are the people who are active in the organization of the group. For an illustration, we can

think of a Christian church. As any pastor knows, within a congregation there are active and inactive members. There are the people who actually make the church work by teaching Sunday school or organizing bake sales; and then there are the people who show up once or twice a week and simply attend.We can see the same thing in political parties: There are those who are active year in and year out and there are those who simply vote.It's the workers or "leading group"that Dahrendorf has in mind as members. For a collective to function as a group,there also has to be a defining set of ideas, or an ideology. These ideas must be distinct enough from the ruling party to set the conflict group apart.For example,for the students at your school to become an interest group, there would have to be a set of ideas and values that are different from the ones the administration and faculty hold. Just such an ideology was present during the free speech movement at the University of California at Berkeley during the sixties. A friend of mine taught his first introduction to sociology class at Berkeley during this time. He walked in on the first day of class and handed out his syllabus.In response,the students,all 300 of them,got up and walked out.Why? The students believed that they should have had input in making up the syllabus— a value that most professors don't hold. (My friend, by the way, invited them back to collectively negotiate a syllabus.) A group also requires norms. Groups are unruly things.Without norms, people tend to go off in their own direction either by mistake or intention. There must be some social mechanism that acts like a shepherd dog, nipping at the heels of the sheep to bring them back to the flock.So important are norms to human existence, Durkheim argued that people would commit suicide if there were no clear norms to guide behavior (anomic suicide). Norms are particularly important for interest groups involved

in conflict. Conflict demands a united stand from the interest group, and norms help preserve that solidarity. Note also that the existence of norms implies a power hierarchy within the interest group itself—a leadership cadre. The political conditions refer specifically to the ability to meet and organize.This is fairly obvious but is nonetheless important. Using our student revolt example, let's say that your university administration got wind of student unrest.Now,where is the most logical and the easiest place for a group of students to meet? The college campus would be the best place; many students live there and perhaps have limited transportation,and the campus is also the place that every student knows.However, the administration controls access to all campus facilities and could forbid students to gather, especially if they knew that the students were fomenting a revolt. The administration could further hamper meetings through the way the campus is built. I attended a school that was building a student center while I was there. Everybody was excited, and we students were looking forward to having all the amenities that come with such a facility, such as greater choices in food (we would be getting Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, and assorted other options) and a movie theater.What most of us didn't realize at the time was that the university had had plans long before to build a student center, but those plans got scrapped. Why? The original center was supposed to be built in 1964, right in the middle of the civil rights and free speech movements.The university didn't build the center then because they didn't want to provide the students with an opportunity to gather together. The center was eventually built during the latter part of the 1980s, when students seemed most content with capitalist enterprise.Now,move this illustration out to general society and you'll

see the importance of these political conditions: governments can clearly either hamper or allow interest groups to develop. Social conditions of organization must also be met.There are two elements here: communication and structural patterns of recruitment.Obviously,the more people (quasi-groups) are able to communicate, the more likely they will form a social group (interest group). A group's ability to communicate is of course central to Marx's view of class consciousness. Dahrendorf (1957/1959) brings it into his theory with updates: "In advanced industrial societies this condition may be assumed to be generally given"(p. 187). Marx of course was aware of some communication technologies, such as printing and newspapers,but still saw that bringing people together in physical proximity was necessary for communication. Dahrendorf, writing in the 1950s, saw even more technological development than did Marx, and you and I have seen this condition fully blossom with the advent of computer technologies and the Internet. Communication is thus a given in modern society. But hold onto this idea of non–face-to-face communication until we get to Randall Collins; he's going to give us a caveat to Dahrendorf's assumed level of communication. The second part of Dahrendorf's social conditions also sets a limit on communication.The social connections that people make must be structurally predictable for an interest group to develop. Let's use Internet communication as an example. When email and the Internet first began,there were few mechanisms that patterned the way people got in touch with one another. People would email their friends or business acquaintances, and in that sense computer technologies only enhanced already established social connections. But with the advent of search engines like Google and Web sites like Yahoo, there are now

structural features of the Internet that can more predictably bring people together. For instance,I just opened the Yahoo homepage.Under "Groups"is listed "From Trash to Treasure; React locally,impact globally."If I'm concerned about ecological issues,then my communication with other like-minded people is now facilitated by the structure of the Internet. However, my accessing the Yahoo homepage is not structured.Whether or not you or I use Yahoo and see the discussion group is based on "peculiar,structurally random personal circumstances,"which "appear generally unsuited for the organization of conflict groups"(Dahrendorf, 1957/1959, p. 187). Thus,while parts of these social conditions appear to be structured,others are not. The thing I want you to see here is that this condition is highly variable, even though we are living in a technologically advanced society.

Social Change

According to Dahrendorf, conflict will vary by its level of intensity and violence. Conflict intensity refers to the amount of costs and involvement. The cost of conflict is rather intuitive; it refers to the money, life, material, and infrastructure that are lost due to conflict. Involvement refers to the level of importance the people in the conflict attach to the group and its issues. We can think of this involvement as varying on a continuum from the level that a game of checkers requires to that of a front-line soldier. Checkers only requires a small portion of a person's personality and energy, while participating in a war where life and death are at stake will engulf an individual's entire psyche. For Dahrendorf, conflict violence refers to how conflict is manifested and is basically measured by the kinds of weapons used. Peaceful demonstrations are conflictual but exhibit an extremely low level of violence, while riots are far more violent. While violence and intensity

can go together,as in a nuclear war,they don't necessarily covary, and they tend to influence social change in different directions. More intense conflicts will tend to generate more profound social changes.We can think of the life of Mahatma Gandhi as an example of conflict with a high level of intensity but no violence. Gandhi is also a good example of the profound social changes that intense conflict can engender. Not only was he centrally responsible for major structural changes in Indian society, he has also had a profound and lasting impact worldwide. On the other hand, the violence of a conflict will influence how quickly the changes occur. We can think of the recent invasion of Iraq by the U.S. military as an example of violent conflict and rapid social change. The United States invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003. On April 9, 2003, Baghdad fell to the U.S.-led military forces. On that day, U.S. marines pulled down the 20-foot-tall statue of Saddam Hussein, thus symbolically ending his regime. An interim Iraqi government was appointed in 2004 and elections for a permanent government occurred in 2005. How deep these structural changes go remains to be seen, yet there is little doubt that the rapidness of the changes is due to the level of violence the United States government was willing to employ. Important note: the two examples I've just given are somewhat outside the scope of Dahrendorf interests.Remember that Dahrendorf is concerned primarily with explaining class conflict within a society.The reason I used those examples is that they clearly point out the differences between the violence and the intensity of conflict. Often class conflict, especially over longer periods of time, involves both intensity and violence and thus they are difficult to empirically disengage from one another.A good example of these factors is the civil rights movement in the United States. I invite you to

check out a civil rights timeline by using your favorite Internet search engine; be sure to use a timeline that goes back at least to 1954. Think about the types of conflict, whether intense or violent, and the kinds of social changes occurring.

Level of Violence

Within a society, the violence of class conflict, as defined by Dahrendorf, is related to three distinct groups of social factors: (1) the technical, political, and social conditions of organization; (2) the effective regulation of conflict within a society; and (3) the level of relative deprivation. Violence is negatively related to the three conditions of organization.In other words,the more a group has met the technical,political,and social conditions of organization,the less likely it is that the conflict will be violent. Remember, we saw this idea in a more basic form with Coser. While some level of organization is necessary for a group to move from quasi- to interest group,the better organized a group is,the more likely it is to have rational goals and to seek reasonable means to achieve those goals. The violence of a conflict is also negatively related to the presence of legitimate ways of regulating conflict. In other words, the greater the level of formal or informal norms regulating conflict, the greater the probability that both parties will use the norms or judicial paths to resolve the conflict.However,this factor is influenced by two others.In order for the two interested parties to use legitimate roads of conflict resolution, they must recognize the fundamental justice of the cause involved (even if they don't agree on the outcome), and both parties need to be wellorganized. In addition, the possibility of violent conflict is positively related to a sense of relative deprivation.We reviewed this idea with Coser,but here Dahrendorf is specifying the concept more and linking it explicitly to the level of violence.

Level of Intensity

Within a social system, the level of conflict intensity is related to the technical, political, and social conditions of organization; the level of social mobility; and to the way in which power and other scarce resources are distributed in society.Notice that both violence and intensity are related to group organization and the relationship in both cases is negative. The violence and intensity of conflict will tend to go down as groups are better organized—again,for the same reason: better organization means more rational action. With Coser, we saw that people will begin to question the legitimacy of the distribution of scarce resources as the desired goods and social positions tend to all go to the same class. Here, Dahrendorf is being more specific and is linking this issue with conflict intensity. The relationship is positive: the more society's scarce resources are bestowed upon a single social category,the greater will be the intensity of the conflict. In this case, the interest groups will see the goals of conflict as more significant and worth more involvement and cost. Finally, the intensity of a conflict is negatively related to social mobility. If an ICA (imperatively coordinated association) sees its ability to achieve society's highly valued goods and positions systematically hampered, then chances are good the group members will see the conflict as worth investing more of themselves in and possibly sustaining greater costs. In Table 7.1,I've listed the various propositions that Coser and Dahrendorf give us concerning the varying levels of conflict violence and intensity. As you can see, the level of violence tends to go up with increasing levels of emotional involvement the presence of transcendent goals, and a sense of change from absolute to relative deprivation. Conversely, the likelihood of violence in conflict tends to go down when the interest groups meet the

technical,social,and political conditions of organization (class organization); when they have explicitly stated rational goals; and when there are norms and legal channels available for resolving conflict.As the violence of conflict increases,we can expect social changes to come rapidly and we can anticipate groups to experience stronger boundaries, solidarity, and more efficient control and authority. Only Dahrendorf comments on conflict intensity, and he argues that decreasing class organization and social mobility and increasing covariance of authority and rewards will tend to produce higher levels of intensity,which in turn will produce more profound structural changes.

Dahrendorf Summary

• Dahrendorf argues that underlying all social order are imperatively coordinated associations (ICA). ICAs are organizational groups based on differential power relations. These ICAs set up latent power interests between those who have it and those who don't. These interests will tend to become manifest when a group meets the technical,political,and social conditions of group organization.Conflict generated between interest groups varies by intensity and violence. • The intensity of conflict is a negative function of group organization and social mobility, and a positive function of association among the scarce resources within a society. The more intense conflicts are, the more profound are the structural changes. • The violence of conflict is a negative function of the conditions of group organization and already existing legitimate ways of resolving conflict, and a positive function of relative deprivation. The more violent is the conflict, the quicker structural change occurs. • Social change involves shifts in the personnel of ICAs. The new personnel impose their own hierarchy of

status positions roles,norms ,and values, which sets up another grouping of ICAs and latent power interests.

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