The Journal of Democracy and Peacebuilding

The Journal of Democracy and Peacebuilding is a quarterly publication for the international community of conflict engagement practitioners and peacebuilders, with a focus on the interconnection of democracy, conflict, and peacebuilding. This journal, it's editors, contributors and sponsors are committed to enhancing the capacity of social impact groups, social movements, political organizations, and communities throughout the world to engage with conflict creatively and constructively, in order to strengthen democracy and create a more just and peaceful society. The goal is not simply to increase civility, but to explore our differences without losing touch with our common humanity. To focus social, political and community passions on problem-solving and peacebuilding will make change easier, more effective, more inclusive, and less painful. Fields of interest include but are not limited to social change, analysis of political and social systems, communities in conflict, peacebuilding and conflict engagement practices. Topics of current relevance with heightened urgency, as well as cultural ideas and expressions are also encouraged. Please see the Submissions Guidelines if you are interested in contributing to the journal www.TheJDP.org.

From the Editors:

Welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of Democracy and Peacebuilding*. It is indeed an honor to serve as the first editors of what we believe is a unique opportunity for conflict engagement practitioners and peacebuilders to speak their peace (pun intended), unfettered by many of the usual publication constraints.

As members of the international community of conflict engagement practitioners and peacebuilders, we focus on the interconnection of democracy, conflict, and peacebuilding. We invite you to take this journey with us. Here we hope to offer a place to explore ways to illuminate, discuss, critique, assess and reassess, problem solve and review our collective challenges and possible solutions to resolving conflict and building peace.

This journal, its editors, contributors, and collaborators are committed to enhancing the capacity of social impact groups, social change movements, political organizations, and communities throughout the world to engage with conflict creatively and constructively to strengthen democracy and create a more just and peaceful society. The goal is not simply to increase civility, but to explore our differences without losing touch with our common humanity. Focusing social, political and community passions on problem-solving and peacebuilding will make change easier, more effective, more inclusive, and less painful. In every democracy, the need to join together as *thought leaders* and *peace practitioners* has never been as critical as it is today, and this publication only serves to affirm the positive, creative role that our collective minds can play in conflict transformation.

Finally, thank you to all our contributors for taking time to share their thoughtful, valuable work with us.

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Just Thinking: The Meaning of Our Words

By JoAnn McAllister, PhD

ABSTRACT

Words are our primary mode of conveying meaning. We string them together to tell our stories and intend for those who read them to 'get it.' And, yet, how they are understood is always in the hands of the recipient whether they are colleagues, collaborators, or antagonists. Beginning with JDP's primary words – Democracy and Peacebuilding – the challenges of being understood in our current social conditions are legion. These challenges are not just with those who have different or opposing views, they can arise even among collaborative groups. Some strategies to increase understanding are suggested here. The first one is to ask ourselves first: "what do I mean by that?"

Just Thinking: The Meaning of Our Words

We use words to tell stories about our past, present, and future as individuals and as groups large and small – families, communities, organizations, states, countries, cultures, and religious traditions.[1] We also use stories to sell things – ideas, beliefs, preferred attitudes, acceptable behavior, and, of course, things. The words we use impart our values and the choice of words suggests the beliefs that are the source of our expressions. We select words intentionally to make the story 'work,' that is, to convey our perspective. It is important to remember this: all stories present a point of view, and their authors intend to convey that point of view in even the most 'objective' of works.

What recipients of our stories take away though is their interpretation of the words and what the story means for them. Yes, words have definitions and, yet, as we know from experience, words whose meaning we think are obvious are often misinterpreted. The recipients of our stories have a point of view, too, and our words are filtered through their lenses. Met with a rebuttal, we may try to revise, explain, or, sometimes, defend with more or less success but making meaning is done by the recipient.

I offer these thoughts as part of a new collaboration, the JDP team, because people who begin an activity together usually believe they understand and agree on the underlying ideas and values. For example, in beginning a new enterprise, a group develops a mission statement and documents that tell the world who they are and what they want to do. As prelude to this inaugural issue of the Journal of Democracy and Peacebuilding, the JDP team developed a mission statement as part of the submission guidelines for those who want to publish their work in the journal.

The parameters are specific, the name of the journal is further defined by the subtitle: "a journal for the international community of conflict engagement and peacebuilding practitioners." Seems straightforward but my experience in collaborative groups of all kinds – friends, work, community, social change – is that we often do not have the same understanding of the words we use to describe our beliefs and intentions.

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[1] I use stories and narratives interchangeably here. In keeping with a constructivist ontology and epistemology, I consider all of our knowledge 'some kind of story.'

Democracy and Peacebuilding, for example, are loaded with possible definitions and interpretations. I think of Humpty Dumpty's response to Alice asking: "can you make words mean so many different things?" and his reply that a word "means just what I choose it to mean." In the United States and in many parts of the world people are doing just that with the word democracy. That is a problem and depending on your point of view democracy is in trouble here and in other countries with democratic systems.

In the United States, the Constitution is the template for understanding our form of democracy. Even so, the words of the preamble: "we the People," "a more perfect union," "justice," "tranquility," "common defense," "General Welfare," and the "Blessings of Liberty" are the subject of multiple interpretations of what exactly they mean. Moreover, these words rest on the philosophy expressed in The Declaration of Independence – "all Men are created equal,[2]" and "endowed" with the Rights of "Life," "Liberty," and "the Pursuit of Happiness." The meaning of these narratives and each word and phrase was contested at the time they were written, the debates have been continuous, and today have become contentious and a source of the polarization of civic discourse. If these words mean different things to different people, how do we talk to each other whether across the political divide or with allies or potential collaborators.

I used the word lenses above in describing the point of view of the recipient of your story. We all view the world through a particular lens, usually our default view of reality unless we adopt a specific framework. Our view of the world has been composed of all we are woven from the threads of our personal histories. In a conversation I would be able to ask the hearer of my story about their context and, perhaps, understand their perception of what I said and their perspective about the topic. In sending a missive out into the world it is more challenging to ensure understanding and minimize misinterpretation. This is why I suggest the first step whether in conversation or in written communication is to know your own story. [3]

What do you mean by the words you use? It is so easy to assume you know what you mean, and that you are being clear and convincing. However, understanding your own beliefs begins with examining where they come from and what dynamics shaped them. So, what does this word democracy mean to me and what are some sources that have shaped my perspective? It means that:
- as the daughter of a working-class family, I am equal;
- as a woman, I am equal;
- all others are equal; and that
- my role is to ensure the equality of all by promoting the "General Welfare."

Democracy is not an abstract word for me and when I use it I am not neutral. I know what I mean, and I am passionate about it. What I need to remember is to be mindful and listen to the stories of others and their understanding of democracy.

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[2] Belatedly corrected in the 15th amendment to include all men "without regard to race, color, or previous condition of servitude," and the 19th to include women as citizens eligible to vote.

[3] This epistemological process of self-reflection and engaging in a reflective conversation has been described in a previous paper: McAllister, J. (2016). A Human Science Approach to Engaging in Transformational Social Change. Human Science Perspectives, vol.1(1). https://humanscienceinstitute.org/journal-and-publications/

Words have always mattered, but perhaps not as much as they do today when there seems to be even more nefarious attempts to manipulate the civic conversation and confuse, if not just outright lie about, the important issues that challenge democracies. Sometimes I find I have no words to describe the degraded dialogue that purports to be about our national and international challenges – questions of survival for people and planet. What I do know is that words matter! I look forward to reading your thoughts about what the words that we have selected to describe our collaborative effort mean to you and how you use them in your work to "engage with conflict, creatively and constructively in order to strengthen democracy and create a more just and peaceful society."

About the Author:
JoAnn McAllister, PhD, focuses on the development of social change theory and practice that is guided by an appreciation for the cultural context, beliefs, and aspirations of communities. She is working on a new book: *Still Doing Democracy: Finding Common Ground and Acting for the Common Good* (www.StillDoingDemocracy.com). She is the President of the Human Science Institute (www.HumanScienceInstitute.org) and teaches qualitative research at Walden University.

Electoral Conflicts and Political Polarization: What Can Mediators Do?

By Kenneth Cloke, JD, PhD, LLM

"Our trust in the future has lost its innocence. We know now that anything can happen from one minute to the next. Politics, religion, economics, and the institutions of family and community all have become abruptly unsure."
John O'Donohue

"We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal on the fare,
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love..."
William Butler Yeats

"Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, you are unlikely to step up and take responsibility for making it so."
Noam Chomsky

"The scales of Justice weigh out gain
to those who've learned from pain…"
Aeschylus

Biden and Harris won the U.S. election, but what exactly did they win? What was lost in the process? What is lost and won in electoral conflicts around the world? The U.S. experience offers some lessons for those who seek to reduce the destructive impact of electoral conflicts.

This was obviously an important victory for Democrats, but it has come at a significant cost, both for democracy and for conflict resolution. These costs can be seen in widespread refusals to accept the outcome, unwillingness to cooperate in peacefully transferring power, open support for the undemocratic principle of minority rule, armed threats to voting, opposition to even counting ballots, removal of polling stations in opposing communities, intentional obstruction of the postal service, selective disenfranchisement of minority voters, bizarre gerrymandering, obstructive voter ID requirements, efforts to manipulate the Electoral College and ballot counting, knowingly false claims of electoral victory and voter fraud, and widespread efforts to undermine democratic principles. And all of it supported, at least tacitly, by a near majority of voters.

Over the last several years, we have witnessed a steady undermining of democratic rights and legal protections, and the creation and consolidation of an infrastructure and scaffolding that permit, excuse, and fan the flames of tyranny, despotism, autocracy, dictatorship, dishonesty, and yes, fascism. The fact that none of these were able to emerge full-blown in this election does not mean they could not have, or that they will not in some future election.

The perception that democracy and majority rule inevitably lead to the loss of power, wealth, and status by a previously dominant minority inexorably pushes their effort to regain dominance into ever more extreme, adversarial positions. Holding on to political power against the wishes of a

majority requires the use of authoritarianism, demagoguery, hatred, lying, prejudice, militarism, moral corruption, bullying, environmental destruction, and dehumanizing violence. These tools are needed to suppress democratic values, constitutional protections, civil rights, rule of law, and the freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, and the press—and with them, the possibility of political dialogue, collaborative negotiation, problem solving, consensus building, restorative justice, mediation, and the whole of conflict resolution. While these may seem like abstract and distant ideals, they impact the daily lives of all of us around the world.

These events are taking place in a context of chronic, unresolved national and international conflicts that deeply divide us, and threaten democracy both in the U.S. and abroad. These include conflicts over the economic impact and response to Covid 19 infections; nuclear proliferation and warlike 'big stick' diplomacy against international competitors; openly prejudicial statements and hostility toward historically despised minorities; threats of violence and retaliation by armed ultra-right and neo-Nazi militias; growing poverty; and the expanding pace of global warming, environmental devastation, and species extinction—none of which have been adequately acknowledged, let alone discussed or addressed.

Each of these important and compelling issues takes the form of conflicts that require cross-cultural communication, joint problem solving, and collaboration between political adversaries, which, in turn, require higher order skills in non-violent communication, consensus building, dialogue facilitation, collaborative negotiation, impasse resolution, mediation, and similar interest-based processes. Yet these skills are nearly impossible to practice when the mere idea that there could be a middle ground is regarded as treasonous; when science is considered a conspiracy; and when dialogue, collaboration, and respect for legal rights are viewed as weaknesses that can legitimately be bypassed, outmaneuvered, or silenced though the use of force and violence.

As mediators, it is important for us to recognize that these losses and setbacks in the arena of politics are simultaneously losses and setbacks for the entire project of conflict resolution; for jointly tackling and solving our common problems; for democracy as a defense against bias, tyranny, and the silencing of political dissent; and for resolving the complex social, economic, political, healthcare, and ecological conflicts and crises that increasingly threaten our global survival.

What, then, can we do? As a first step, we can acknowledge that addressing these issues requires, not just periodic elections and topical applications of political pressure, but a complete rethinking, redesign, and reorganization of political discourse, political decision-making, and the ways political conflicts are addressed, handled, spoken about, and resolved.

If we view politics as social problem solving, and as a conflict resolution process, we can redesign it in ways that strengthen our ability to use collaborative, participatory, interest-based, consensus building, non-adversarial forms of political discourse and decision-making. This means acknowledging that complex, multi-faceted political issues concern alternative possible futures, and thus, always have more than one correct answer.

Successful political problem solving therefore requires all nations to evolve beyond simplistic, one-sided, adversarial, winner-take-all processes and relationships; to learn how to turn dissent

and disagreement into improved outcomes; and to remember what we already know as mediators: that the richest and most important conversations always take place beneath the relatively superficial arguments people are having.

These insights suggest that we can use conflict resolution systems design principles to explore and implement a wide range of participatory methodologies and procedures, such as citizen's assemblies, focus groups, citizen's juries, town hall meetings, deliberative democracy, alternative forms of voting, community dialogues, sortation (used in ancient Athens), public policy and environmental mediation, large group consensus building processes, and similar efforts that broaden problem solving, deepen decision-making, and turn diversity and dissent in a less adversarial and more collaborative and democratic direction.

As a second step, we can strengthen our skills and capacities in using a rich, robust, and diverse array of processes, techniques, methods, and approaches to addressing political differences, such as reaching agreements on shared values, guiding principles, and ground rules; asking questions that do not have a single correct answer; using paradoxical forms of problem solving; creatively overcoming impasses; and trying experimental approaches to implementation, such as pilot projects, charettes, rubrics, negotiated criteria, 360 degree evaluations, constructive feedback, and continuous improvement, among others.

As a third step, we can recognize that political arguments, which seem hard-boiled, factual, and ideological on the surface, are actually deeply emotional, intimate, and heartfelt topics that have become overheated and highly polarized, partly because they are framed as 'either/or' alternatives that require one side to win and the other to lose; and partly because both sides care so deeply about issues that matter to them, and concern outcomes they passionately desire.

Resolving political conflicts therefore requires higher order skills, not only in emotional intelligence, active and responsive listening, empathy building, non-violent communication, and appreciative inquiry; but in creative problem solving, group facilitation, conflict coaching, and opening heart-to-heart conversations between distrustful and passionate antagonists. While mediators and conflict resolvers practice these skills every day, we are not nearly as adept or skillful as we need to be in working with highly polarized political opponents.

What we have not yet done is figure out how to talk about these issues in ways that allow them to be resolved at deeper levels, and thereby become less divisive. The remedy is not to meet somehow in the 'middle,' for example, between slavery and freedom, or disenfranchisement and the right to vote, or dictatorship and democracy; but to see that these are manifestations of deeper, underlying dysfunctions in conflict-promoting political systems, which unnecessarily position one person's gain as another person's loss, pitting us against each other, sometimes simply as a way of motivating voters to vote for otherwise lackluster candidates who promise to favor them over others for purely personal gain.

The remedy is clear. It is to shift our political center of gravity from debates to dialogues, from bullying and epithets to open and honest communications, from closed-hearted to open-hearted conversations, from power and rights to interest-based forms of problem solving and dispute

resolution, from retributive to restorative justice, from lying and enduring enmity to truth and reconciliation.

The means, here, are the end, the process *is* the content, and the goal *is* the way we go about trying to achieve it. Our first challenge lies in learning how to coalesce into political language, into conversations, sentences, and words, a deep empathy for the person with a passionate commitment to solving the problem; an unconditional affirmation of respect and inclusion with an unconditional affirmation of dissent and difference of opinion; a desire for unity in facing problems with an acknowledgement of the value of diversity in our approaches to solving them, and willingness to disagree in pursuit of a deeper truth. Here are a few questions for political adversaries that seek to do that:

- What life experiences have you had that have led you to feel so passionately about this issue?
- Where do your beliefs come from? Family? Faith? Culture? Work?
- What do you think your beliefs might be if you had been born into a different family, religion, race, gender, class, or time?
- What is at the heart of this issue, for you as an individual?
- Why do you care so much about this issue?
- Do you see any gray areas in the issue we are discussing, or ideas you find it difficult to define?
- Do you have any mixed feelings, doubts, uncertainties, or discomforts regarding this issue that you would be willing to share?
- Is there any part of this issue that you are not 100% certain of or would be willing to discuss and talk about?
- What questions or points of curiosity do you have for people who have different views?
- What are some of the key words or phrases that divide us? That unite us?
- What are some 'hot button' political words or phrases for you?
- What do these words or phrases they mean or imply to you? Why? What experiences have you had with them?
- What emotions do you experience, or get triggered by, with each word?
- Do you think other definitions, meanings, experiences, or emotions are possible? How?
- What if we decided not to use words that divide or trigger us? Are you willing to try, right now?
- Even though we hold widely differing views, are there any concerns or ideas we have in common?
- What values or ethical beliefs led you to your current political beliefs?
- What facts, if proven to be true, might cause you to think differently?
- Is it possible to view our differences as two sides of the same coin? If so, what unites them? What is the coin?
- Without mentioning your preferred candidate, what principles do you believe the candidate you support stands for? Why are those principles important to you?
- What are your goals for this election, other than to elect the candidate you support? Why are those goals important to you?
- How might we extend those principles and goals to this conversation we are having right now?

- What do these principles and goals require of us, in the way we treat each other, or how we talk to each other about the candidates we each support?
- What forms of political argument or support do you feel are ineffective, counter-productive, or encourage you to resist?
- What forms of political argument or support do you feel are effective, productive, or encourage you to think and learn from those you disagree with?
- What ideals or principles do you think both candidates share?
- What do you think will happen if our arguments or support become too adversarial or confrontational?
- How might we work together to prevent that from happening?
- Is there anything positive or acknowledging you would be willing to say about the people on the other side of this issue?
- Instead of focusing on the past, what would you like to see happen in the future? Why?
- Do you think we are disagreeing about fundamental values, or over how to achieve them?
- Is there any way that both of you could be right about different aspects of the issue? How?
- What criteria could you use to decide which ideas or approaches work best?
- Would it be possible to test our ideas in practice and see which work best? How might we do that?
- What could be done to improve each of our ideas?
- Could any of my ideas be incorporated into yours? How?
- Is there any aspect of this issue that either of us have left out? Are there any other alternatives to what we are both saying?
- What could we do to improve our process for disagreeing with each other in the future? For encouraging dialogue? Would you be willing to do that together?
- Do you think this has been a useful and constructive conversation? If so, how? If not, what could we do better?
- What is one thing I could do that would make this conversation work better for you?
- What did you learn from our conversation?
- What would you like to do differently in the future if we disagree? How could we make our dialogue ongoing or more effective?

Electoral democracy has gone through a period of profound conflicts, yet each unique conflict points us toward potential solutions and more collaborative processes. Here are a few proposals to help resolve electoral conflicts between political parties, fortify voting rights, improve trust in outcomes, strengthen democracy, encourage dialogue between differing groups and factions, and promote participation in political decision-making, based on the core democratic principles of popular sovereignty, majority rule, and minority rights.
- In advance of elections, initiate facilitated dialogues in diverse local communities to increase communication and understanding, and elicit consensus-based recommendations for ways of conducting upcoming elections more collaboratively, fairly, and securely.
- Create a multi-party national electoral commission to summarize popular input, synthesize ideas, reach consensus, and recommend improved rules and processes, including minimal standards for electoral fairness for all elections.
- Invite representatives of political parties to meet, aided by professional mediators and facilitators, to discuss, collaboratively negotiate, and reach consensus on rules to govern

elections, including conduct of candidates during debates, ethical campaign ads, limits on financial contributions, ways of reducing fraud and dishonesty, resolving contested outcomes, and accepting final results.

- Establish and enforce a Voter's Bill of Rights that guarantees one person/one vote as a universal right of all citizens.
- Establish automatic, life-long voter registration for all citizens, based on a commonly used form of identification.
- Permit and protect mail-in ballots and advance voting and require that all such votes be counted in advance of in-person voting.
- Require that voting machines be secure, non-hackable, manufactured by non-partisan companies or agencies, and capable of creating a paper trail.
- Fund the development of free, secure, easy-to-use apps that inform citizens of their voting rights, provide forums for facilitated dialogues and discussion of the issues, enable fact-checking, support online dispute resolution, and permit online voting, making sure there is access to computers and internet for those without.
- Initiate in-person and online dialogues and town-hall meetings in local communities following candidate debates, led by professional mediators and facilitators, in which participants discuss and reach consensus on recommended solutions to issues raised during the debates, and ways of improving debate and dialogue processes.
- Tighten restrictions on private, special interest, and foreign campaign contributions, and on electorally related contributions to candidates or PACs above a mutually agreed upon amount.
- Shorten the electoral timetable, and provide public funding for federal campaign ads, with a precondition, that these be fact-checked and candidate approved prior to airing.
- Use mathematical modeling, artificial intelligence, and community and public policy mediation to identify, restrict, and repair gerrymandering, and make it easier for citizens to challenge electoral boundaries in court.
- Improve, automate, and streamline the process for recounting ballots, using neutral or bipartisan observers wherever outcomes are contested, and mitigate 'winner take all' elections by using percentage or proportional representation, instant runoff voting (allowing second choice votes to count) fusion voting (allowing two or more parties to nominate the same candidate), and similar methods.
- Pass legislation making election days national holidays, with paid time off to enable those who work to vote.
- Establish Ombuds offices to investigate and resolve electoral conflicts, convene candidates and representatives of political parties to prevent and resolve conflicts that arise before, during, and after elections; and mediate issues before going to court.
- After elections are over, invite people in diverse communities into dialogues to evaluate the electoral process, reach consensus on recommendations for future elections, and discuss ways of healing, reuniting, and commit to working together to solve common problems, using restorative justice circles, and facilitated truth and reconciliation processes.

There will always be many more ways of undermining and destroying social relationships than of building or advancing them, yet we have always progressed as a species more by working with, than against one another, and as our technological power and capacity for destructiveness continue to grow at an increasing pace, our challenge will be to strengthen communicative skills and

capacity for collaboration at an equal or greater pace, if we are to avoid descending into barbarism and a war of each against all.

In conflict, our options ultimately boil down to two: go it alone, or face it together. We make these choices every day, as individuals and neighbors; but we also make them as organizations, societies, and nations. With the development of mediation, dialogue facilitation, collaborative negotiation, consensus building, and similar skills, we are better able to face our problems together and collaboratively. All that is required is our decision, determination, and collective effort to make it happen.

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A Discursive Public Health Approach to Wrongdoing and the Wrongdoer

By Dianne Williams, PhD

ABSTRACT

Punishment as retribution belongs to a penal philosophy that is archaic and discredited by penologists. Our correctional system, whose raison d'etre is correcting or rehabilitating wrongdoers, serves instead to protect society against crime and exact such punishment on wrongdoers that they are expected to refrain from future wrongdoing regardless of the underlying reasons for the initial engagement in criminal activity. This logic assumes that man is a rational, pleasure-seeking creature who can be prevented from engaging in antisocial and illegal behavior simply because of the prospect that the pain of punishment will outweigh the benefits gained from the commission of the crime. This is another assumption that may again, be misplaced, if recidivism rates and prison population are any indication.

A Discursive Public Health Approach to Wrongdoing and the Wrongdoer

Western approaches to reducing crime have focused solely on retribution and continue to do so despite not having had the desired impact. The utilitarian justification for this retributive approach is a reduction in recidivism of existing offenders and deterrence of would-be offenders. This assumes a societal desire to reduce crime by seamlessly reintegrating wrongdoers. This assumption may be misplaced.

If it was surmised, as early as 1965, that prisons were not achieving their proclaimed goals, and were instead a delusional concept and actively destructive, then what are we, as a society gaining from supporting a practice that now exists solely to facilitate higher profit margins for unscrupulous businesses and which ultimately marginalizes, on average, 2.7 million citizens, the vast majority of whom, in reality, have the potential to be contributing members of society. In essence, our criminal justice system does not dispense justice and our correctional system does not correct—enter Restorative Justice (RJ).

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a Public Health approach to crime that aims to support transformative change. This approach deals with violence as though it was an epidemic or contagious disease. To prescribe relevant solutions, policy makers and program designers study and analyze the underlying causes of violence and design targeted initiatives to curb its spread. Public health is a science based on a multi-disciplinary approach which utilizes a broad knowledge base to successfully respond to a range of health conditions. This necessarily means that acts of violence, must be viewed as (1) the symptom of a deeper health issue, particularly in the case of the wrongdoer (person who caused the harm), and (2) must be viewed from the perspective that just as there are secondary and tertiary victims of wrongdoing, society is a secondary and/or tertiary wrongdoer. We could argue that, as communities of care of both the person who has been harmed and the person who caused the harm, we have failed the wrongdoer in some way or we have created such a dysfunctional environment that the wrongdoer, for his/her own survival, was forced to engage in the inappropriate, antisocial, illegal, or nonconforming activity in the first place. This is particularly true for juvenile wrongdoers and wrongdoers who belong to other vulnerable or marginalized groups. In essence, guilt is subjective and secondary and tertiary wrongdoers hold levels of culpability based on societal proximity to the primary wrongdoer.

A Public Health approach to violence emphasizes collective action from diverse sectors including health, education, social services, justice, policy, and the private sector, not only for the benefit of the victims/survivors but, and perhaps more importantly, for the benefit of the wrongdoer, especially if the goal is to give the victims (primary, secondary and tertiary) a greater sense of peace by reducing the likelihood that the wrongdoer will reoffend. And what of the wrongdoer? If the victim's sense of peace is inextricably tied to the likelihood that the wrongdoer will not reoffend then it stands to reason that the rehabilitation of the wrongdoer is as important as the victim's. With this many actors (primary, secondary, and tertiary wrongdoers and primary, secondary, and tertiary victims), it is no wonder that the process must be necessarily discursive.

The recognition of violence as a health issue is premised on the acknowledgement that violent behavior is rarely ever 'senseless' or 'violent', but rather arises from contextual, biological, environmental, systemic, and social stressors. It is analogous to an epidemic in which violence spreads, clusters, and transmits through exposure. Therefore, violence is not symptomatic of 'bad people' and can be better depicted as a negative health outcome resulting from exposure to numerous risk factors. This forms the basis of a trauma-informed approach suggesting that there is underlying historic or situational trauma for every violent act.

To be clear, the goal of RJ is not to be an alternative to the existing criminal justice system. In fact, to be truly effective, restorative processes and principles must be embedded into and operate within traditional criminal justice systems. Though RJ differs greatly from the current retributive criminal justice model, there are some noted similarities. Restorative processes, for example, embrace tenets of retributive justice in that offenders are assumed to be mentally competent and morally culpable actors and are expected to accept responsibility for their actions and acknowledge the impact on the parties directly involved as well as the wider community. A Restorative approach absolutely promotes accountability and Restorative practitioners are committed to a process of acknowledgement and admission. However, the focus is on the unacceptable deed and not on the doer who still has the potential to be a contributing member of society. While the doer is held accountable, the response to the deed need not necessarily be punitive but should, instead, focus on fostering reintegration of the wrongdoer rather than stigmatizing and marginalizing.

Restorative processes introduce tertiary level prevention which typically, in the case of the victim, but also necessarily in the case of the wrongdoer, addresses the problem at the root to reduce the likelihood of recidivism. This is a flexible and discursive process that can take any form, depending on the community, the design of the program, the nature of the case and the participants involved, with the intent of providing more equitable, accessible, compassionate, and pragmatic justice.

Retributive justice places emphasis on victim safety punishment of the wrongdoer, to the exclusion of short term, and perhaps more importantly, long term healing. If applied correctly, Restorative processes can lead to healing and transformation of people, relationships, and communities. In essence, the restorative process normalizes discursive dialogue and negotiation as opposed to the existing adversarial process and in which one social injury simply replaces another.

There is no argument that there are glaring inadequacies in the current framework of criminal justice. Most obvious is a lack of discursiveness, relativism and reflectiveness which limits justice

because of its failure to address oppression and social inequalities. Through its discourse and its practices, the existing Criminal Justice system continually invokes and reproduces the dominant affluent caucasian male's subjectivity of law. In contrast, a fundamental feature of Restorative Justice is discursiveness. Almost all restorative models prescribe that all parties, victims, wrongdoers, and their communities of care, (as secondary and tertiary actors) participate in the process by sharing their own accounts of their experiences and contributing to the final decision on what needs to happen to make things right.

This allows for restorative processes to include the reproduction of the subjectivity of those involved via storytelling, external to the rigid confines of western law. Rather than giving privilege to the law, professionals and the state, restorative resolutions engage those who have been harmed, those who caused the harm, and their affected communities in a search for solutions that promote repair, reconciliation, and the rebuilding of relationships. Restorative justice seeks to build partnerships to re-establish mutual responsibility for constructive responses to wrongdoing within communities.

Restorative Justice has at its core the transformation of punitive attitudes when dealing with wrongdoers and the normalizing of a more pragmatic approach to violence, because it investigates the root cause of the behavior and targets it directly, rather than providing temporary relief of the symptoms through retribution and punishment. The process is often misconceived as being too soft and informal because it does not necessarily denounce the harm caused to the victim as unacceptable, nor does it necessarily contradict justifications and trivializations made by the wrongdoer, but rather focuses on the long-term healing of all parties involved. The process argues that both the victim and the wrongdoer, as primary actors, as well as their communities of care as secondary and tertiary actors have a role to play in the conflict. While this may reduce the wrongdoer's sense of personal responsibility, the approach encourages collective decision making.

The process facilitates communication and compensates for existing power imbalances by lending support to the weaker party. The setting is non-adversarial, provides the opportunity for wrongdoers to understand and take responsibility for their behaviors without blaming the victims, while identifying underlying comorbidities in the wrongdoer's unaddressed and past trauma such as drug or alcohol abuse. It is this open dialogue in a non-judgmental environment which aids the healing process of the victims as well as the wrongdoer and both parties' communities of care. It is also mandatory that the wrongdoer acknowledge the basic facts of the case and that the process maintains the interest of the victim even as it acknowledges the needs of the wrongdoer. Thus, considerable effort is spent within the RJ process assessing the risks and needs of the victims and mitigating any possible harm.

In the final analysis, the restorative process is used to bring victims and wrongdoers together to enable the wrongdoer to acknowledge and accept responsibility for the action that has caused the harm, to allow the victim the opportunity to talk about the impact of the wrongdoer's action, and to allow both parties to take an active part in the determination of what is needed to repair the harm done. From a restorative point of view, although much emphasis is placed on the victims and the harm caused, there is a need to focus equally on wrongdoers and affected communities to consider all stakeholders' feelings. Although restorative processes represent more than just getting or giving justice, they ought not to be viewed as contradicting retributive processes as they borrow and blend

many elements of traditional practices. Ultimately, however, it is about positively influencing human behavior through the use of an iterative process that invites the active participation of communities of care to not only accept responsibility for the wrongdoer's actions, in their capacity as secondary and tertiary wrongdoers, but to also share in the decision making as to what needs to happen to heal the harm, what needs to be done to meet the underlying needs of both the victim and the wrongdoer and how all parties can engage in behavior changes that contribute to the seamless reintegration of the wrongdoer and a reduction in the likelihood of recidivism.

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Bordering on Failure: A Tale of Discovering the Three Rules of Conflict

By Duncan Autrey, MA

ABSTRACT

This article tells the story of how I discovered the Three Rules for Transforming Conflict, while working on a series of border conflicts in Ecuador. This allegorical tale teaches poignant lessons about the essential nature of conflict and the existential value of improving our political, social, and environmental discourse. The three rules of conflict present a guide to improving collective decision making. The rules teach us to get clear on what the conflict is really about; to include everyone who is involved; and to ensure that the process of transformation is aligned with the desired outcome. Win-Lose processes are dividing us, impeding our healing and progress, and they are undermining our sense of shared humanity. In contrast, this story reminds us that being in any ongoing relationship means that we are interdependent, so our shared success depends on the quality of our processes. We all win, or we all lose.

Bordering on Failure: A Tale of Discovering the Three Rules of Conflict

This is the story of how I discovered the three rules for transforming conflict, while simultaneously failing to prevent it. As we face our current political, social, and existential challenges, this tale may serve as an allegory, offering insights into how we can change the way we change today.

In 2013, I had just graduated with a master's degree in International Security, Peace, and Conflict Studies from Universidad del Salvador in Buenos Aires, I launched my career as a Conflict Transformation Facilitator. Soon afterward, I joined a colleague in Ecuador to explore a possible project for Mediators Beyond Borders International. We spoke with politicians, organizers, lawyers, and heads of mediation organizations.

One recurring topic was the pending national deadline to resolve hundreds of border disputes throughout Ecuador. The country had over 700 undefined, under-defined, or disputed municipal, cantonal, and provincial borders. The President of Ecuador passed a law requiring every political leader to define their territory's borders by a certain date or risk their job.

As border conflicts go, these weren't very scary. People had lived happily with blurry borders for centuries, without many significant issues. They were primarily a source of confusion arising from historical accidents. Most borders were created long before technology, using descriptions based on long forgotten geographical features. In many regions, the descriptions written in the founding documents didn't correspond with their neighbors. Generally, the situation presented a logistical challenge, not an existential one.

That's until we arrived in the mountain city of Cuenca, to meet with Chechi, the Vice Governor of Azuay. Their province was responsible for 32 borders, and one of the border discrepancies was becoming very contentious. By historical accident, the border between mountainous Azuay and coastal Guayas, hadn't been clearly defined for over 400 years. The disputed area, of cloud-forested mountains and cacao fields, included an indigenous community and over a dozen towns. Over 60,000 people were in limbo.

Chechi explained that they wanted to peacefully define their borders, and that they needed immediate help. Recognizing that this conflict-opportunity, wasn't for MBBI, I eagerly offered my services as a newly minted conflict transformation professional, and they accepted.

Three weeks later, I moved to beautiful Cuenca from Buenos Aires, and I began my new job as the Community Communications Director at the Provincial Government of Azuay. I had my first real job transforming conflict.

It quickly became a professional nightmare. The newly assembled team was chaotic and under extreme time pressure. The leader of the team became angry and spiteful. The real challenge arose, because I was an unknown person from a different culture, who was proposing ideas that people weren't ready for.

But they wanted my new ideas. They asked me to flip the script ("*cambiar el chip*") on their conflict and show a new way of approaching it. I faced the challenge enthusiastically, but I couldn't pierce through the urgency.

When sides were taken, voices were excluded, and things spiraled into violence, I was an easy scapegoat.

Nonetheless, my efforts to create a poignant way to communicate about conflict led me to discover *"The Three Rules of Conflict Transformation."* They have been a guide and companion ever since.

Rule One
The conflict is not about what it's about.

If my mission was to introduce a new way of thinking about this border situation and to transform this confrontation into an opportunity for generative collaboration, rule one was the starting point.

I needed to demonstrate that it wasn't about the border, rather how it impacted people's lives. When people are in conflict, it's usually over strategies or things. When the situation creates an emotional charge, something personally important is happening. This is why conflict is an opportunity to truly get to know one another, and it's also why conflict is so intense and complex.

The wisdom that *"the conflict is not about what it's about"* arises directly from mediators' interest-based approach to resolving conflict. We know the way through conflict is to reveal and meet everyone's underlying needs and interests.

My first task was to figure out the underlying needs in the impacted communities. I used this first rule to explain why our first step was to travel along the border to interview community leaders. Our goal was to determine what was important to them so officials would consider it as they defined the border. I delved into these communities to ask questions about what mattered to them, their historical experiences, concerns, and who they thought officials should include in the conversation.

As expected, these interviews revealed that the conflict wasn't about what the governors thought it was about. People weren't concerned about the invisible borders or GPS coordinates. Instead, they asked, "Who's going to provide water, electricity, and education?"

People shared stories of identity: where their ancestors came from, marriages, and the food they enjoyed. Their cultural differences were important. Azuay's mountain culture and Guayas' coastal culture have very distinct histories and traditions.

I submitted reports to my boss to inform our overall strategy and show the conflict was not just about the border. The people cared about identity and public services, so those were the topics the political leaders and negotiators needed to address. Beyond maps, people needed to know their leaders would care for them.

Rule 2

Whoever is involved in the conflict needs to be involved in the solution, or it's not going to work.

The next step was to convene discussions between the community leaders and then have incrementally inclusive dialogues in and between the affected communities. These would inform the governors' decisions.

Sharing these reports and my overall strategy revealed that I was gathering a diverse set of perspectives, including from those with a relationship with the Guayas government.

My boss explained that there was no chance we could include, listen to, or create space for the 'enemies' who disagreed with the Azuayan government. He thought me ignorant to have thought that was a good idea.

Recognizing that excluding anyone would undermine our capacity to address this conflict, I uncovered the second rule of conflict. At the time, I emphasized it by adding: *whoever is excluded from the process will include themselves on their terms.* I was new to Ecuador, but I knew enough about conflict to understand that excluding people from the process would only anger them. Sure enough, the border dispute devolved into an "us versus them" situation.

Many were angry at their ostracization. Protests arose in the towns, with an angry mob smashing government vehicles. They took over the government building, ransacking it while we cowered in our offices. As I hid behind a locked door, I knew we had failed because we did not incorporate their voices into the conversation. They believed that forming a mob was the only way to be heard when we should have already been listening.

Rule Three
The process of transforming or resolving a conflict is the same as the outcome.

As complexity grew and deadline pressure rose, the governors' offices took over negotiations, excluding the communities. It became a secret process with lawyers and geographers making short-term choices with long-term implications. While trying to push back against their approach, I identified the third rule of conflict, which means two things.

Firstly, the qualities of the future that we're creating will reflect the qualities of the process. When resolving a dispute, we lay the foundations for the future we want. If the government wanted an outcome that honored the local citizens' needs, the process had to honor them. Clarity about education, water, electricity, and identity was vital, so they needed to talk about those topics throughout. Similarly, an adversarial process creates adversarial outcomes.

Secondly, the process and the outcome are the same because *the outcome is just a new process.* As ill-defined as the previous borders were, they had been there for over 400 years, and these new digitally coded borders will potentially be around for the rest of human history. People will have to live with them and the implications for their education, water, electricity, and identity. It's not merely a static choice.

It was important to recognize that designing the border was not the end of the process; it was the beginning of a new phase.

This point brings us to the **fourth of the three rules of conflict***: There is no final outcome.*

If diverse people are going to be in ongoing relationship, they can expect to always be facing the tension between disagreement and collaboration. New issues and decisions will arise. Thus, one doesn't have to figure out **WHAT** the solution is, instead one must figure out **HOW** they want to find solutions now and in the future.

Epilogue

In the end, while my rules of conflict did not pierce through the urgency, we defined every border by the deadline. The governments celebrated; the people accepted the decision. There was very little bloodshed, and we all learned a lot. Although the three rules of conflict arose from Ecuador, they are applicable everywhere. These rules are useful in understanding the ongoing tension arising in our current political and social systems.

A Three-Fold Lesson

In case you haven't noticed, poorly managed conflict is eroding our democracy. We know the reality of angry mobs that feel excluded. Learning to transform our approaches to political, social, and environmental conflict is existentially important. For long term change we need an omni-win process and outcome. Here is a way to immediately apply the lessons of this story to the conflicts in your own life.

Effective decision-making hinges on the three elements: clarity of *content*, the quality of the *relationship*, and the collaborative nature of the *process*. If you're stuck in a conflict, at least one of these elements is missing.[4]

Use the three rules to bring you back.

CONTENT

Talking in circles? Remember **rule one**: the conflict is (usually) not about what it's about.

- Confirm agreement on the goal: What is the conversation about? and what question are you trying to answer?
- Get on the same page: Define terms and share information sources.
- Find the heart of the matter: Try to understand why the issue is so important to you and to others.

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[4] See: Understanding the Sources of Social & Political Conflict" in the *Conflict Literacy Framework* by the DPACE Initiative for more information. www.dpaceinitiative.org/framework/sources

RELATIONSHIP

Meeting resistance? Remember **rule two**: Whoever is involved in the conflict needs to be part of the resolution, or else...

- Be inclusive: Invite all relevant stakeholders and affected parties into the conversation.
- Don't exclude: If certain groups or perspectives are missing, consider why and what it would take to include them.
- Build trust: Actively improve the quality of the relationships.
- Keep it simple: Recognize and acknowledge your interdependence and human dignity.

PROCESS

Fighting with someone? Remember **rule three**: The process and the outcome are the same.

- Assess your process:
  - Is there a path to collaborative decision-making, or does it lead to a rivalrous cycle of winners and losers?
  - Are the participants empowered to make decisions about the topics they care about?
  - Is there deliberation and dialogue between different perspectives?
- Ask others if the process is working for them and propose new processes.
- Ask for help. There are many organizations and individuals out there who have these skills.
- REMEMBER: If you're in and ongoing relationship there will not be a final outcome.
  - Consider how you want the relationship to feel and function over the long run and move towards that.

We are diverse humans with feelings. We're in relationship, and disagreements will occur. We get to decide together how we engage with our differences. We can choose a way that brings us closer together, is generative and nuanced, or we can pick sides, try to defeat our rivals, and potentially never find a way to solve our shared problems.

We all win, or we all lose.

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Duncan Autrey, MA is a conflict transformation facilitator and educator. As a Rotary World Peace Fellow he studied International Peace and Conflict in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Duncan's conflict management work spans from the local to the international. He's a central leader of the Democracy, Politics and Conflict Engagement Initiative. His current project is a podcast that promotes creation of a win-win democracy and collaborative solutions to our shared human challenges. Learn more at omni-win.com.

The Polarities of Democracy from Conception to Execution

By William J. Benet, PhD

ABSTRACT

People around the globe have embraced democracy to bring about positive social change to address our environmental, economic, and militaristic challenges. Yet, there is no agreement on a definition of democracy that can guide social change efforts. The polarities of democracy presents a unifying theory of democracy to guide healthy, sustainable, and just social change efforts. The theory consists of 10 values, organized as five polarity pairs: freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation. In this definition of democracy, each value (pole) has positive and negative aspects, and the objective is to successfully leverage the polarities so as to maximize the positive aspects and minimize the negative aspects.

Introduction

The Polarities of Democracy theory was developed through my original doctoral research (2001-2006) conducted at the University of Toronto (Benet, 2006), updates and revisions arising from my post-doctoral research (2006-2013) carried out through the University of Toronto (Benet, 2012, 2013), and ongoing subsequent research (2013-present) carried out through the University of Toronto, Walden University, and the Institute for Polarities of Democracy in Washington, DC.

I was exploring the problem of why, while democracy has been and still is the rallying cry for those seeking to overcome oppression, the promise of democracy has never become a reality for all people. In addition to my research. I also was drawing on my 40 plus years of political and social activism in which, while achieving many individual victories, I was unable to find solutions to overcome systemic and structural racism, patriarchy, economic exploitation, and other forms of oppression. The Polarities of Democracy theory emerged from my research as a unifying theory that might be used to make the promise of democracy a reality for everyone.

In constructing my Polarities of Democracy theory, I applied Dr. Barry Johnson's Polarity Thinking (1992, 2020) as my conceptual framework. Johnson says that while there are some problems that can be solved using *either/or* thinking, there are others that involve polarities (aka paradox, dilemma) that require *both/and* thinking because they consist of interdependent poles. These interdependent poles create polarity tensions that go on forever. But the tensions can be intentionally leveraged to maximize the positive aspects of each pole and minimize the downside limitations or negative aspects. This helps leaders, teams, organizations, and communities attain and sustain their preferred future with a *more than the sum of the parts* synergistic effect.

My research supports the finding that democracy should be an either/or solution to the problem of oppression in both the workplace and in society. It should provide a system of governance that (a) overcomes oppression (our deepest fear), (b) achieves human emancipation (our highest aspiration), and (c) advances healthy, sustainable, and just organizations and communities. But the

challenge in achieving and sustaining democracy as an either/or solution to oppression is that it also requires both/and thinking.

So, my research concludes that democracy requires ten values, each of which is essential, but none of which are sufficient by themselves. Rather, these ten critical values exist as five polarity pairs. To realize the promise of democracy, both/and thinking is needed to effectively leverage these five pairs to maximize the positive aspects of each pole and minimize the negative aspects of each pole. Thus, the Polarities of Democracy's ten values arranged as the five pairs are:

- Freedom and Authority
- Justice and Due-Process
- Diversity and Equality
- Human Rights and Communal Obligations
- Participation and Representation

Further, each of the Polarities of Democracy pairs are interrelated with the other pairs, creating a *multarity* (a system of two or more interdependent polarity pairs). To seek greater democratization, we must effectively leverage each pair of values by maximizing the positive aspects and minimizing the negative aspects of each pole. Because the pairs are interdependent, failure to successfully leverage any one pair of values negatively impacts the other pairs.

In addition to Johnson's Polarity Management serving as my conceptual framework, there are three other foundational works underlying the Polarities of Democracy theory: Robert Blake and Jane Srygley Mouton's *Managerial Grid* (1964, 1985), R. Freeman Butts' *Decalogue of Civic Values* (1980), and Budd Hall's *Participatory Research* (1975).

Finally, my research draws from concepts that span Western, Eastern, African, and Indigenous literature and wisdom. This suggests that the principles of democracy may have universal applicability to all cultures and time periods. This may allow us to pursue positive social change by overcoming the forces of power and privilege that sustain systemic forms of racial, gender, social, environmental, and economic oppression and violence.

Application of the Theory

The Polarities of Democracy theory is now being used by doctoral students and graduates around the world to make the promise of democracy a reality for all people. Current and completed studies explore achieving positive social change that overcomes oppression in (among others) the US, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Niger, Liberia, Bangladesh, and Haiti. Walden University has served as the primary location for those doctoral students and graduates using the Polarities of Democracy as their theoretical framework.

The post-doctoral application of social change projects is carried out through the Institute for Polarities of Democracy, a 501(c)(3) organization headquartered in Washington, DC. The Institute was created in 2017 to equip a cadre of post-doctoral scholar/practitioners with the tools and skills to apply the theory to real world social problems on a global basis.

The Institute for Polarities of Democracy Anti-Racism Initiative

The Institute's current primary focus is its Anti-Racism Initiative (Institute for Polarities of Democracy, 2020) being carried out in strategic alliance with the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE). This initiative, developed in response to the murder of George Floyd, uses the Polarities of Democracy theory and Critical Race Theory to promote the 21st Century Policing Report (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015) developed under the Obama administration and intended to transform policing from a warrior mentality to a guardian mentality (Institute for Polarities of Democracy, 2020).

Initiative Timeline

Conceptualization of the Anti-Racism Initiative (Benet & McMillan, 2021) began shortly after the murder of George Floyd. On May 29, 2020, as a senior fellow and coordinator of the Institute for Polarities of Democracy Learning Community, I issued a call to action to respond to the outcry over George Floyd's murder. Dr. Joseph McMillan, a past president of NOBLE and a fellow of the Institute, immediately proposed a joint initiative between the Institute and NOBLE. A conference call was held on June 2, 2020, with McMillan, me, and Chief Cerelyn "CJ" Davis, the then president of NOBLE. President Davis then arranged a conference call on June 7 with the past presidents of NOBLE. McMillan proposed the joint initiative, I described the polarities of democracy approach, and the presidents supported proceeding with the development of a formal agreement.

Following the support of the NOBLE past presidents, Dr. McMillan and I conferred with the Institute for Polarities of Democracy president, Dr. Nicole Hayes, and the managing director, Suzanne Rackl. Together, we developed the overall structure for the Anti-Racism Initiative and requested volunteers for the initiative from the Institute's Learning Community. A formal MOA between the Institute and Noble was signed on November 12, 2020.

Initiative Personnel

Ultimately, a total of 22 practitioners, activists, and academicians took part in conducting Phase One of the Institute/NOBLE Initiative. All of their efforts, including those of the initiative co-chairs, were carried out on a pro bono basis. These volunteers were all affiliated with either NOBLE, the Institute, or Walden University. The overall methodological approach of the Anti-Racism Initiative and the Phase 1 analysis was designed by the initiative co-chairs. The remaining volunteers then conducted their efforts in teams under the guidance and with the participation of the initiative co-chairs. Recruitment of Walden faculty and graduates was coordinated through the Walden University Center for Social Change and the efforts of Dr. Bill Schulz (director of the Center) and Molly Raymond (doctoral candidate and Institute fellow).

Initiative Results

The Phase One findings were presented at the NOBLE Annual Conference on August 2, 2021 (Institute for Polarities of Democracy, 2021). One of the most striking takeaways from the analysis of The Report is how relevant its recommendations are today. In many if not most instances, its

recommendations and action items could be drawn directly from current headlines. For example, in providing guidance for the types of training and education that are needed for reimagining policing, in their report, the President's Taskforce on 21st Century Policing (2015) stated:

> The need for understanding, tolerance, and sensitivity to African Americans, Latinos, recent immigrants, Muslims, and the LGBTQ community was discussed at length at the listening session, with witnesses giving examples of unacceptable behavior in law enforcement's dealings with all of these groups. Participants also discussed the need to move towards practices that respect all members of the community equally and away from policing tactics that can unintentionally lead to excessive enforcement against minorities. (p. 52)

Additional Polarities of Democracy Application

Examples of additional specific social change efforts applying the Polarities of Democracy to overcome oppression, promote human emancipation, and advance healthy, sustainable, and just organizations, communities, and nations include:

- Hawaii: An Indigenous Ojibwa's application of the Polarities of Democracy to overcome long-standing oppression and land appropriation of the Kanaka Maoli.
- Haiti: A Native Haitian's application of the Polarities of Democracy to attain higher literacy rates in the rural areas of Haiti such as Pointe l'Abacou.
- Nigeria: A Native Nigerian's application of the Polarities of Democracy to improve the effectiveness of international development initiatives in Northern Nigeria through women's empowerment.
- London: An International Rotarian's application of the Polarities of Democracy to global climate change, international peace and conflict resolution, and anti-racism efforts that address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

A compilation of all of the research completed to date using the Polarities of Democracy has been established by the Walden Center for Social Change. The Polarities of Democracy Collection is housed at the Walden University Library. This collection houses scholarly output of the Walden University community in order to generate, conserve, and transform knowledge to improve human and social conditions. The Polarities of Democracy Collection is located at: https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/pod/

The full scope of the social change efforts being pursued by the Institute for Polarities of Democracy can be found at our website: https://instituteforpod.org/

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Do No Harm: Compassionate Actions Supporting the Common Good

By Wendy Wood, PhD

'If you've come here to help me, you're wasting your time. But if you've come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.'
Lilla Watson

ABSTRACT

To take good care of ourselves and our world is a universal obligation of fundamental importance. As conflict practitioners and peacebuilders, engaging in ways that do not harm others or the planet requires that we are mindful and compassionate; that we use our words wisely and listen deeply; that we are authentic while embracing the ideals of equity and working for the common good; and that all are actions are accompanied with love and joy for the work we do. Based on social science research, these qualities of mindful engagement are essential tools if we are to meet the unique social, political, environmental and community challenges of our time.

Do No Harm

Most of us are familiar with that phrase, 'do no harm,' which comes from the Hippocratic oath, *primum non nocere*, or "first, do no harm." This fundamental global ideal requires that we minimize the harm that is inadvertently caused by our actions. It asks that we be aware of how the consequences of those actions may contribute to wide-ranging and complex repercussions which may be immediate or long term. Mahatma Gandhi rooted his philosophy in *ahimsa*, the overflowing love that arises when all ill will, anger, and hate have subsided from the heart. *Ahimsa* is accomplished by following the precepts of causing no injury through right action, including deeds, thoughts, and words. Gandhi believed *ahimsa* to be a creative force that could lead to one's divine truth and applied this principle and moral imperative of 'do no harm' to all living things.

We are living in a world of increasing violence, pandemic level threats to our health, systemic racial injustice, devastation of our planet, disconnection from our families and communities, and serious threats to democracies across the globe. Our hearts are breaking. There is a palpable climate of disconnect violence, divisiveness, and neglect. There are wars on many fronts. We are at war with each other, with our neighbors, with our communities, with other nations. Global pandemics are taking lives and livelihoods from millions of people around the globe, while leaders wrestle how to effectively respond. The earth has lost half of its wildlife in the past forty years. Rapid climate change is contributing to devastating natural disasters. Children are killing children. It is difficult to envision any real alternative and so we may become both complicit and avoidant. We are becoming, quite rightly, overwhelmed with legitimate cause for fear and unrest that demands we take action as global environmental and social injustice threaten our very existence. Yet in the midst of all of this polarization, violence, and dis-ease, human beings have an innate desire to rectify wrong-doing and protect what we hold dear, with equanimity — equal consideration for all people and the world in which we live.

The world needs a new kind of diplomacy and social sensibility, equipped with the motivation and tools to transform our heartfelt intentions into altruism—compassionate actions which support the common good. This is not just about the individual—we are in this together. Now is the time to cultivate our benevolent virtues, recognize our interconnectedness, and appeal to the best instincts of the human spirit. For our social world to exist with some degree of harmony, we cannot rely on others to make things better. Each one of us needs to step up in the best way possible and contribute to the changes we wish to see happen. A single interaction that is mindful and compassionate has the potential to bring a sense of hope and provide motivation to find solutions that may not otherwise have been discovered. If we can maintain an attitude of doing our best amidst the flux and confusion of daily life as well as the perilous times we're in today, we can come to realize that this is what many others are also trying to do.

There is a social and universal responsibility to act, for both enlightened self-interest as well as for the benefit of all. Society has within it both value and practice which are central to ideals of justice and human rights. Transcending gender, class, race, religion, and culture, compassion in action is focused on all humanity, giving us possibilities for global civility while upholding the virtues of human dignity. We must include regulating and rewarding interactions so that people do not feel marginalized, stressed, or become disengaged. When we neglect these responsibilities, harm occurs—harm that is potentially devastating if we fail to pay attention. We cannot go in and rip out parts of people's lives and expect them to remain whole.

So, what are we to do? How might we reimagine the ways in which we engage as human beings on this precious planet? How can we best contribute to the health, safety and happiness of our friends and family, and all humanity? What is required of us to live and work in ways that do not harm others or the planet? Answering this question can be a challenging, if not daunting, task, especially as more complex and difficult circumstances plague us.

Where do we begin? We can begin with examining our role and responsibility for what's happening in our world. We can decide to become involved in making changes, whether it's at work, in our family, our neighborhood or some social or political action that can positively impact the challenges we face. We may decide to do something radically different, learn new ways of engaging and tools for forgiveness and reconciliation. And we are not alone in this journey. There are plenty of examples of people who we can turn to for inspiration.

Inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr., Congressman John Lewis left his home in rural Alabama, starting what would become a lifetime of social and political activism. Despite continued threats, intimidation, and brutal physical attacks, he maintained his commitment to nonviolence and equality for all people. As an astute observer with a fearless mission to end racial segregation in the South, John Lewis' journey was long and difficult, yet he persevered. He spoke to the values of faith, patience, study, truth, peace, love, and reconciliation. "Real leaders are not appointed," Lewis said. "They emerge out of the masses of the people and rise to the forefront through the circumstances of their lives. Either their inner journey or their human experience prepares them to take that role. They do not nominate themselves. They are called into service by a spirit moving through a people that points to them as the embodiment of the cause they serve."

The idea of collective social responsibility is at the root of a healthy society. Traditional teachings of many indigenous peoples refer to responsibility as much more than taking matters into one's own hands. When solving a problem or settling a dispute, for example, they focus on much more than a single aspect of someone's existence. Attention is paid, with respect, to all things that influence a person's life—community, family, the environment, ancestors, and spirit.

For native Hawai'ians, *kuleana* is a deeply held notion that there is value in responsibility that transcends rights, interests, privileges, and ownership. There is honor and gratitude when one takes responsibility. Kuleana is something one possesses and extends far beyond our personal and professional lives, reaching deep into the physical, spiritual, and ancestral worlds. There is no ignoring your kuleana and the clarity and honesty it brings. It is to be shared. And when practiced, kuleana brings about transformation and one becomes *ho'ohiki*—keeping the promises you make to yourself and others. Once you have kept those promises, you can stand behind your convictions, your ways of knowing, your belief systems, and be accountable in all respects—not simply for the task at hand, but the entire world in which you live.

Ubuntu is an African word for human kindness. It is the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all of humanity. The virtue of ubuntu asserts that being part of "the tribe," or society, gives humans their humanity. We can't exist in isolation, and when you possess ubuntu, you are warm and generous. "We are because you are," and "I am" because "you are." Ubuntu is both a deep appreciation of individual uniqueness and collective social responsibility. For South Africans, they owe this quality of interconnectedness to each other. Aboriginal Australians share a deeply held belief of *kanyini*, or responsibility—a responsibility that applies to one's belief systems, spirituality, family, and land. There is no separating them. If you take a piece out of one, the others will falter. They are intricately linked in this web of responsibility.

So, it is when we are doing our work as conflict engagement practitioners and peacebuilders. We must be mindful of our kanyini, our ubuntu, our kuleana, and our responsibility that is carried from our past into our present if we are to engage in ways that do not harm. Doing our part in a community that intentionally encourages collective responsibility and a genuine sense of belonging can be a source of strength and purpose. For meaningful change to happen we must take on the tasks together. When we do this, our authentic self emerges, giving us the freedom to act mindfully and compassionately with the hope that anything is possible. We are being asked to come together, not for self-interest, but for the benefits we gain through cooperation and a willingness to contribute to the well-being of humanity. The awakening of an open, kind, and good heart helps us find the way toward right actions with the purest of motivations for the good of others and ourselves.

It takes courage to step out of what feels comfortable, what we think is true, and give ourselves permission to make choices which better align with our values and altruistic nature. We can think of and act in new ways to work with communities that constrain us and within systems that bind us. "If we are a drop of water and we try to get to the ocean as only an individual drop, we will surely evaporate along the way," says Thich Nhat Hanh. "To arrive at the ocean, you must go as a river. The sangha (community) is your river. Allow your community to hold you, to transport you," he says. "When you do, you will feel more solid and stable and will not risk drowning in your suffering. As a river, all the individual drops of water arrive together at the ocean."

The capacity to reach out and find ways of transforming our knowledge into action, is one of the

keys to guiding us toward possible solutions. We must find ways to develop equanimity and engage mindfully and do so without causing harm in a way that unifies rather than creates polarization. This type of engagement is not a formula or structured way of doing work — one that compartmentalizes our thinking, establishes protocols, creates models, and introduces methodologies. Nor is this way of engaging asking us to abide by some kind of plan or approved way of acting, or to fixate on some ideal of how we are supposed to be. Rather, cultivating and utilizing 'mindful engagement', and living our lives in ways that translate into meaningful, effective, and rewarding experiences for ourselves and others is essential. Living and working in this way has the potential of making situations better, while deepening our understanding of others'— and our own — perspectives and experiences.

Note: Adapted from Wendy Wood and Thais Mazur, *Do No Harm: Mindful Engagement for a World in Crisis* (2021), RioKai Press, Mendocino, CA.

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