

Interpersonal Conflict

Student's Name

COM 200: Interpersonal Communication

Instructor's Name

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### Interpersonal Conflict

We all experience conflict in our lives to varying degrees. We all deal with it differently, as well. Conflict can be as simple as differing opinions regarding the best sports teams to as complicated as the best way to run a country. How we deal with interpersonal conflict can mean the difference between peace and all-out war.

**Commented [KC1]:** There is good sentiment here. But as an introduction, the student also needs a clear thesis that is the heart of their paper and a preview of what they plan to do in the paper.

### Defining Conflict

Conflict is a serious disagreement or argument. According to Bevan (2020), there are three criteria for a conflict. 1) Conflict can only exist if at least one person communicates, either verbally or nonverbally, that there is a struggle happening. If no one says anything about the situation, then there is not a conflict. 2) There have to be at least two people involved and they must need each other in some way. If they can both walk away from the situation, then there is no conflict. 3) Each person perceives that they have incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals. They feel the other person is getting in their way and keeping them from what they want.

**Commented [KC2]:** Great definition, as the student has paraphrased Bevan nicely and added additional detail.

### Conflict Example

The multimedia resource I chose was an episode from the television show "This Is Us. S4E4." In the scene, Randall and Beth are a married couple. They arrive for the opening of Beth's dance studio. Her mother is also arriving at the same time. The storyline suggests that Carol, Beth's mother and Randall, her husband, do not get along very well. They enter the building to find a terrible odor. They call in someone and find that there is a dead possum in the wall, and they are told it might take a week or so for the smell to dissipate on its own. This is where this particular conflict between Carol and Randall begins. Carol tells her daughter Beth that she needs to reschedule the opening. Randall tells her no, they are not rescheduling. Carol

starts to say, “Randall, you can’t have people coming...” She stops and says, “this is what we are going to do.” She turns to Beth and continues. “You are going to tell people you are very sorry. You are going to ask them to come next Saturday. You are going to double down on promotions. It’s a shame...” Meanwhile, you can see Randall is getting really upset. He interrupts Carol by retorting, “Don’t tell me what I can and can’t do, Carol. This is important to my wife and I am going to fix it so we’re not rescheduling. Am I clear?” He turns and starts to walk away. He stops and comes back to her and says, “I apologize for speaking to you in that tone, but the content holds.” He then walks away again.

**Commented [KC3]:** Yes. Nice detail about exactly what happened as it helps the reader understand your later points.

In this scene, the first criterion is met when Randall verbally communicates his part of the struggle by saying, “Don’t tell me what I can and can’t do, Carol.” The second criterion is met as the conflict in this scene is between Carol and Randall. They each want to control the situation, and they need the other person to cooperate. For the third criterion in this scene, Randall wants the opening of Beth’s dance studio to continue as planned, and her mother, Carol, wants her to postpone it for a week.

**Commented [KC4]:** Yes. Good illustration of how there is a clear struggle here over what should be done.

### **Ineffective Handling**

In this scene, Randall loses his temper with his overbearing mother-in-law. Carol, in particular, expresses some negative relationship maintenance behaviors. According to Bevan (2020), this type of behavior is considered antisocial and involves being controlling. Carol should not have been so quick to start giving orders and let the couple deal with the situation. If they could not come up with a solution or ask for her advice, that would have been fine. Randall, on the other hand, should not have lost his temper.

**Commented [KC5]:** Good point, as it might not help him accomplish his goals. Is there value in this "dark side" as well? I'd like to have seen this critique developed more but it is still a very good point.

### Addressing the Conflict

Two conflict strategies that the characters addressed in this scene were competition and compromise. Carol's strategy seems to be competition as she appears to have a high concern for self and a low concern for others. She wants everyone to obey her and quickly disregards what Randall has to say. Randall, on the other hand, appears to use the compromise strategy which is a moderate concern for both self and others, according to Bevan (2020). He wants everyone to get along and is trying to avoid any type of conflict. Bevan (2020), refers to the "Dark Side" of interpersonal communication and explains how it is not always an entirely negative thing. Sometimes these dark messages can reveal useful information. In this particular scene, Randall gets angry and stands up to his mother-in-law. Carol thought he lacked the strength of character that she believed her daughter needed in a husband. After his outburst, he proved her wrong by setting up the opening of the dance hall outside in the parking lot where it was a success. The opening was to showcase his wife's talent, not the location of the studio. As Carol watched him take charge and turned things around, her admiration for him grew.

### What they could have done

Beth and Randall had to have been together at least 15 or more years, and that is a long time to be at odds with your mother-in-law. Carol appears to be a very domineering character based on the reactions of the other characters in the show. Randall and Carol could have used a couple of different strategies to improve their relationship many years before. One of the things they could have done was set aside some time together to express their thoughts and emotions. Bevan (2020) states that expressing your feelings while they are happening is not always appropriate, like Randall giving in to his anger at that particular moment. He could have let it go and asked Carol to sit down with him to discuss why she appeared to dislike him. He could have

**Commented [KC6]:** Nice resolution. I wondered if he "collaborated" with others to get there.

I only saw one strategy fully addressed here and two were required.

**Commented [KC7]:** This is another great observation, as it speaks to the importance of self control. This could have been addressed more directly, but it is still a nice point.

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approached the meeting by saying “I” statements. According to Bevan (2020), these types of statements can relay your emotions without appearing that you are attacking the other person. The characters did talk during the opening and were able to come to an understanding, which will undoubtedly help to improve their relationship.

In conclusion, there are many things we can do to improve our relationships if that is what we want to do. First, we need to identify where the conflict is, then try different strategies to improve relations. If all parties are willing, then the conflict should be resolved, and the relationship should improve.

References

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