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Unresolved Conflict: What Gives?

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ABSTRACT

Unresolved conflict occurs in friendships, romantic relationships, family conflicts, and workplace settings. This study examines the different factors and behavioral/cognitive attributes that contribute to unresolved, interpersonal conflicts. A survey of undergraduates were asked to recall a conflict that was not resolved and answer related questions pertaining to conflict styles, problem seriousness, frequency of thinking, climate, and closeness. Associations between conflict styles and mulling or problem seriousness were not found, but mulling and problem seriousness correlated. Other significant findings also occurred in the exploration of climate and gender over the topic of unresolved conflict.

Keywords: unresolved conflict, mulling, problem seriousness, climate, conflict styles, closeness, gender differences

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal conflict is seldom easy. Conflict is complex and Wilmot and Hocker (2001) explain the elements that contribute to its complexity. First, conflict on an interpersonal level is an expressed struggle that places internal strain on the parties who enact conflict behavior (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001; Floyd, 2009). The activity of interpersonal conflict is more than a disagreement; it is a struggle on the inside and the outside. Secondly, Wilmot and Hocker identify interdependence between parties as the second element because conflict arises when parties are necessarily connected because of their goals. Each party has to depend on the other in some way (Floyd, 2009). The third element pertains the fighting aspect of a conflict and the position each party holds. Incompatible goals establish the fight, where parties believe only one side can win (Floyd, 2009; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Perceived scarce resources that can be tangible or intangible is the fourth element laid out by Wilmot and Hocker. Parties can fight over the scarcity of a tangible item like money or an intangible concept like time. Lastly, interpersonal conflict must begin with action. Some kind of element of interference triggers the conflict because one party is stopped from carrying out a desired action or achieving a desired goal (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001; Floyd, 2009). Conflict surrounding roommates, friendships, family members, romantic partners and other relationships all potentially involve these five elements that create an interpersonal commonality between each conflict.

People vary in their willingness to engage in conflict, but Floyd (2009) establishes that conflict is natural. There is no way to stop interpersonal conflict because it is a part of humanity. A relationship without conflict is rare. Significant relationships between friends, family and romantic partners are more likely to have episodes of conflict (Floyd, 2009). Yet, these relationships can then benefit from conflict. Canary, Weger and Stafford (1991) found a positive

association with the length of a relationship and conflict that resulted in a better understanding of

each person's position with the fostering of new ideas. A relationship would last longer when

conflict allowed partners to learn more about each other. If managed in the right way,

interpersonal conflict will stop the escalation of small issues by releasing tensions, which can

strengthen relationships (Floyd, 2009; Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001).

Unhealthy management of conflict can lead to problems. Besides the unpleasant feeling

that affects a person during conflict, it can harm a person's well being, along with the

relationship where the conflict was produced (Floyd, 2009). Research establishes that, along with

increase in stress hormones caused by it, conflict could slow the immune system's ability to heal

wounds and increase blood pressure (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1996).

These adverse effects strain the bodily function. Greater ailments can develop in time or come

from the vulnerability in the immune system with more and more interpersonal conflict.

Once interpersonal conflict ensues, one of two things can happen. It will either come to a

resolution or be left unresolved. The inability to resolve a conflict occurs in a variety of

relationships. In a study involving college students by W. L. Benoit and P. J. Benoit (1987),

40% of the participants left their conflict unresolved by changing the topic, terminating

conversation, or leaving. This suggests that, out of all the conflicts occurring in the lives of

undergraduates at a given time, four out of every ten students will not resolve their conflicts and

may leave them unresolved. Conflicts among dating couples can go unresolved, too. One study

conducted by Lloyd (1987) found 32% of romantic partner participants fading out of their

conflicts without coming to a resolution. Lloyd demonstrates that quality of these relationships

could deteriorate from constant presence of unresolved conflict. In the family sector,

Montemayor and Hanson (1985) looked at the conflict adolescents had with parents and siblings

to find that 50% of the recorded conflict resolutions resulted in the act of withdrawing. This category of withdrawal may have been categorized as a resolution, but it was only a resolution to stay unresolved. Montemayor and Hanson defined withdrawal as instances when parties moved to a different subject, physically left the space they occupied, stopped paying attention to each other, or quit conversing. Similarly, a study performed in the workplace by Gayle and Preiss (1998) contributed 79% of the sample recollecting instances of conflict that were never resolved. Gayle and Preiss also establish that unresolved conflict created a basis for the conflict to occur again. It was also found that participants of resolved conflict were perceived as less angry and exhibited more signs of happiness than those of unresolved conflict (El-Sheikh, Buckhalt, & Reiter, 2000). Through these examples of past research, the prevalent severity of unresolved conflict in interpersonal relationships is achieved.

While the issue of unresolved conflict comes up in research, it goes by different names, and not enough research focuses on the causes and results of unresolved conflict (Benoit & Benoit, 1987; Lloyd, 1987; Miller, Roloff, & Maris (2007); Gayle & Preiss, 1998; Montemayor & Hanson, 1985). From this gap in research up to date, the current study attempts to address this gap by focusing on contributions to unresolved conflict. The following section reviews literature regarding known attributes of unresolved conflict and behavioral/cognitive attributes, such as conflict styles and mulling, that have specific effects. In the course of this next discussion, I will propose various directions that this study will take in researching contributing factors related to unresolved conflict.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Unresolved Conflict

Conflict is not always resolved. There are times when positions are too strong and independent to change that no agreement can be met (Floyd, 2009). A conflict will then be pushed to the background of the relationship, unresolved. Research shows that different types and styles of conflict revolve around unresolved conflict. Avoiding, stonewalling, serial arguments, perpetual arguments, and intractable arguments all play a role in circumstances surrounding unresolved conflict.

Avoidance

Avoiding a conflict can leave it unresolved. Folger et al. (2001) defines an avoidance strategy as one in which a party will refrain from openly addressing or managing the conflict. It is avoided because a party prevents it from happening. Although avoidance can sometimes be a good thing, there are many instances where conflict exacerbates, when parties try to make it disappear (Floyd, 2009). Wilmot and Hocker (2001) establish two consequences resulting from avoidance. First, avoidance can lead to more avoidance. This perpetuates into a downward "spiral of avoidance" (Wilmot & Hocker, p. 243). Secondly, conflict avoided once can lead to the escalation conflict, and this pattern can repeat. Both courses do not resolve the conflict. They can cause future eruptions because the conflict has not been reduced and the contribution of both parties is not acknowledged (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001).

Stonewalling

More than avoiding, stonewalling is another precursor to unresolved conflict. The act of stonewalling occurs when one party, who is listening, proceeds to withdraw completely from the interaction (Gottman; 1999; Floyd, 2009; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Gottman (1994)

demonstrates this behavior with the example of a person literally putting up a wall made of stone to prevent any further engagement with the other person in the conflict. As contributed by Floyd, stonewalling is not a tactic used to by people to compose and gather their thoughts. It does not aid conflict management in any way. When stonewalling happens, the barrier it creates is due to a person shutting down and not being present in the conversation (Floyd). Gottman (1999) suggests that instances of stonewalling in their natural setting may result in one party physically leaving. After any such act of stonewalling, it can become close to impossible for any resolution (Floyd).

Serial Arguments

Once unresolved conflict has been conceived, it can continue to live and grow in the form of serial arguments. Conflict over a particular issue that remains unresolved from a single argument and is reintroduced in subsequent arguments is the foundation of serial arguments (Miller et al., 2008; Johnson & Roloff, 1998). Essentially, when an argument ends without resolution and begins again (and often again) without any change of topics, it has become serial. Vuchinich (1987) contributes that arguments can have a quick ending or continue for a long while because of the pressure one party puts on another to conform. In W. L. Benoit and P. J. Benoit's (1987) study, reoccurring arguments with the same person were about the same issue 40% of the time. Johnson and Roloff (2000) contend that these reoccurrences are due to the inability of both parties to align their views after the primary clash between both sides. Hence, serial argument ensues in frequent cases of unresolved conflict.

With the common occurrence of serial arguments, negative effects can occur. The most important factor revolving around serial arguing is perceived resolvability, or the supposed progress each party thinks they are making toward a resolution (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). A

study by Malis and Roloff (2006) examined the implications of stress in relation to serial

arguments. Undergraduate students in the study experienced more stress when they believed

they would not reach a resolution in the conflict surrounding their serial arguments. Johnson and

Roloff (1998) also found that perceived resolvability related to the quality of the relationship.

Undergraduates in this study experienced less satisfaction with their relationship when they

could not perceived a future resolution. Both of these studies imply the negative affects of stress

and declining relationship satisfaction that results from unresolved conflict in serial arguments.

Perpetual Problems

Some conflicts never will be resolved. Gottman (1999), in his research with married

couples, calls never-resolved conflict "perpetual problems". These problems are ones that have

been going on for a long time. Miller et al. (2008) suggest that perpetual problems can generate

serial arguments. In Gottman's research with couples, 69% discussed conflict that he described

as perpetual problems. He claims that either a couple can be in dialogue about the issue to help

their relationship, or the couple will fall into a gridlock. Gottman argues that, once this sort of

stalemate around the conflict has been reached, the couple will experience an emotional

disconnect in their relationship. As such, perpetual problems fall into a specific sect of

unresolved conflict.

Intractable Conflict

Intractable conflict is almost indistinguishable from perpetual conflicts because it too

describes conflicts that seem to be unresolvable (Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, & Bui-

Wrzosinska, 2007). Northrup (1989) defines intractable conflict as being resolve-resistant,

progressively intensifying, and exemplifying attempted destructiveness on the behalf of at least

one party involved.   This category of unresolved conflict is both heated and hostile. Longevity

of these intractable conflicts is a factor, too, because many consume a lot of time (Coleman,

2000; Coleman et al., 2007; Northrup, 1989). Northrup demonstrates how the majority of these

conflicts use distributive tactics with one party as winner and the other as loser in the argument.

Intractable conflict is thus another segment of unresolved conflict.

These various categories of avoidance, stonewalling, serial arguments, perpetual conflict

and intractable conflict arise around the common theme of unresolved conflict found in the

present literature. However, many of them are specific to certain relationships. For instance,

perpetual problems have only been studied in marital relationships, and serial arguments mostly

revolve around romantic relationships (Miller et al., 2008). Studies have also failed to provide

specific reasons unresolved conflict transpires. This lack of research on unresolved conflict

across the relational board gives rise to my first research question.

RQ1: What are common contributors to unresolved conflict among different relationships?

Climate

Folger et al. (2001) describe the climate of conflict as relatable to the weather, such that

both are subject to rapid change, consist of many different conditions, and quick to spread over a

large range of contexts. The researchers depict climate as an atmosphere that contains the

behaviors and outlooks of parties involved in the interaction. Folger et al. notes the significance

of climate because of its uniform interplay among relatable events. Climate can be a predictor of

the near future. It influences the interlocking conflict by speeding up destructiveness or

maintaining productiveness (Folger et al.). Climate influences the quality of interactions (Folger,

Poole & Stutman, 2001). Nevertheless, climate is not a feeling one person can have while the

other feels something else. Generally, both parties in an interaction experience conflict climate

similarly (Folger et al.). Individual perceptions do play a role, though. Establishing and

preserving climate is not possible without these perceptions, even when they only constitute part

of the whole (Folger et al.) In this sense, the experience of both weather and relationships

correspond to the overarching term of climate that can describe each in metaphoric form. A

relationship can be like the weather and the weather can be like a relationship in terms of climate.

No research has been conducted to determine whether or not unresolved conflict maintains a

certain climate. But it can be assumed that unresolved conflict that happens in a relationship will

field some sort of climate related to a weather pattern.

Associating Unresolved Conflict to Behavioral and Cognitive Attributes

Varying literature has examined certain behavioral and cognitive attributes that come into

play and affect the outcome of any conflict (Zacchilli, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2009; Cloven &

Roloff, 1991; Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2012; Sanford, & Rowatt 2004). However, no research has

been conducted with the specific focus of conflict that has not been resolved in relation to

behavioral and cognitive attributes that might contribute to it being unresolved. The preexisting

research that examines general conflict, conflict styles, mulling, problem seriousness and conflict

in relation to men and women will be discussed and used to make predictions about behavioral

attributes that contribute to unresolved conflict.

Conflict Styles

As established by Wilmot and Hocker (2001), responses that are patterned or behavior

that is clustered by people in conflict constitute conflict styles. They illustrate the overarching

picture that is portrayed by someone in conflict with someone else. Wilmot and Hocker attribute

an individual's personality to the foundation of styles and their interpretation. Folger et al.

(2001) contributes the notion that conflict styles can be the basis of control and power in the

given scenario. It is important to note that conflict styles are the most researched topic in

interpersonal conflict, and different styles can be used productively in different situations

(Wilmot & Hocker, Folger et al., Floyd, 2009).

Zacchill, Hendrick and Hendrick. (2009) created the Romantic Partner Conflict scale that

measured the tactics of compromise, domination, avoidance, separation, submission, and

interactional reactivity. The researchers defined compromise as a style that aimed to please both

parties involved in the argument. Zacchilli et al. conceive of compromise as an outcome of

negotiation and collaboration tactics that was present in previous conflict style literature.

Domination is defined at the style used when one party's arguments overshadow the other

participant's input thereby controlling the conflict outcome. Avoidance was characterized by

Zacchilli et al. as the prevention of any conflict episodes before they happened. A separation

style differed from avoidance by involving a time period for heated tempers to cool and an

agreement to refrain from discussion until a future time (Zacchilli et al.). Parties that wanted to

bring the conflict to a quick and abrupt ending by submitting to the other's desires were

classified by Zacchilli et al. as having a submission conflict style. The final style, interactional

reactivity, was characterized with both parties employing "verbal aggression, emotional volatility,

and lack of trust between partners" (Zacchilli et al., p. 1082).

Originally, the intention of Zacchilli et al. (2009) was to classify all six of their subscales

into categories of destructive or constructive conflict. The researchers characterized destructive

conflict as strategies that do not benefit the relationship between the parties and constructive

conflict as beneficial strategies. In Zacchilli et al.'s findings, domination and interactional

reactivity were found to be destructive because they were negatively related to respect and

satisfaction in a relationship, and compromise was the only style that could be classified as

constructive because of its positive correlation with respect and satisfaction in a relationship.

The other scales of avoidance, submission, and separation did not be consistently fall into either constructive or destructive category. However, Zacchilli et al. did find submission to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Rubenstein and Feldman (1993) found similar results with compromise being associated to good outcomes and an attack style associated with bad outcomes in the lives of adolescent boys. Inconsistent with Zacchilli et al., Rubenstein and Feldman found avoidance to be associated to a bad outcome. While these conflict styles were tested with relationship satisfaction, the climate of the relationship from the conflict was not addressed. From this, I pose my second research question.

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in climate after the unresolved conflict depending on the conflict style used?

Mulling & Problem Seriousness

Mulling is characterized as a state of prolonged thought that occurs in the thought process of a conflict (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). Cloven and Roloff contend that the act of mulling can amplify the perceived seriousness of a problem by an involved party. At any rate, effects on relationships have been found to be negative when communication about conflict in the relationship has been suspended (Sillars, 1980; Cloven & Roloff). Mulling comes into play when communication is avoided, causing the individual to enhance the seriousness of disputes and attribute blame on the other for causing the conflict (Cloven & Roloff). While this research is based on general conflict, unresolved conflict, such as stonewalling or avoidance, is characterized by a lack of communication, which can instigate increased mulling. Therefore, this research allows the formulation of the first hypothesis.

H1: The frequency of thinking about a problem is positively correlated with perceived problem seriousness in relation to unresolved conflict.

The effect on climate due to frequency of thinking and problem seriousness was never researched, however, so a third research question was formed.

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in climate after the unresolved conflict depending on the frequency of thinking or perceived problem seriousness?

A study concerning roommate conflict among undergraduate students, conducted by Cloven and Roloff (1991), examined the sense-making activity of these individuals. The researchers found that greater arguments produced more mulling. In contrast, Cloven and Roloff established that increased communication about the conflict could reduce individual mulling and associations with greater problem severity. This communication was referred to as integrative strategies that highlighted cooperation between parties. The researchers demonstrate their belief that mulling actually leads the conflict to an unhealthier place than where it was during the point of conflict conversation. Distributive strategies that involved demanding and forceful acts were associated with mulling in this study, as a result. In this way, Cloven and Roloff establish the idea that individual classification of conflict can determine amounts of mulling and the related effects. Avoidance, nevertheless, did not contribute to prolonged-thinking effects (Cloven and Roloff). Due to these findings, the following hypotheses and research question were formed regarding conflict styles that revolve around the topic of unresolved conflict.

H2: A compromising conflict style is negatively correlated with frequency of thinking and problem seriousness in relation to unresolved conflict.

H3: A dominating conflict style is positively correlated with frequency of thinking and problem seriousness in relation to unresolved conflict.

H4: An interactional reactivity conflict style is positively correlated with frequency of thinking and problem seriousness in relation to unresolved conflict.

H5: A submission conflict style is positively correlated with frequency of thinking and

problem seriousness in relation to unresolved conflict.

RQ4: What relationships are significant between avoidance or separation with frequency of

thinking or problem seriousness?

Gender Differences

Findings around gender differences and conflict issues are variable. Research by Sanford

and Rowatt (2004) looked at emotion of anger and sadness in interpersonal relationships. They

found a significant gender difference in regard to these emotions, with women reporting more of

both types of emotion. In relation to avoidance, previous literature has found females to

experience less satisfaction with their relationships, when they perceived partner avoidance or

physically avoided their partner more; men participated in more styles of avoidance (Afifi,

McManus, Steuber, & Coho, 2009; Duane, 1989). El-Sheikh et al. (2000) established that

women felt happier than men during arguments that involved compromising or apologizing at

the end. They also found women to experience more anger during unresolved arguments, when

men were found to have feelings that are more neutral. Yet, women were established as being

more likely to pacify in a conflict (Duane, 1989). Papa and Natalle (1989) contributed findings

consistent with previous studies that observe men using assertive behaviors more than women,

and women using compromising behaviors more than men. Canary, Cupach and Messman

(1995) maintain that there are more similarities between conflict styles of men and women than

differences (p. 131). This leads to the last research question:

RQ5: Do any significant differences exist between men and women in relation to conflict

styles, mulling, and problem seriousness regarding unresolved conflict?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The present study examined a convenience sample of college students from public and

private universities in the Northwest. Following approval by the Institutional Review Board, 60

students participated in the sample, with 41 females and 19 males. Participants ranged in age

from 18 to 26 years, but 67% were between the ages of 21 and 23. The participants provided

conflict examples with varying relations: 15 students recalled conflict with a roommate; 16

students recalled conflict with a friend; six students recalled conflict with a family member; 21

students recalled conflict with a romantic partner; and one student recalled a conflict with a

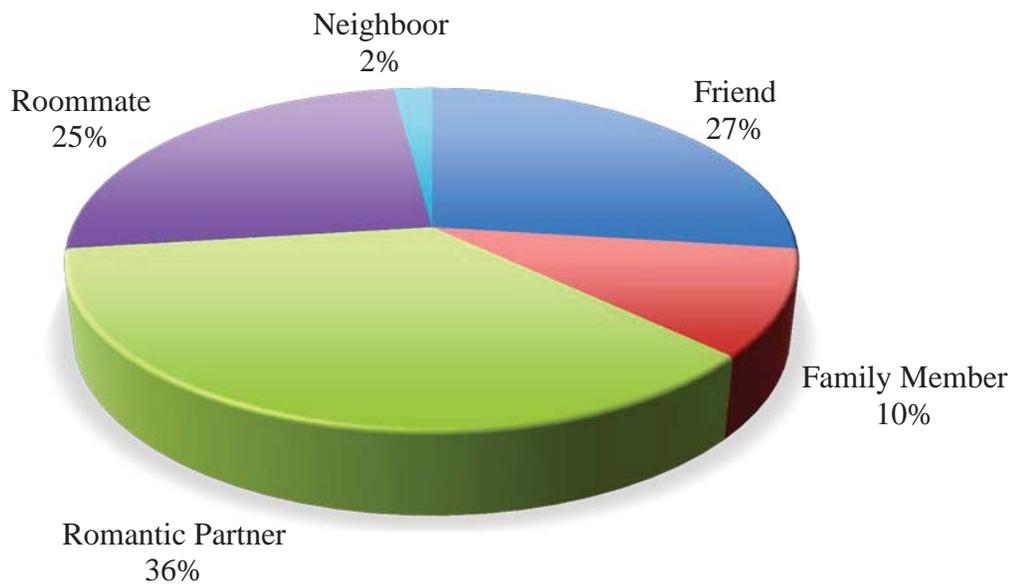neighbor. Figure 1 represents these data in percentages.

Figure 1. Conflict Relationships

Procedure

Participants were recruited through personal Facebook messages and asked to participate

in the study without compensation. Each message contained an anonymous link to an online

survey, constructed using Qualtrics Online Survey Software. Once participants were redirected

to the survey, they began by reading a consent form that explained the purpose of "explor[ing]

the aftermath of unresolved conflict in relation to closeness." After providing consent, they were

directed to the survey. Participants first filled out an open-ended question about an unresolved

conflict to help the individual recall the circumstances surrounding the conflict. Although this

study relies on the memory of participants to recall something that happened in the past, research

has shown that negative interactions are more impactful and memorial when a person is making

a judgment than positive ones (Kellermann, 1984). Thus, conflict recalled by participants will

provide sufficient accuracy to be used in analysis. With a particular conflict in mind,

participants then answered close-ended questions based on scales that will be discussed later.

Theme Analysis

Based on the Grounded Theory Method that was founded by Glaser and Strauss (1999), a

form of data analysis was employed to foster more of a participative and involved interaction

with the data collected in the open-ended question (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Fifty-eight

responses were initially assessed and four were later dropped because of limited descriptions of

the recalled conflict. The open-ended question asked participants to "describe a conflict with a

roommate, friend, family, romantic partner, or other person which did not have satisfying

closure." Because responses to this question were already addressing unresolved conflict, the

author and one other coder looked specifically for contributors to the unresolved conflict. Use of

this data analysis technique was not carried out fully because this study did not look to

incorporate themes into theory. Glaser and Strauss persuade that analysis of quantitative data

can be more relaxed with observance of rules regarding grounded theory. The goal of the current

study was only to identify themes of unresolved conflict for future research to generate theory.

The first step of the analysis involved an independent line-by-line coding that looked to summarized the identified contributors using the participant's own words where possible. This process followed the method clarified by Thompson, Cole, and Nitzarim (2012). Next, the researchers moved to a stage of grouping and arranging. Groups were created based on theoretical connection and inner parallels (Thompson et al.). Both coders used the definitions of interpersonal conflict and everything literature suggests about unresolved conflict that was discussed earlier. The last step consisted of finalizing themes by discussion between the coders.

Measures

As noted in the previous section, participants answered one open-ended question to describe a specific conflict they recalled, and then they answered close-ended questions based on this past conflict. The close-ended questions were taken from Zacchile et al.'s Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (2009) and the scales used by Cloven and Roloff (1991). Reliability of each scale was tested using a Cronbach's alpha reliability test. Participants also answered nominal questions pertaining to demographics, closeness before and after, climate, and relationship of the participant with the other person described. Nominal questions regarding the attribution of blame and the amount of discussion with others were also asked, in accordance with Cloven and Roloff's (1991) study.

Romantic Partner Conflict Scale

Zacchilli et al.'s subscales of compromise, domination, avoidance, separation, submission and interactional reactivity were used in the present study. Their Romantic Partner Conflict Scale was adapted to fit a variety of relationships (roommates, friends, romantic partners, and family members). Wording that included "my partner" was changed to "we" or "the other

person." All scale questions were based on a 5-point Likert basis from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The adapted version of the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale proved to have reliable subscales. Including all fourteen of the compromise questions, I found an alpha of 0.934. My collection of the six questions for the subscale of domination resulted in an alpha of 0.895. Taking the three avoidance questions, I calculated an alpha of 0.834. The five separation questions yielded an alpha of 0.826. For the subscale of submission, an alpha of 0.889 was produced for the five relating questions. The last subscale had an alpha of 0.799 for the six corresponding questions of interactional reactivity. With high scores for each subscale, I totaled each subscale and proceed to preform analysis that will be discussed later.

Mulling Scale

Cloven and Roloff's (1991) mulling scale was used as the secondary measure in the present study. The scale measured the frequency of thinking about the problem, the frequency of sense-making activity, and the respondents' perceptions of the impact of their thinking about conflicts. All questions were based on a 5-point scale, instead of a 7-point scale used in the original study. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.915.

Problem Seriousness

Problem seriousness was assessed using the example provided Cloven and Roloff (1991). Each question used a 5-point scale, instead of a 7-point scale used in the original study. The alpha for this measure in original form was 0.239. Removal of one question was proved to increase the alpha. I deleted this question that asked "How often does the conflict occur?" to produced an alpha of 0.708. Deletion of this question to gain such a large increase in reliability is understandable because many of the people in my survey only encountered their described

conflict once. The original scale was designed to test problems that usually reoccurred between

undergraduate roommates (Cloven & Roloff). Without the frequency question, the problem

seriousness scale fit the current study because participants found the unresolved conflicts to be

serious even though the conflicts did not often occur.

RESULTS

Research Questions

The first research question sought to identify contributing factors to unresolved conflict.

From a modified Grounded Theory Method, eight themes were identified as contributors to

unresolved conflict. The first identified theme was communication avoidance. This theme

captured the largest proportion of identified contributors, as most responses dealt with a lack of

communication about the conflict reported. Many responses noted that one party would stop

talking, not talk, or ignore the problem. Specific examples for communication avoidance

occurred when participants responded by "sa[ying] around 3 words to my roommate for the

whole semester" and "having a conversation on the phone with my dad . . . [where we] were

arguing about how I spent $40 at a bar the other night . . . and we had to change the subject."

Secondly, a theme of fear was identified that encompassed unease about future interactions,

consequences or resolutions. Examples of fear included, "I felt pressured into everything and

never felt like I could say no," and a "[b]reakup with a girlfriend due to uncertainty regarding

future plans." The third theme was trust. Many issues were associated to honesty, respect or

perceived harm to constitute this theme. Two examples of unresolved conflict due to trust issues

were when "[t]here was a conflict with a friend where we both felt like the other person wasn't

being honest and had the best intentions" and "I felt a friend and co-worker of min was dishonest

in her tactics to get me to cover her shift." A fourth theme was validation. Lack of recognition

or acknowledgement with respect to needs of a party formed this theme. An example of validation was when a participant said, "My parents had not allowed me to date, technically, so when I had a budding relationship with a girl, she believed I has her boyfriend. However, in my mind, I was not allowed to date so I was not her boyfriend yet. This discrepancy between our thinking led to her breaking up with me even though we were not in a relationship." Next, the fifth theme was competing differences, which dealt with differing views or opinions and an inability to accept another's point of view. One example of a competing difference was when a participant responded by saying, "My roommate on year and I had differing opinions on what it meant to be a good roommate." Another example of competing differences was when a participant said, "I have different political view that my parents and we disagree about a lot of things. I left for college without resolving this problem, and last week (election day) we butted heads a lot." Conflict abandonment was the sixth theme that identified parties who disengaged from the conflict physically or mentally. "A fight that was a culmination of various conflicts that ended in walking out and no resolution of those issues or that friendship," was an example of conflict abandonment. A seventh theme was coherence, which pertained to frustration of not understanding goals of the other party. This theme of coherence was exemplified in a response that said, "My significant partner did not understand the importance of my values regarding traditions that I hold about my birthday, such as celebrating it and having a nice birthday dinner." Finally, the last theme was resolution resistance that characterized the unwillingness of a party to accept a conclusion. Examples of resolution resistance included, "Friendship. He overdosed and I tried to help him away from drugs. He didn't want any of it," and "I apologized, but she didn't really accept it." These eight themes are depicted in Figure 2.
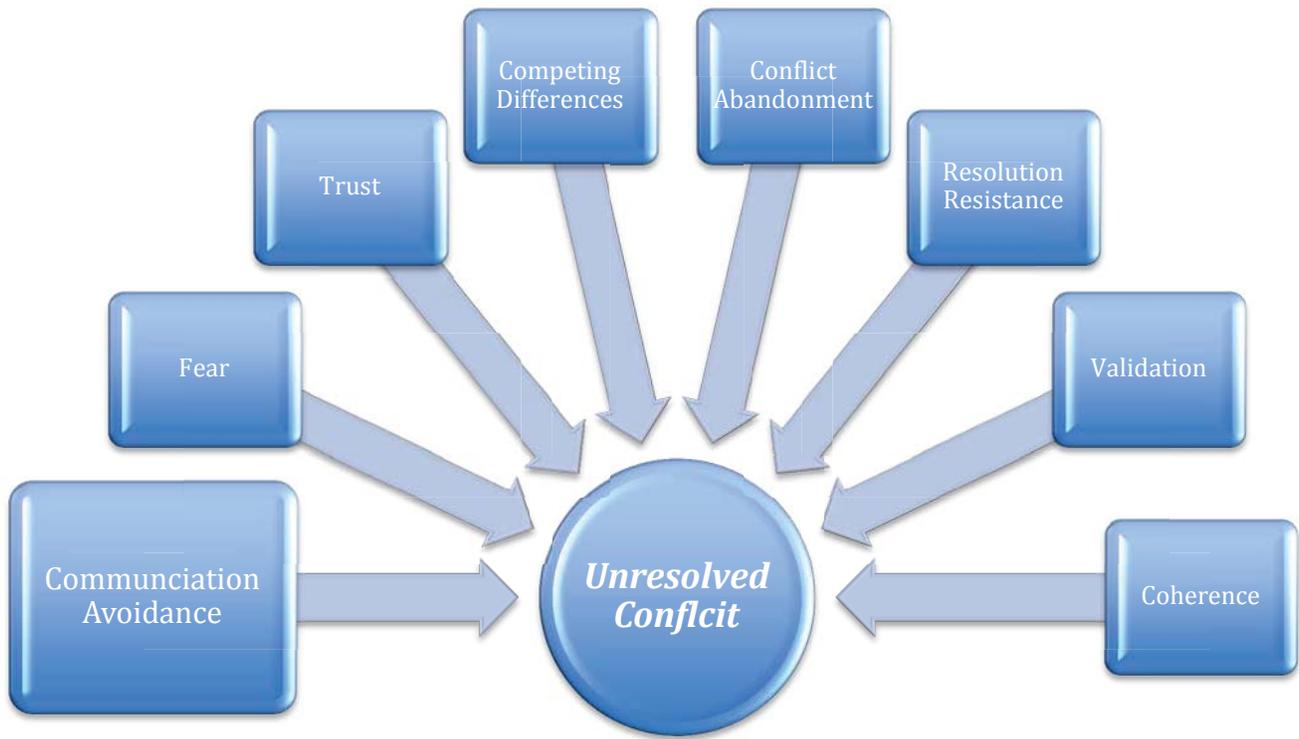
Figure 2. Contributors to Unresolved Conflict

The second research question asked whether there was a significant difference in climate after the unresolved conflict, depending on the conflict style used by the participant. Initial observations of the data found that only one person classified the climate as sunny after the conflict (see Figure 3). Consequently, the sunny category was dropped for appropriate data analysis because it was apparent that most instances of unresolved conflict do not result in a relationship-climate classified as sunny. An independent samples t-test then compared conflict styles in a cloudy vs. stormy climate. Compromise, domination, submission, avoidance and separation yielded insignificant relationships, but the subscale of interactional reactivity provided a significant difference with climate. Results showed that a stormier climate was related to the use of an interactional reactivity conflict style, $t = 4.75$, $p < 0.04$ (cloudy: $M = 14.03$, $SD = 3.42$; stormy: $M = 16.05$, $SD = 5.65$).
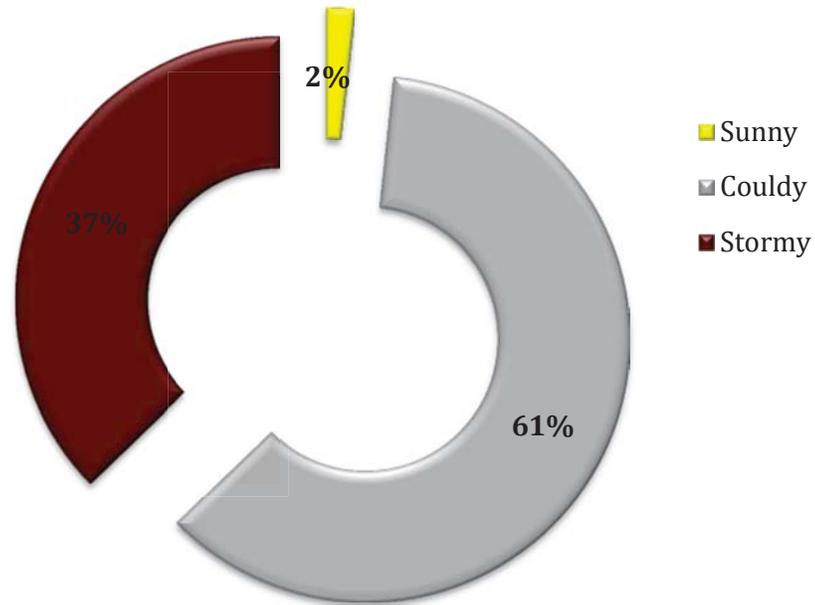
Figure 3. Climate of the Relationship After the Conflict

Research question three asked whether there was a significant difference in the relational

climate after an unresolved conflict depending on the frequency of thinking or perceived

problem seriousness. Similarly, to the analysis run for the previous question, the sunny category

was dropped because of one report of a sunny climate after a conflict (see Figure 3). Two

independent sample t-tests compared mulling and problem seriousness in a cloudy vs. stormy

climate. Both tests concluded with significant differences. Results showed that a stormier

climate was indeed related to more mulling, t = 3.88, p < 0.001 (cloudy: M = 30.22, SD = 5.86;

stormy: M = 36.73, SD = 6.71), and related to greater problem seriousness perceived, t = 0.333,

p < 0.001 (cloudy: M = 6.69, SD = 1.72; stormy: M = 8.63, SD = 1.40).

The fourth research question examined the relationship between mulling and avoidance,

mulling and separation, problem seriousness and avoidance, or problem seriousness and

separation. Bivariate correlations where calculated between these scales and none of the

relationships proved to be significant. Therefore, no significant relationship was found between

avoidance or separation with frequency of thinking or problem seriousness for RQ2.

Research question five sought to find a significant difference between males and females

among conflict styles, mulling and problem seriousness. An independent sample t-test compared

the sample of 19 males and 40 females with each one of these scales. No significant difference

was found for frequency of thinking, problem seriousness, compromise, domination, submission,

avoidance or separation. However, upon testing gender and the conflict subscale of interactional

reactivity, I recorded a significant difference between men and women, $t = 2.81$, $p < 0.01$. (male:

$M = 12.44$, $SD = 3.75$; female: $M = 15.80$, $SD = 4.40$). Women, therefore, reported significantly

more interactional reactivity conflict styles than men.

Hypotheses

Each hypothesis that was formulated deduced some kind of correlation. The first

hypothesis theorized that mulling would be positively correlated with problem seriousness.

Consistent with H1 was the bivariate correlation that found the more thought process about an

unresolved conflict, the more likely the unresolved conflict is to be perceived as more serious, r

$= 0.829$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, H1 was supported. Hypotheses 2 through 5 theorized

correlations between the conflict styles of compromise, domination, and submission and both

scales of mulling and problem seriousness. After running bivariate correlations, no relationship

was found to be significant. Thus, H2, H3, H4 and H5 were not supported.

Additional Findings

After running all major tests for the research questions and hypotheses, I was curious if

any relationships existed with the nominal questions that asked about attribution of conflict

blame and perceived relational closeness after the unresolved conflict in relation to the scales

previously used. With regard to the attribution question, a one-way ANOVA did not find a

significant difference between the Romantic Partner Conflict Subscales of compromise,

domination, submission, separation and interactional reactivity and the scales of problem

seriousness and mulling about unresolved conflict. However, for those who predominantly used

avoidance as a conflict style in their relationship, there was a significant difference at the $p <$

0.05 level between the three attributions of self, both and other, $F (2, 56) = 3.96$, $p < 0.03$. The

group sizes were unequal, though, so a harmonic mean of the group size was used ($M = 11.86$).

A post hoc Tukey HSD test revealed that participants were more likely to share blame than to

attribute fault to the other person (M dif. $= 1.85$, Std. Error $= 0.71$). This test of participants who

used an avoidance style did not find a significant difference among participants being more

likely to attribute themselves as sole factors in causing the conflict than to share the blame (M dif.

$= 0.55$, Std. Error $= 1.07$) or attribute it to the other person (M dif. $= 2.40$, Std. Error $= 1.15$).

Regarding perceived relational closeness after the unresolved conflict, a one-way ANOVA did

not find a significant difference among the subscales of avoidance, domination, submission,

separation and interactional reactivity and the frequency of thinking scale. For those who

predominantly used compromise as a conflict style in their relationship, however, there was a

significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level between distant, somewhat close and very close, $F (2,$

$56) = 4.09$, $p < 0.03$. The group sizes were unequal, though, so a harmonic mean of the group

size was used ($M = 11.94$). A post hoc Tukey HSD test revealed that participants were more

likely to move from being distant to being very close after the unresolved conflict (M dif. $=$

12.23, Std. Error $= 4.39$). This test did not find a significant difference among those who used

compromise as a conflict style and any other level of closeness they felt toward the other person.

For example, going from somewhat close to very close (M dif. $= 12.23$, Std. Error $= 4.39$) or

going from distant to somewhat close (M dif. = 12.23, Std. Error = 4.39) did not have a

significant mean difference. Another one-way ANOVA regading closeness after and the same

harmonic mean found a significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level in relation to problem

seriousness, $F (2, 56) = 5.00$, $p < 0.02$. A post hoc Tukey HSD test revealed that participants

were more likely to move from being very close to being distant in their relationship if they

perceived greater problem seriousness of the unresolved conflict (M dif. = 1.99, Std. Error =

0.74). This test did not find a significant difference among participants who perceived more

problem seriousness and any other level of closeness the felt toward the other person. For

example, going from very close to somewhat close (M dif. = 0.73, Std. Error = 0.86) or going

from somewhat close to distant (M dif. = 1.27, Std. Error = 0.59) did not have a significant mean

difference.

Furthermore, I was interested in finding out whether or not participants felt significantly

more distant in their relationships after unresolved conflict. My initial analysis of closeness

before the conflict and closeness after the conflict used a chi-squared test. However, because of

my study's small sample size that caused the condition of having fewer than the minimum of five

in expected count cells, I was unable to test a significant difference using a chi-square test.

Observations in the crosstabulation still showed that more relationships became distant after the

conflict that was not resolved. Most notable were the observations that out of 38 people who

were very close before the unresolved conflict, 22 of them felt distant after. Along the same

lines, 12 out of 15 people felt distant after unresolved conflict, when they felt somewhat close

before the conflict. Figure 4 represents this data.

	Distant Before	Somewhat Close Before	Very Close Before	
Distant After	6	12	22	
Somewhat Close After	0	3	9	
Very Close After	0	0	7	

Figure 4. Relationship of Before and After Closeness

Looking more closely at the number of participants who claimed that they felt distant before and the number of participants who claimed that they felt distant after the unresolved conflict, I observed an increase in proportions. I then used a test of proportions with independent samples to find out if this increase was significant. My alternate hypothesis was that the proportion of participants who felt distant after the unresolved conflict is greater than the proportion of participants who felt distant before the unresolved conflict, H_1: $p_1 < p_2$. Using the test statistic in Figure 5, I inputted the 59 participants who answered this question as the sample size, the 6 participants who felt distant before the unresolved conflict, and the 40 participants who felt distant after the unresolved conflict, $z = -6.42$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, at a five percent level of significance, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the proportion of participants

who felt distant after the unresolved conflict is greater than the proportion of participants who felt distant before the unresolved conflict.

$$z = \frac{\hat{p}_1 - \hat{p}_2}{\sqrt{\dfrac{\overline{p}\,\overline{q}}{n_1} + \dfrac{\overline{p}\,\overline{q}}{n_2}}}$$

$$\text{where } \overline{p} = \frac{r_1 + r_2}{n_1 + n_2} \text{ and } \overline{q} = 1 - \overline{p}$$

$$\hat{p}_1 = r_1/n_1; \; \hat{p}_2 = r_2/n_2$$

Figure 5. Test Statistic Formula

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify contributing factors in the relatively unexplored topic of unresolved conflict. Aside from the empirical results that constituted the majority of this study, eight themes were identified as unresolved conflict contributors. These themes included communication avoidance, fear, trust, validation, competing differences, conflict abandonment, coherence, and resolution resistance. Communication avoidance was the most prevalent theme that was identified to contribute to a conflict having no resolution. In relation to previous research, this theme respectively exemplifies the category of avoidance (Folger et al., 2001). While it makes sense that avoiding a conflict and refraining from communication about it would be a common theme, the prevalence of this theme in the present study solidifies avoidance as a what participants perceived as the main contributor to unresolved conflict. Gottman's (1991) behavior of stonewalling also is supported as a theme in the current research with the theme of conflict abandonment. Most cases of this matter exemplified a party shutting down or physically leaving to create the unresolved conflict, which are exemplary characteristics of Gottman's

stonewalling. While the research of stonewalling is predominately found in marital relations, the

theme of conflict abandonment supports and expands the concept of stonewalling throughout

close relationships. Another noteworthy theme was competing differences that referred to

differing views and an inability to accept them. Although not relating to the specific areas of

unresolved conflict identified in previous literature, competing differences falls in line with the

definition of an interpersonal conflict that was discussed during the introduction of this study.

Wilmot and Hocker's (2001) specification of interpersonal conflict as incompatible goals that

fall in conjunction with scarce resources align with the theme of competing differences. When

individuals have competing differences at the level of interests and values, they are especially

challenging to resolve and, hence, are likely to become serial, intractable, or perpetuate (Johnson

& Roloff, 2000; Gottman, 1999; Northrup, 1989). This theme of competing differences suggests

that some basic, not specific, forms of interpersonal conflict can produce unresolved conflict.

Where these three themes support previous research, the other five themes of fear, trust,

validation coherence, and resolution resistance are not discussed as specific contributors to

unresolved conflict. Avoidance is largely examined in past studies (Gottman; Wilmot & Hocker;

Folger et al.; Floyd, 2009; Canary et al., 1995), and although this study supports the need for that

research, these new identified themes give cause for more studies to be conducted for a better

understanding. The present findings from the first research question provide backing for the

need to broaden and clarify the scope in which unresolved conflict comes about.

In testing relationships with a perceived climate that came after the unresolved conflict,

participants noted abundantly more causal climates that were cloudy or stormy. This indicates

that unresolved conflict resulted in more unhappy feelings and more tension. Accordingly,

Folger et al. (2001) identifies conflict being indicative of future interactions. The resulting

assumption can then be made that darker climate brought about by unresolved conflict can lead

to darker interactions that will subsequently occur. In specific findings of this study, the conflict

style of interactional reactivity was significantly related to a stormier climate. Zacchilli et al.

defined this style as a harsh and heated way of dealing with conflict. Due to interactional

reactivity's significance with darker climate, rash decisions and emotional interplay with conflict

can produce a more threatening climate, which can then intern supply fuel for more threatening

acts. Folger et al. explains that climate and interaction are both dependent on each other.

Interaction affects climate, which then affects interaction again. Mulling and problem

seriousness of an unresolved conflict were also significantly related to stormier climates. Since

Cloven and Roloff (1991) contribute the consequence of negative relationship affects that

transpire from mulling and amplified problem seriousness, the relationship with climate in the

present study supports this prior research with conflict in general. Mulling and less

communication does not benefit relationships that experience unresolved conflict because of the

resulting worse climate. In practical implication, unresolved conflict should be handled with less

destructive conflict styles. The more a problem is perceived as serious, the more likely it is for

an unhealthier climate. The resolvability should also be dealt with in a way that does not

increase the frequency of mulling to avoid a stormier climate that can produce interactions more

volatile.

Previous literature has provided several different outlooks on gender differences with

respect to conflict interactions. Most research provides the assumptions that there are more

similarities than the occasional, specific differences (Canary et al., 1995). The present research

only found one significant difference between men and women and that related to conflict styles.

With the use of an interactional reactivity, or emotionally aggressive and distrusting, conflict

style in respect to unresolved conflict, I found a significant gender difference. This finding is consistent with studies that have found women to report more emotions of anger than men in close relationships (Canary et al.; Sanford & Rowatt, 2004; El-Sheikh et al., 2000). With this finding and the previous finding dealing with climate and interactional reactivity, women may need to be more conscious of using this conflict style because it is more likely to lead to a stormier climate. No other significant differences were found between men and women. This finding in unresolved conflict supports one side of the argument literature that men and women are more similar than different with respect to general conflict (Canary et al.).

Examining the specific issue of unresolved conflict, the current study found one correlation between behavioral and cognitive attributes that pertain to dealing with conflict. The more frequent thinking that occurred about the unresolved conflict was indicative of perceiving the problem to be more serious. This finding supports the general conflict finding by Cloven and Roloff (1991). My finding supports the relationship of mulling and perceived seriousness as they are translated across specific conflicts, like unresolved conflict. It is understandable that these two variables are related, too, because they were both more evident of a stormier climate in my previous findings. As such, increased communication about issues around unresolved conflict should take place to reduce negative effects from perceived problem seriousness that arises from greater mulling (Cloven and Roloff). While I deduced that mulling or problem seriousness would correlate one way or another to some of the conflict styles examined in this study, the absence of significant correlations suggests no relationship between these variables with respect to instances of unresolved conflict.

Additional findings to this study provide a reason to pursue subjects of blame attribution and perceived relationship closeness after an unresolved in future studies. Participants who used

an avoidant conflict style were more likely to share blame than to attribute fault to the other

person. As Floyd (2009) suggests, this may be to make the conflict disappear, but it can lead to

exacerbated conflict. Further investigation could be pursued to find implications that occur when

conflict is not resolved by avoidance and parties attribute the blame equally to bury the conflict.

Compromising participants were found to be more likely to go from being distant to being very

close after unresolved conflict. This finding may indicate that people who are used to

compromising are more able to deal with unresolved conflict. It would be advantageous to look

into compromising styles to see if they are the most beneficial, when it comes to mediating

unresolved conflict. On the other hand, participants were more likely to move from being very

close to being distant with greater perceived problem seriousness. With a more serious problem,

this study suggests that more distance is created. It may be useful for future research to examine

and find support of whether or not problems of greater severity are less likely to be resolved.

Furthermore, the significant increase in distance after an unresolved conflict offers some

evidence to the importance of examining the topic of unresolved conflict to find helpful steps to

take in preventing or managing it.

Limitations

Consistent with all research investigations, several limitations were present in this study.

A predominate limitation was the small sample size used. Due to few participants, the number of

female subjects happened to account for twice the number of male subjects. This disproportion

should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of RQ5, which looked at

significant differences between males and females. Of these males and females, all were

predominantly young, undergraduate students, which does not characterize the population as a

whole. Research that follows this study should expand the amount and age range of participants.

Regarding the analysis with respect to the goals of the study, The Romantic Partner Conflict Scale may have not been the best scale to use for this study. It assumed that participants had been in multiple conflicts with the person in the conflict they described and had them assessed conflict styles based on multiple interactions. While the close relationships in this study were theoretically similar to romantic partners, being significant and predicted to engage in more conflict than other relationships (Floyd, 2009), they may not have been similar enough, all together. I think many participants encountered the problem of not being able to decipher whether or not they used certain tactics when arguing. Through the examination of the open-ended questions, it was my perception that many of the unresolved conflicts described happened to be the only conflict that the participant had ever encountered with the other person. In these cases, the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale would prove to be ineffective because a conflict style between the two parties could not be determined when the parties do not engage in enough conflict together. Future research on unresolved conflict should examine conflict styles in a natural setting, because of the current findings that suggest unresolved conflict creates more distance in relationships. While more research is needed to confirm this effect of distance in relationship, my finding would indicate that fewer interactions occur between parties, making it very difficult to identify a conflict style between them. The Romantic Partner Conflict scale also assumes that parties have a developed relationship because it is identifying a process rather than a topic of conflict (Zacchilli et al., 2009). A more helpful scale in subsequent research could stem from the five conflict styles of competition, collaborations, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation that Kilmann and Thomas (1975) defined from personality dimensions. A potential study could look at which conflict style is most prevalent in acts of unresolved conflict to find out how to better manage and prevent unresolved conflict. Once a scale is developed for

unresolved conflict, this new scale, conflict styles, climate and gender differences could be further analyzed to find any correlations, as well.

In the identification of contributing themes for unresolved conflict, this study could have been strengthened by a more extensive or reliable method to analyze the open-ended questions or the conflicts in general. Both researchers of the present study were not highly skilled at coding and the Grounded Theory Method relies on experienced and skilled coders (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Future studies may consider using an independent approach to coding, as used in Cloven and Roloff (1991), and running an intercoder reliability test. More theory for identifying contributing factors should be used, too. I do not claim to have identified all the major themes present that are contributors to unresolved conflict. Moreover, respondents were required to recall a period of conflict for the basis of this study. Cloven and Roloff persuade the challenges associated with the method of measuring cognitive content. Future research could look into measuring interactions of conflict in person, to study the effects first hand and gain an understanding of the conflict from the perspectives of both parties (Cloven & Roloff). This would help to better identify climate, too. Folger et al. (2001) establishes climate as a mutual atmosphere, and while one person's perceptions play an important part, climate is best assessed by imputed from both parties. A qualitative analysis of conflict journals pertaining to the unresolved conflict overtime could be one possible avenue of research.

Conclusion

Overall, the current study provides evidence for further research to examine, support, and expand on more contributors of unresolved conflict. It merits the discovery of advice and consultation to prevent distance and negative effects in close relationship. The area of unresolved conflict has been found to be much more diverse than specific topics of avoidance

and stonewalling (Gottman, 1999; Floyd, 2009). Although the specific conflict styles examined

did not correlate with frequency of thinking or problem seriousness, frequency of thinking and

problem seriousness did correlate to support Cloven and Roloff's (1991) similar finding in

general conflict. These two variables were then found to be causal predictors in the development

of a stormier climate that results after unresolved climate. A stormier climate was also attributed

to a conflict style of interactional reactivity, which is a more destructive and emotive conflict

style that was significantly different for men and women. In summary, more research needs to

be conducted in the area of unresolved conflict to expand and support the current results.

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APPENDIX

Unresolved Conflict Online Survey

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jonathan Squires, from the
UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND Department of Communication Studies. The study explores the
aftermath of unresolved conflict in relation to closeness. If you decide to participate, you will be
asked to fill out a short on-line questionnaire. The questionnaire will take about 10-20
minutes. If at anytime you feel uncomfortable during the questionnaire, you may skip a question
or leave the questionnaire completely by exiting from the on-line survey. There are no
anticipated risks or benefits to you associated with this study. The study's goal is to add to our
understanding of the effects of conflict on relationships. Should the survey bring up
uncomfortable memories, feel free to discontinue. If reoccurring memories become a significant
problem, please seek guidance or help from a counselor at your university. The on-line survey
program makes subject identities anonymous. Information obtained in connection from this
study will be aggregated and will not identify you in any way. Jonathan will present the findings
of the study in a poster presentation at University of Portland, and hopefully at a local
conference.   Your participation is voluntary. Whether or not you decide to participate will not
affect your relationship with your university. If you decide to participate, you are free to
withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you have
any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me by phone at (541) 417-0749, email
at squires13@up.edu, or by mail at 5000 N. Willamette Blvd., Haggerty Hall 207, Portland, OR
97203. Also, feel free to contact my advisor, Dr. Shapiro, at (503) 943-7349. If you have any
questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review
Board office at the University of Portland. The board can be reached by email through
irb@up.edu or by contacting the current IRB Chair, Dr. Karen Ward, at (503) 943-7436. If you
would like a copy of this form, please email squires13@up.edu and one will be sent to
you. Your accessing of this on-line survey indicates that you have read and understand the
information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your
consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. Thank you for your interest
and help.

Sincerely,
 Jonathan Squires
November 8, 2012

❍ I agree - continue to survey (1)
❍ I do not agree - exit survey (2)

Thank you for choosing to participate in the study! I very much appreciate your time to help me
with this study. Please remember to be patient, as time can seem to move slower when
completing a survey. Also, remember that you are an AWESOME person for doing this!

Q1 Please describe a conflict with a roommate, friend, family, romantic partner, or other person
which did not have satisfying closure.

Q2 What was your relationship with the other person?
○ Roommate (1)
○ Friend (2)
○ Family Member (3)
○ Romantic Partner (4)
○ Other: (5) _____

Q3 What was your level of closeness before the conflict?
○ Distant (1)
○ Somewhat Close (2)
○ Very Close (3)

Q5 How severe was the conflict?
○ Only a Disagreement (1)
○ Not very Severe (2)
○ Moderately Severe (3)
○ Severe (4)
○ Extremely Severe (5)

Q6 How would you describe the climate between you and the other person after the conflict?
○ Sunny (1)
○ Cloudy (2)
○ Stormy (3)

Q7 What was your level of closeness after the conflict?
○ Distant (1)
○ Somewhat Close (2)
○ Very Close (3)

The following questions are to determine the conflict strategy used between you and the other person you described for the first question.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
We collaborate to find a common ground to solve problems between us. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
We try to collaborate so that we can reach a joint solution to conflict. (2)	○	○	○	○	○

We collaborate to come up with the best solution for both of us when we have a problem. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
In order to resolve conflict, we try to reach a compromise. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
When we have conflict, we collaborate so that we are both happy with our decision. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
The best way to resolve conflict between the other person and me is to find a middle ground. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Our conflicts usually end when we reach a compromise. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
When we disagree, we work to find a solution that satisfies both of us. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
When we disagree, we consider both sides of the argument. (9)	○	○	○	○	○

We often resolve conflict by talking about the problem. (10)	○	○	○	○	○
We try to find solutions that are acceptable to both of us. (11)	○	○	○	○	○
Compromise is the best way to resolve conflict between us. (12)	○	○	○	○	○
We try to meet halfway to resolve a disagreement. (13)	○	○	○	○	○
We negotiate to resolve our disagreements. (14)	○	○	○	○	○
When we have conflict, I try to push the other person into choosing the solution that I think is best. (15)	○	○	○	○	○

When we disagree, my goal is to convince the other person that I am right. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
When we argue or fight, I try to win. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I try to take control when we argue. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

I rarely let the other person win an argument. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
When we argue, I let the other person know I am in charge. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I avoid disagreements with the other person. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
I avoid conflict with the other person. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
The other person and I try to avoid arguments. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
When we disagree, we try to separate for a while so we can consider both sides of the argument. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
When we experience conflict, we let each other cool off before discussing it further. (10)	○	○	○	○	○
When we have conflict, we separate but expect to deal with it later. (11)	○	○	○	○	○
When we have conflict, we withdraw from each other for a while for a "cooling-off" period. (12)	○	○	○	○	○

Separation for a period of time can work well to let our conflicts cool down. (13)	○	○	○	○	○
I give in to the other person's wishes to settle arguments on his or her terms. (14)	○	○	○	○	○

When we have conflict, I usually give in to the other person. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I surrender to the other person when we disagree on an issue. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Sometimes I agree with the other person just so the conflict will end. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
When we argue, I usually try to satisfy the other person's needs rather than my own. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
The other person and I have frequent conflicts. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Our conflicts usually last quite awhile. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
When the other person and I disagree, we	○	○	○	○	○

argue loudly. (7)					
I suffer a lot from conflict with the other person. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
I become verbally abusive to the other person when we have conflict. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
The other person and I often argue because I do not trust him/her. (10)	○	○	○	○	○

The following questions are to determine a relationship between mulling and the conflict you described for the first question.

M1 How much time did you spend worrying about the conflict?
○ Did not worry at all (1)
○ Only worried a little bit (2)
○ Somewhat worried (3)
○ Significantly worried (4)
○ Worried very much (5)

M2 To what extent, if at all, did thoughts about the problem interfere with daily activity?
○ Did not interfere at all (1)
○ Only slightly interfered (2)
○ Somewhat interfered (3)
○ Interfered (4)
○ Interfered a lot (5)

M3 To what extent, if at all, do you put in any effort to mentally assessing the problem?
○ Did not assess at all (1)
○ Little effort (2)
○ Some effort (3)
○ Put in significant effort (4)
○ Very much effort was used to assess (5)

M4 How much time was spent reflecting on the problem?
○ No time (1)
○ A little time (2)
○ Some time (3)
○ A significant amount of time (4)
○ A lot of time was spent reflecting (5)

M5 How much did you think about the conflict?
- ○ Never thought about the conflict (1)
- ○ Thought little about it (2)
- ○ Thought some about it (3)
- ○ Significantly thought about it (4)
- ○ Thought about the conflict all the time (5)

M6 How much of your thinking tried to explain the source of the conflict?
- ○ No thoughts (1)
- ○ Few thoughts (2)
- ○ Some thoughts (3)
- ○ Significant thoughts (4)
- ○ Most thoughts (5)

M7 How much of your thinking tried to find a way to solve the problem?
- ○ No thoughts (1)
- ○ Few thoughts (2)
- ○ Some thoughts (3)
- ○ Significant thoughts (4)
- ○ Most thoughts (5)

M8 How much of you thinking was an emotional response to the problem?
- ○ No thoughts (1)
- ○ Few thoughts (2)
- ○ Some thoughts (3)
- ○ Significant thoughts (4)
- ○ Most thoughts (5)

M9 How much time did you spend discussing the conflict with others?
- ○ Never (1)
- ○ A little (2)
- ○ Some (3)
- ○ A lot (4)
- ○ Frequently (5)

M10 Did thinking about the conflict make you feel better or worse about the problem?
- ○ Felt much worse (1)
- ○ Felt a little worse (2)
- ○ Felt the same (3)
- ○ Felt a little better (4)
- ○ Felt much better (5)

M11 To what extent did thinking about the problem provide you with a better understanding of the problem?
- ○ Not at all (1)
- ○ Slightly more understanding (2)
- ○ Some understanding (3)
- ○ A better understanding (4)
- ○ A very much better understanding (5)

M12 How serious was the conflict?
- ○ Not serious at all (1)
- ○ Slightly serious (2)
- ○ Somewhat serious (3)
- ○ Serious (4)
- ○ Very serious (5)

M13 How often does the conflict occur?
- ○ Only occurred once (1)
- ○ Twice (2)
- ○ A few times (3)
- ○ More than a few times (4)
- ○ Occurs a lot (5)

M14 Did the conflict bother you?
- ○ Not at all (1)
- ○ Slightly (2)
- ○ Some (3)
- ○ Bothered me (4)
- ○ Bothered me very much (5)

M15 Who do you think was responsible for the conflict?
❍ Self (1)
❍ Other Person (2)
❍ Both (3)

The following are the final four questions.

Q9 What is your gender?
❍ Male (1)
❍ Female (2)

Q11 What is the gender of the other person in the conflict you described?
❍ Male (1)
❍ Female (2)

Q10 What is your age?
❍ 18 - 20 (1)
❍ 21 - 23 (2)
❍ 24 - 26 (3)
❍ 26 - 30 (4)
❍ 31 and above (5)

Q12 How long had you known the person with whom you had the conflict?
❍ All my life (1)
❍ 5 - 10 years (2)
❍ 3 - 4 years (3)
❍ 1 - 2 years (4)
❍ Less than a year (5)

YOU FINISHED! Thank you for you time. Your help is very much appreciated. It will allow me to finish my senior capstone, which will ultimately allow me to graduate. You are a great person. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me by phone at (541) 417-0749, email at squires13@up.edu, or by mail at 5000 N. Willamette Blvd., Haggerty Hall 207, Portland, OR 97203. Also, feel free to contact my advisor, Dr. Shapiro, at (503) 943-7349. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board office at the University of Portland. The board can be reached by email through irb@up.edu or by contacting the current IRB Chair, Dr. Karen Ward, at (503) 943-7436. If reoccurring memories of the conflict you described become a significant problem, please seek guidance or help from a counselor at your university.