

Revitalizing Conflict Research with a Communication Perspective: Celebrating and Learning from Linda Putnam's Contributions to the Study of Conflict

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Abstract

In this tribute to the 2010 recipient of the International Association for Conflict Management Lifetime Achievement Award, we celebrate the scholarship of Linda Putnam. We highlight her transformational impact not only on conflict research, but also on those of us who have had the opportunity to work with her. Noting her multidisciplinary research and her advocacy for a communication perspective of conflict, we review four distinct contributions and their intersections with conflict research: the communication perspective of conflict, interaction analysis, the bona fide group perspective, and bounded emotionality. Underlying these contributions are cross-disciplinary principles exemplified in Linda Putnam's research and career that serve to revitalize conflict research and inspire scholars. We conclude with her words of wisdom on the future of this field of research.

Conflict scholars have long been interested in the subject of transformation, examining its occurrence in settings ranging from mediation (Bush & Folger, 1994) to international peacemaking (Dayton & Kriesberg, 2009; Lederach, 1995). Conflict transformation involves "moments in the conflict process in which parties reach new understandings of their situation, ones that redefine the nature of the conflict, the relationship among the parties, or the problems they face" (Putnam, 2004, p. 276). Such redefinition, arrived at and practiced through conflicting parties' interaction with each other, can lead to new ways of thinking about issues, new questions, and new ways of interacting (Putnam, 2004). Conflict transformation has the potential to produce positive consequences for individuals, relationships, and the wider systems of which they are a part (Bush & Folger, 1994). Such positive transformation, whether in conflict settings, educational settings, or other relational settings, does not simply happen; it takes people who are curious, who think abstractly and across boundaries, who recognize and legitimate others, who build constructive connections with others (Putnam, 2004). Linda Putnam is such a scholar.

Linda's career has been widely celebrated. She has been honored by the International Association of Conflict Management with the Lifetime Achievement Award (2010); the National Communication

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Association with the Distinguished Scholar Award (1999), Presidential Citation Award (2010), and the Samuel Becker Distinguished Service Award (2012); the International Communication Association with the Steven Chaffee Career Productivity Award (2005); *Management Communication Quarterly* with its inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award (2012); and the Academy of Management with the Distinguished Service Award (2011). Linda also received prestigious university honors from Texas A&M University and the University of California, Santa Barbara, having been named a Regents Professor at Texas A&M University in 2006 and a Faculty Distinguished Research Lecturer at UCSB in 2015. These awards speak to the indelible and transformative mark she has made and continues to make on scholarship across a range of disciplines. She also has enriched the lives of those of us afforded the opportunity to work with her and experience her seemingly limitless energy and her genuine care, concern, and interest (Figures 1–4). Indeed, the four of us came to know Linda at different times and in different ways—as PhD advisees (Tricia and Deanna at Purdue, Greg at Texas A&M) and as research colleagues (Bill).

Our goal in this essay is both to pay tribute to Linda’s countless contributions to conflict research and to flesh out key lessons or principles evident in her scholarship that can revitalize conflict research. By “revitalize,” we do not suggest that conflict research is fading or in dire straits. Indeed, if the pages of *NCMR* are any indication, researchers are asking interesting questions and advancing understandings of conflict in a variety of settings. Instead, we take up Linda’s description of revitalization from her discussion of small group research:

Revitalizing . . . means more than critique, new foci, or broadening the scope of a given area. It embraces alternatives that infuse a research domain with “new life” or added vigor. . . . The real issue in revitalizing is how to develop mindsets for introducing new ways of thinking about small group communication (Putnam, 1994, p. 97).

It is this ability—an ability to develop mindsets for introducing new ways of thinking about a field or question—that in part has contributed to the impact Linda has made and is continuing to make on our field. That Linda has done this while also being genuinely caring and compassionate creates a lasting legacy that we celebrate here.

We frame our discussion around four principles evident in Linda’s research that spans across disciplines. First, communication is central to understanding conflict, as evident in conflict framing. Second, conflict unfolds in the parties’ interactions, making interaction analysis a valuable tool. Third, conflict is embedded in its contexts, as highlighted by the bona fide group perspective. Fourth, conflict is an emotional, whole-person phenomenon, as demonstrated in the concept of bounded emotionality. Together, these principles offer ways for conflict researchers to ask new questions, develop new relationships across disciplines, engage in new thinking, and attend to multiple voices that constitute the field of conflict research.

Centrality, Complexity, and Commitment to Praxis: Linda Putnam’s Contributions to Making Communication Matter—Tricia Jones

Performance, progress, and impact are always a matter of context. Remembering the arc of the field as Linda has made her mark as a first-tier scholar is important. Standing in the present, her contributions are difficult to match. It is impressive to remember that when Linda’s voice began to call out the centrality and complexity of communication, the field was just beginning to own the area of organizational communication, not to mention the work in conflict and communication. Her vision was unique and persuasive; her rhetorical force and consistency defined a multidisciplinary, reflective, and interpretive approach to scholarship.

But for me, as a first-semester master’s student at Purdue University in the late 1970s—sitting somewhat daunted watching Linda pull out her famous yellow, flair-filled, escribed legal pads of knowledge and launch an information-packed, three-hour graduate session nonstop—something even more



Figure 1. Linda Putnam presenting a keynote address at The Conflict Conference in 2015.

important happened. I began to understand the degree to which communication matters as a vehicle for human understanding and to change in a way I simply had not before.

My undergraduate studies in communication and history were engaging and my masters' courses in the Krannert School of Management were intriguing and highly useful. But it was Linda's well-argued and, ironically, simultaneously inclusive lectures that convinced me the discipline of communication was and would be one of the most powerful intellectual platforms for understanding conflict and developing interventions that matter. She helped me, and many other conflict scholars, embrace a communication perspective on conflict, and dare to claim the importance of praxis in our work.

Linda has been a kaleidoscope of insight as she helped us value the multiplicity and interconnection of perspectives while acknowledging that there is a mystery and magic in the process—an undeniable essence that cannot be quantified but, nonetheless, claims a certainty. In reviewing her work once again, it is striking how much she literally loves the concept and analysis of frames at every level. There are contributions from Linda's work that strike me as elemental and that I would like to discuss here. Some of these concepts will ring again in the comments of Greg, Deanna, and Bill. And that is how it should be, for connection and flow of her elemental analyses across contexts and years is heady.

The Centrality of Communication in Conflict

During the 1980s, Linda and I published two articles that reviewed literatures on the role of communication in bargaining (Putnam & Jones, 1982a) and reported on the patterns of interaction related to negotiation outcomes (Putnam & Jones, 1982b), the latter of which Bill Donohue kindly discusses in more depth later in this article. In the next decade, Linda refined a definition of a "communication perspective" and, with Michael Roloff, presented this as the core of their edited volume *Communication and Negotiation* (1992). They asserted that three key factors differentiate a communication perspective on negotiation: (a) That attention is paid to the microelements, such as verbal utterances and nonverbal cues, in the larger context of the negotiation process; (b) that the focus is on the dynamic aspects of negotiation, including "how information processing occurs; how offers are formulated and modified; how issues and disputes are transformed; how power and authority are redefined through communication styles and strategies; and how conflict in negotiation escalates and de-escalates" (p. 7); and (c) that

the intent is to discover systems of meaning in negotiation through analysis of language and discourse. This elucidation of the communication perspective served to essentialize and differentiate the perspective from others.

Later, Joe Folger and I adopted the communication perspective to organize our book on *New Directions in Mediation* and extended the understanding of third party processes (Folger & Jones, 1994) beyond the predominant labor relations frames common at the time. While mediation and negotiation scholars engaged in microanalyses of these processes prior to this work (Donohue, 1978, 1981; Jones, 2001a, 2001b); defining the perspective defined a community of thought that helped to further encourage and promote the work.

A communication perspective requires the conflict scholar to acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of the perspective, to respect and learn from a variety of disciplines not traditionally central in conflict studies. As Bruce McKinney noted in his review of *Communication and Negotiation* (1993, p. 368), “Much of the research cited in the eleven chapters does not come from traditional communication research. Rather, the literature reviews come from a variety of disciplines (i.e., psychology, sociology, labor relations, anthropology, and linguistics).” The breadth of her scholarship is breathtaking, and my opinion, it is no accident that the work of her students (hopefully including me) is replete with multidisciplinary.

Discursive Strategies for Meaning-making in Conflict and Organizations

Throughout her organizational communication and conflict work, Linda consistently advocates a “sense-making” analytic that is informed by, although more discursively rooted than social–psychological “sense-making” theorists like Karl Weick. Overlapping with the microanalytics of the communication perspective, she serves to introduce discourse analysis in a variety of forms to the understanding of conflict. Again and again she acts as implicit matchmaker between scholars seeking to understand meaning and methodologies capable of yielding insight. Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) overviewed eight different approaches to discourse analysis for organizational communication researchers, and these explanations similarly informed organizational conflict and negotiation scholars (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). She has devoted considerable effort to supporting and presenting views of organizations as discursively based (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004; Grant, Hardy, & Putnam, 2010; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009).

In 2005, she contributed a similar service writing about “mucking around” in discourse and elaborated the three different types of discourse analysis that typify research in negotiation—conversational analysis, pragmatics, and rhetorical analyses. Indeed, much of her research in negotiation processes is discourse analytic (in the general sense of that term), including her analysis of pilots in conflict about professional values and futures (Real & Putnam, 2005) and her analyses of teacher union negotiations (Putnam, Wilson, & Turner, 1990).

A striking feature of Linda’s work in this area, one I think she rarely gets enough credit for, is her willingness to struggle “out loud” and “on the page” with the real difficulties of grappling with an inherently challenging methodology. I remember in the 1990s at an International Association for Conflict Management (IACM) conference in Europe, she presented a paper in which she used conversational analysis of adjacency pairs in interpersonal negotiation. What struck me then and after was her willingness to be honest and reflexive about her own research, turning the presentation into a compelling critique of the specific method while revealing the continuing value of the method applied well. That moment reinforced others in which, as a teacher, she taught one of the most valuable lessons—that it is laudable to explore and risk to move forward, to work outside of one’s comfort zone to do honor to the phenomenon of study.

Framing Conflict

For the past decade, Linda’s primary interests focused on framing in conflict and negotiations, although her earlier work also included acknowledgment of framing as a core direction of the field. Her early

chapter entitled “Framing, Reframing, and Issue Development” (Putnam & Holmer, 1992) analyzes the research of framing, provides an excellent literature review of framing research, and argues that contemporary perspectives of framing heuristics, frame categories, and issue development all fail to provide the necessary representation of framing in negotiation.

Her orientation to framing is articulated in her 2010 article:

Communicative framing is another way that disputants develop spaces for new understandings. Framing refers to the linguistic boundaries that participants construct or the ways that they use language to bracket off elements of a conflict for inclusion or exclusion from a scene. Bracketing is pulling a conflict situation out of the stream of ongoing events in which it occurs. Of note, participants typically bracket the same conflict incidents in very different ways (Putnam & Holmer, 1992). (Putnam, pp. 328–329)

In fact, in an interview about her social science career by *Social Science Space* (March 30, 2012), she describes the framing process as “. . . how disputants in a conflict label a situation, privilege certain features of it as important, and include some elements in their descriptions while they leave out others.”

Framing analyses in conflict have been conducted by a variety of disciplines and in a variety of contexts. For example, researchers studied frames that Kurdish youth use to understand and describe their conflicts in Turkey (Başer & Çelik, 2014). Others examine framing of environmental and intractable conflict in news and media outlets and speculate on the impact of those frames for the trajectory of the conflict (Vraneski & Richter, 2003).

Elliott, Kaufman, Gardner, and Burgess (2002) suggest that people create frames to understand why conflicts exist, what actions are important in the conflict, and what response options are available. Moreover, perspective taking requires that conflicting parties consider the discrepancy in frames that leads to alienation and escalation. This conflict analysis and perspective taking often involves six categories of frames—identity, characterization, conflict management, risk or information, loss or gain, and views of nature (particularly in environmental and public policy conflicts).

The work on intractable conflict strongly emphasizes frame analysis as Peter Coleman and his colleagues suggest (Coleman, 2004). Communication and socialization are central to intractable conflicts and critical to its transformation. Such transformation encourages conflicting parties to challenge oversimplified ideologies and analyze communication processes so that appropriately complex narratives emerge and can result in better relationships. Linda’s interest in issues of framing in intractable conflicts resulted in her work on a large NSF-funded project with other negotiation scholars who contributed significantly to the framing literature (Brummans et al., 2008; Gray, Coleman, & Putnam, 2007).

Applying frame insights to negotiation practice is a focus in her discussion of “changing the name of the game of negotiation” (Putnam, 2010a). She explores practice implications but also strikes a cautionary note. For example, some of the “game-changing” moves discussed (Putnam, 2010a, pp. 333–335) include using different labels to name a conflict, shifting levels of abstraction, and employing systematic questioning.

Wishing on a “Star”

As someone who focuses on conflict practice and intervention as much as research, I look forward to learning more from Linda about her thoughts on praxis and what the communication perspective provides to sophisticated application of theory. Of course, that bias is one that she owes some responsibility for since her teaching lit the spark in me almost 40 years ago.

While my scholarship and practice has been informed by a variety of people, there is no doubt that Linda’s influence is discernible. For example, the conflict coaching model that I developed with my colleague Ross Brinkert (2008) is a one-on-one intervention that uses narrative conflict theory to help a party develop a deeper understanding of their conflict, identify a preferred assets-based direction for the conflict, and develop essential skills to enact the preferred direction. The engine of the conflict analysis

conversations focus on elicitive questioning to help the party better understand identity, emotion, and power issues for self and other in the conflict. Much of the emotion theory that undergirds the conflict analysis conversations resulted from my interest in understanding how emotional experience frames conflict and escalation (Jones, 2005). The conflict coaching process has been adopted by a number of federal agencies and is a critical component of intelligent dispute system design with workplace mediation (Jones, in press). We are currently piloting implementation and research in the New York Unified Court System Community Dispute Resolution Center systems (Jones, Hedeem, Raines, & Cutrona, 2016) for use in family, coparenting, elder care, and neighborhood conflicts. Adapted versions of our conflict coaching process are used in mixed cities disputes by Israeli mediation centers throughout that country. A pilot for special education disputes was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Office of Dispute Resolution, to assist in parent–parent, teacher–teacher, and administrator–administrator conflicts (Jones, 2013).

Interestingly, it strikes me that Linda’s recent publications concerning engaged scholarship (Putnam & Dempsey, 2015) even more strongly embrace praxis. I can only hope that this happens and that other “pracademics” (a terms I use with pride) are willing to carry the banner of her work forward in their own practice. As Linda’s career convincingly attests, communication matters.

Contributions to Interaction Analysis—Bill Donohue

Linda Putnam has used a number of communication contexts to create a series of windows that allow various scholars and practitioners to peer into the ever unfolding drama of organizational life. Early in her career, Linda chose to focus on conflict contexts because they disrupt the ordinary, glossed-over organizational routines and quickly expose, and make explicit the underlying organizing schemes that



Figure 2. Linda Putnam at the 2011 International Association of Conflict Management Conference in Istanbul, Turkey. From left to right are Meina Liu, Linda Putnam, Tom Putnam, and Bill Donohue.

define actual organizations. This move was innovative because, prior to Linda's research, the value of conflict in opening organizational windows was largely unknown in organizational communication.

Searching for a productive conflict context and methodology to better understand organizational life, Linda and her colleagues chose to explore the areas of bargaining and negotiation using interaction analysis. As a fellow conflict researcher who has relied extensively on Linda's scholarship for my own research, I thought it would be useful in this section to review three specific studies by Linda and her colleagues that illustrate the value of using interaction analysis to open organizational windows. The three studies include Putnam and Jones (1982b), Putnam (1983), and Putnam et al. (1990). This section will proceed by reviewing the unique contributions of these studies and then integrating their findings relative to understanding organizations.

Putnam and Jones (1982b) focused on the idea of reciprocity in negotiations in a simulated grievance case with subjects enacting labor management roles. The goal of the study was to determine the interaction structure of tactics exchanged during the bargaining. Using a modified version of the Bargaining Process Analysis tool, coders examined the tactics of each side to test for reciprocity of bargaining strategies. Using lag-sequential analysis, Linda and Tricia found that subjects assuming management roles were more likely to use defensive tactics, while the labor role players emphasized more offensive tactics. The most interesting finding may be in identifying the structure of the impasse dyads. These dyads exhibited a tightly structured, reciprocal pattern of attack–attack, or defend–defend, and interestingly, with the management role players initiating these cycles.

Most interesting about this study is that it is one of the first studies to clearly demonstrate the relationship between interaction structure and outcome. In other words, communication was not just about the frequency with which individuals used various strategies and tactics—an old way of thinking about language and communication. It was more about how the actual turn-by-turn coordination of certain tactical and strategic interaction choices created an actual structural context over time and how those structures were related to important outcomes like agreement or impasse. At the time, this idea of exploring structures created from a turn-by-turn exchange process was beginning to gain some traction, particularly in understanding conflict contexts (Donohue, 1978, 1981). But, it was the Putnam and Jones (1982b) article that applied a rigorous and innovative methodology to carefully describe how the specific structures that disputants create can lead them in one direction or another. The promise of understanding how communication systems are accomplished through the exchange of messages, rather than the accumulation of messages, was finally being realized.

The second article builds on this idea that individuals both create and confront communication systems as they interact in substantive tasks. In a lag-sequential study of group climates, Putnam (1983) sought to learn whether high procedurally ordered (HPO) groups structured their communication systems differently than the low procedurally ordered groups (LPO). In other words, when groups seek to forge a particular group climate, how do their communication exchange patterns differ? This question is different than the one posed in the Putnam and Jones (1982b) bargaining study because in this group study the emphasis is on climate rather than outcome. This extends our understanding of interaction structures' role by identifying what happens when groups try to grow a particular climate or orientation toward the process by which they perform their duties, rather than focusing on the results of those duties.

The important insight from how climate influences group process is that HPO groups organized their process around a deductive pattern, while the LPO groups used a more inductive pattern. Specifically, when following a procedural adjustment in the talk, the HPO groups stepped back and focused on goals, then issues relevant to those goals, followed by implementation messages. In contrast, talk within LPO groups following a procedural adjustment jumped to a discussion of content details without providing a directional context for these details.

What these two Putnam studies have in common is that both show significant communication system contrasts between groups that either achieve different outcomes or have different climate orientations. The striking feature of groups that achieve negotiated agreements and groups with high procedural order

is that both create a very predictable set of organizing schemes for pursuing their goals. The agreement negotiators communicated in patterns consistent with their roles (which the HPO climate groups developed) using a stable, deductive structure of examining the substantive demands of their task. When both groups deviated from these paths, that is, the bargaining groups stepped outside of their roles and just fought with each other, or became highly inductive in discussing the task, the interaction lost its momentum and productivity. In other words, structure matters.

The third study deviates from the first two because it focuses on the naturalistic context of teacher–school board negotiations and studies interaction somewhat broadly and not in an utterance-by-utterance turn fashion. Putnam et al. (1990) were interested in learning how interaction evolved in these naturalistic exchanges between two bargaining groups. Was there an interaction structure that emerged in the course of the exchanges, or was there no apparent organizing scheme to reach their outcome? Rather than having transcriptions of actual interaction, the researchers were able to directly observe the negotiations and take field notes of the comments.

What emerged from this more qualitative approach to studying interaction was that, in early stages of bargaining, the union members were focused on issues related to harm and workability, whereas later stages dealt with arguments on implementation to reaffirm earlier demands and prioritize issues. The board members also began negotiations by focusing on workability issues, but in later stages, dealt more with harm-inherency, disadvantage arguments and costs in an effort to rationalize settlement structures. In short, the union proposed changes and discussed how to implement them, while the school board resisted these changes by talking about their costs. This study is clearly more abstract in the sense that actual interaction was not analyzed. Notes of the interaction were used as data. However, the value of this approach is that we are able to see whether the structure of issue deliberations plays an important role in the bargaining process.

Taken together, the three studies discussed here reveal the structural qualities of tactical, procedural, and issue-based communication systems. These are important dimensions of any interaction structure in substantive communication exchange. Yet, Putnam is probably the first scholar to think about all of them in a systematic and sustained way.

Thinking about the value of this research program, communication is a multilayered system that has both a vertical and horizontal structure. The vertical layer consists of all the various features of each individual utterance (e.g., content, relationship, strategic, procedural, coherence), while the horizontal layer focuses on how messages connect with one another over time and ultimately create structures that define the context of the interaction. Each of these three studies looks at a vertical piece of the puzzle and then examines them in their horizontal motion. Taken together, they start to fill in the picture of how communication structures actually operate collectively.

For Linda and her colleagues, these structures display important features of organizational life. They tell us about how people form and reify their organizational roles while revealing the assumptions people use to make sense out of, and ultimately shape their work environments. Of course, Linda's work goes well beyond just using interaction to learn about organizational life. Her work extends beyond bargaining and negotiation, hence its value and impact in many social science fields.

Studying Conflict from a Bona Fide Group Perspective—Greg Paul

One of the noteworthy facets of Linda's career is its reach across disciplines and concentrations. Indeed, while a significant amount of Linda's research focuses on conflict and negotiation, her work also has helped to spur research in other areas, including discourse analysis (Grant et al., 2010; Putnam, 2005, 2010b), communicative constitution of organization (Putnam & Cooren, 2004; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009), and small group dynamics (Putnam, 1983, 1994; Putnam & Stohl, 1990; Putnam, Stohl, & Baker, 2012). These contributions are, in no small part, a product of Linda's emphasis on reaching beyond disciplinary boundaries, forming interdisciplinary partnerships, and promoting multiple voices to enhance



Figure 3. Linda Putnam at the 2011 International Association of Conflict Management Conference in Istanbul, Turkey. From left to right are Linda Putnam, Roy Lewicki, Barbara Gray, and Dom Santavicca.

dialogic communication. As one of Linda’s graduate advisees, I had the benefit of learning from Linda firsthand about a principle that should undergird conflict research—that exploration of a phenomenon should involve multiple voices from multiple disciplines and should account for the environment in which the phenomenon occurs.

One of Linda’s many contributions outside the specific domain of conflict communication that reflects that principle is the development of the bona fide group perspective (BFGP) (Putnam & Stohl, 1990, 1996; Putnam et al., 2012; Stohl & Putnam, 1994). Developed with Cynthia Stohl, BFGP grew out of a critique of traditional research on group communication that approached groups as “containers” or “black boxes.” Such research typically utilizes laboratory settings to investigate group processes such as decision making or conflict management. The problem, as Stohl and Putnam assert, is that groups are not containers, are not zero history, and are not static. Instead, groups have fluid and permeable boundaries and are interdependent with their contexts.

Studying group process from BFGP has several implications for understanding “groupness” and group processes and for conducting research on groups. First, because group boundaries are fluid, membership also becomes fluid. Group members maintain relationships with multiple groups and with people outside of their groups. As group members communicate with one another and with people outside of the group, they construct and negotiate what it means to be one of the groups. Such fluidity and external relationships problematize the drawing of clear and concrete boundaries around groups. Thus, when studying groups, it is imperative to look in and around the group, examining the relationships constituted through members’ communication with each other and with extra-group individuals. Second, it is problematic to try to understand group processes by bringing people with no history together and asking them to work through a problem. This is because members bring their past experiences and current identities to bear on their actions—meaning that group processes are embedded in their environment.

Furthermore, researching group processes from BFGP involves more than simply examining the influence of the external environment, as if such influence were one-way or static. Instead, studying group processes involves being aware of and sensitive to the dynamic and mutual influence between the group and its contexts. All of this entails being sensitive to communication processes, including discourses and directionality.

Recognizing and being sensitive to these implications can help to “revitalize” research on intra- and intergroup conflict in the sense that it can help to prompt new or different questions or to look at group conflict from a different perspective. This revitalization pertains not only to *what* we study but also *how* we study it.

By way of example, I turn to an area of conflict research opened to me by working with Linda as her advisee: restorative justice. My primary focus during my graduate studies was on organizational conflict, particularly the practice of forgiveness. My questions were pretty basic—*how*, *when*, *what*, and *why* do people forgive at work? What are the *consequences* of forgiving? Throughout the process of developing the prospectus, gathering data, and making sense of the data, Linda was there asking questions, challenging assertions, pushing me to be more focused, to write tighter arguments, to account for context. She asked me to *unpack* assumptions, add *nuance*, read in situ—all phrases that have been seared into my mind (and no doubt the minds of all her advisees). Her support, her questions, her countless edits (I will never look at a felt-tip pen the same way again) pushed me to look at forgiveness from different angles, to shed artificial academic boundaries in order to think more comprehensively about the forgiveness process, and to interrogate critically the process of forgiving in the workplace and the factors that influence and are influenced by it. Over the course of wrestling with Linda’s questions and comments, I happened upon the concept of restorative justice, which is receiving increasing attention across multiple disciplines, including communication, criminology, and education.

Although scholarship on restorative justice is increasing rapidly, the continued vitality of that research—as well as other group conflict research—can benefit in many ways from taking to heart the principles of BFGP. First, it is important to be sensitive to the communication that constitutes conflict. A key element of restorative justice is the practice of dialogic communication between the wrongdoer and the person wronged (Paul, 2015; Umbreit, 2001). Dialogic communication occurs in practices such as victim-offender conferences (VOCs), which involve bringing together the parties to an offense (i.e., victim, offender, and their supporters) in a facilitated meeting to discuss the offense, negotiate restoration, and work through future expectations. “Being sensitive” involves more than analyzing message content. It involves evaluating language systems parties use to make sense of their conflict, themselves, and one another. It also involves examining larger justice discourses at work in the environment in which the conflict occurs and situating the language systems used in a particular VOC within those larger discourses. Doing so can unearth “implicit,” “covert,” and “normative” assumptions that animate restorative practices and guide communication that constitutes conflict and restoration.

Second, BFGP calls us to account for relationships group members have with each other and with people outside the group. In studying VOCs, for example, a researcher may draw a boundary to create a “group” made up of the victim, the offender, and the facilitator. Such a boundary not only artificially focuses attention on the communication among the three parties, but also fails to account for the presence of the parties’ supporters or their connections with their “communities of care” who may or may not be physically present within the VOC. These relationships likely influence conflict goals, practices, and expectations that guide and are guided by communication.

Third, BFGP calls us to blur the brackets we place around a conflict, particularly with regard to time. The concept of the “sparking event” suggests that a conflict begins at the moment of the spark. In the case of restorative practices, the offense ostensibly is the sparking event. Yet, the conditions for the creation of the spark do not simply arise from nothing. Researchers should be sensitive to the personal, relational, and communal histories influencing and influenced by the conflict episode. This involves looking for opportunities to study “natural groups,” as some studies report (e.g., Desivilya, Somech, & Lidgoster,

2010; Han & Harms, 2010; Weingart, Todorova, & Cronin, 2010). It also involves embracing the complexity of group conflict by looking at group members' interconnected pasts and presents, and interweaving those through any interpretation and analysis of conflict processes. Embracing complexity can help researchers take a more nuanced approach to labels such as "victim" and "offender," particularly if the parties have offended or been victimized in the past by one another.

Fourth, BFGP calls us to approach research into group conflict in concert with researchers from multiple disciplines. This "interdisciplinary community of scholars" (Putnam, 1994, p. 98) forces us as researchers to probe and blur our own assumptions that are embedded in our academic silos and to reach out to academics and practitioners alike and explore new questions prompted by the synthesis of multiple bodies of literature. Restorative justice research, for example, does not belong solely in the realm of criminology; new advances in research will come when researchers from multiple disciplines bring their own questions and perspectives to the table. Doing so can enable researchers to be critically self-reflective in evaluating what we feel are "fundamental assumptions" that guide how we make sense of group conflict.

If this seems like a tall order, it is. Conducting this type of analysis requires a willingness to "muck around with discourse" (Putnam, 2005), to hold loosely the assumptions we may hold dear, to ask new questions, to tell different stories. Linda's own research provides an example of how to do this (Stohl, 2012). She demonstrates a commitment to cultivating interdisciplinary relationships, centering communication, and looking backward and looking forward that has helped her fashion a body of research that moves beyond simple description. Couple all of this with her welcoming friendliness, genuine care, and sincere compassion, and what becomes strikingly clear is that Linda has left an indelible, bona fide imprint not only on conflict research but also on the people who have been fortunate to know her.

Understanding Emotion Helps us Understand Conflict—Deanna Geddes

Another substantial contribution of Linda's scholarship is introducing "bounded emotionality" (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Putnam & Mumby, 1993), although the impact of this work goes well beyond



Figure 4. Linda Putnam and Deanna Geddes at the 2012 Academy of Management Conference in Boston, MA.

providing an alternative to “bounded rationality” (Simon, 1976). Given emotion’s mainstream appeal and presence in current organizational studies, it is perhaps easy to forget how limited such research on emotion was 25 years ago. With friend and former colleague Dennis Mumby, Linda offered bounded emotionality not to privilege its status over “rational” modes of organizing, but instead to open a dialogue for other models and perspectives of organizational functioning. Utilizing Derrida’s (1976) concept of deconstruction, they explain how meanings are constructed through dichotomies and often “stabilized” by favoring one term over the other. In organizational research, rationality versus emotionality remained a dominant and long-standing duality where for many the “brain” is central and the “heart” tangential at best. The “myth of rationality” split emotion (bad) from thought (good) and aligned rationality with valued objectivity and order, while emotionality reflected devalued subjectivity and potential chaos. Portraying one’s emotions as distracting and detrimental fueled the long-standing belief that emotions had no place at work, unless harnessed (or manufactured) as an instrumental commodity—typified by emotional labor—and demonstrated in public “performances” (Hochschild, 1983).

Bounded emotionality offered an alternate set of values and practices as a complementary way of “knowing” and “being” that could enhance organizational functioning. Here, emotionality (i.e., natural feelings and affective responses to organizational situations) is simply recognized as part of organizational life and the means whereby colleagues negotiate “shared reality” (Putnam & Mumby, 1993). Rather than stripping away “the individual experience, the relational context, and the intimacy that typifies expression of personal feelings” (Mumby & Putnam, 1992, p. 472), bounded emotionality offered a “mode of organizing in which nurturance, caring, community, supportiveness, and interrelatedness are fused with individual responsibility to shape organizational experiences” (Mumby & Putnam, 1992, p. 474). Its six defining characteristics are mentioned briefly here to demonstrate their continued relevance and importance for understanding the emotional experience of collective sense making and problem solving, that is, organizing.

Intersubjective limitations redefines “bounded” when applied to emotionality as a necessary state of constraint recognized by individuals in a community to effectively work with and respond to each other. In other words, when we recognize our associates have different comfort levels of emotional expressiveness, we can adjust our emotion displays in ways that enhance shared understanding and mutual commitment to the task and each other. *Tolerance of ambiguity* establishes a new norm that does not necessarily try to reduce equivocality (Weick, 1979), but instead seeks to “recognize divergent and even contradictory positions among organizational members” in accomplishing organizational tasks (Mumby & Putnam, 1992, p. 475). *Heterarchy of goals* and values recognizes that there is not just one, universal, and hierarchically imposed set of values guiding one’s actions. Consequently, it is important to give consideration to and respect for individually held values and goals. *Integrated self-identity* is preserved for organizational members, not fragmented by the bounded rationality dualism of brain versus heart or emotional labor’s imposition of a “managed” heart. In other words, bounded emotionality means you bring your whole self to your work while also bearing in mind you are part of a social collective striving toward organizational goals. *Community* characterizes this need for “connectedness within freedom and for diversity within solidarity” as individuals in organizations work together to accomplish goals and strengthen relationships (Mumby & Putnam, 1992, p. 477). Finally, *relational feeling rules* allows for spontaneous and emergent feelings that appear naturally in everyday tasks and encourage receptiveness to these individualized, emotional responses. In a broad sense, bounded emotionality brought recognition that, individually and collectively, it is vital that employees be allowed to integrate their whole self with work expectations.

Linda and Dennis’ work introduced a perspective that proved highly influential to my own research and numerous others. For instance, bounded emotionality principles helped guide my resolve to “problematize” (Alvesson & Sanberg, 2011; Poovey, 1988) traditional views of workplace anger so as to acknowledge its useful role in signaling important issues that require attention and promoting timely dialogue and necessary change. Similar to the evolution of emotion and conflict’s acceptance in

organizations, anger has for years suffered from bad PR. Anger at work was often equated with deviance, hostility and aggression, and, as a result, something to be avoided, feared, and eradicated. The naive assumption was that “good” organizations did not have anger (or emotional members or conflict). However, increasingly we recognize that anger—like conflict—is not inherently “bad.” Instead, if not a chronic occurrence reflecting an entrenched trait, anger is infrequent and episodic, emerging when one’s goals, expectations, or values are thwarted by another. Rather than akin to aggression or hostility, expressed anger more often reflected “pain and suffering” experienced by the individual damaged, offended, or let down by another. Thus, one of my ongoing recommendations for observers, witnesses, and even targets of anger expression is to respond with interest, concern, and even compassion when trying to figure out what social norm violation—intentional or not—occurred that contributed to another’s anger.

Such propositions associated with the dual threshold model of workplace anger (Geddes & Callister, 2007) reflect possibilities introduced by bounded emotionality. The dual threshold model proposes that favorable consequences from workplace emotions—any emotion—would be realized most often when they are known to relevant others and expressed in a way that does not offend the community (Stickney & Geddes, 2014). Thus, by crossing the organizational “expression threshold” and avoiding the subsequent “impropriety threshold,” expressions of anger have a “space” where valuable social information is learned and communication initiated to address conflicts, concerns, and needed change. Linda and Dennis expressed a hope when presenting bounded emotionality “[to] . . . create a space for as yet unimagined ways of talking about and doing organizing.” (p. 474). Between the expression and impropriety thresholds, an expandable “zone of expressive tolerance” (Fineman, 2000) emerges where caring communities can push against restrictive emotion display norms (represented by the thresholds) and provide room for necessary dialogue to resolve disputes and manage conflict.

Understanding emotion is important for explaining conflict and its impact on organizations and its members. Connecting these two streams of research can “revitalize” conflict scholarship and, hopefully, improve the work experience (see Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Jordan & Troth, 2006; Nair, 2008; Todorova, Bear, & Weingart, 2014). Not surprisingly, anger and conflict have a logical pairing in these pursuits. Both can prove beneficial or detrimental to organizations and its members. Scholars are pursuing the anger–conflict relationship to better understand organizational behaviors including negotiation tactics (Côté, Hideg, & Van Kleef, 2013; Sinaceur, Van Kleef, Neale, Adam, & Haag, 2011; Van Kleef & Côté, 2007), forgiveness (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010), punishment and advocacy (Geddes & Stickney, 2011; Stickney & Geddes, 2016), mediation (Friedman et al., 2004), ethical behavior (Lindebaum & Geddes, 2015), protracted anger (Tagar, Federico, & Halperin, 2011), relationship well-being and teamwork (Rothman & Magee, 2016; Tjosvold & Su, 2007), and international dispute resolution (Zhang, Ting-Toomey, & Oetzel, 2014), among other phenomena. Clearly, our individual interests, passions, and goals may conflict with and even thwart those of our colleagues, generating anger. However, when addressing differences and working together to accomplish organizational goals—reflecting bounded emotionality’s principles of integrated self-identity and community—we benefit by emotional honesty from, and compassion toward, others. Allowing those with divergent opinions and backgrounds to express emotion without fear of retaliation is part of recognizing and even valuing our spontaneous emotions—reflecting principles of intersubjective limitations, tolerance of ambiguity, and relational feeling rules.

Although offered at the time as a “friendly amendment,” bounded emotionality clearly problematized bounded rationality as the primary framework for understanding organizational functioning, conflict resolution, and decision making. Bounded emotionality helped raise our understanding of and appreciation for all aspects of feeling and expressing emotions in organizations. Since the publication of these two seminal works, there have been over 1,300 citations between them. The suggestion that organizational theorizing could benefit by making emotions central (vs. peripheral) constructs has indisputably

altered the landscape of organizational research. Thank you Linda (and Dennis) for opening our minds and our hearts.

Venturing Forward

In reflecting on Linda's work, we identified several themes throughout her scholarship and career that offer great potential for revitalizing conflict research. First, a communication perspective of conflict can generate intriguing questions and novel insights. Paying attention to parties' language and interaction provides important clues as to how conflict unfolds and how conflicting parties give meaning to these challenging situations. Second, openness to new ideas, to exceptions, and to critical reflection can enrich the quality of our scholarship. As Tricia discussed with Linda's own reflection on her IACM conference paper, there is value in being critically self-reflexive, holding our ideas loosely and approaching them as one contribution to the larger, growing chorus. Third, new ideas emerge from a willingness to try new methods, ask new questions, and approach those questions from a new perspective. As scholars, when we mirror this appreciation and interest regarding new approaches—whether through journals such as *NCMR* or at conferences such as IACM—valued insights and ideas can emerge that alter our own thinking about conflict. Linda's advocacy for a communication perspective of conflict research was particularly novel and helped transform and legitimize an entire field of conflict research. Fourth, new questions and insights emerge from approaching conflict from multiple perspectives or disciplines. Rather than remaining in our comfortable academic silos, we would do well to reach out to researchers outside our fields to explore conflict dynamics, maintaining a receptive posture to the ideas of people with different scholarly backgrounds than our own. After all, scholars in a range of fields, including communication, management, sociology, political science, and psychology, research different types and dynamics of conflict. How much richer could our research be if we put into practice the type of openness and curiosity exemplified in Linda's research!

Perhaps the best way to integrate our thoughts is to turn to Linda's own reflections on her work. As Putnam (2010a) notes in her address during the 50th meeting of the International Communication Association:

[T]he key passion that drives my work is how the accomplishment or communication construction of negotiation changes the direction of a conflict. These shifts or twists in social interactions are known as conflict transformations (Putnam, 1994, 2004; Putnam, 1994, 2004, 2009). Transformation refers to the “ah-ha” moments in which the lightbulb goes on and illuminates a situation in an entirely different way. Disputants gain new understandings or fundamentally different views of what is happening than when they entered the situation. (p. 325).

How can researchers generate “new understandings” and transformation in our research? Again, Linda's own words from the same address provide a guide:

In the next decade, the field needs to make a concerted effort to connect our many voices—divisions and interest groups, specializations, perspectives, ethic and cultural stances, and research methods. The aim of this process is not to produce a core body of knowledge or a unified paradigm. It is not simply to make contacts in the field; rather it suggests a genuine effort to enlist other scholars in exploring differences and understanding shifting voices. It calls for a conscious effort to build paths that lead to and from autonomous groups. Although engaging in this process is imbued with its own set of contradictions, we need to move past these concerns and develop alternatives for coming together (Putnam, 2001, p. 45).

Although she was speaking about the continued development of the communication discipline, her ideas are instructive for us as conflict researchers. We should heed Linda's call and career to be open to multiple voices, work across boundaries, ask new collectively-constructed questions, thereby transforming and revitalizing conflict research.

Looking Backward, Looking Forward

In July 2016, we asked Linda to reflect on her work and offer her thoughts regarding revitalizing conflict research. Specifically, we asked for her reflections on the links between interaction analysis and conflict outcomes; future contributions of interaction analysis research, cross-disciplinary research and her involvement in it; the nature of revitalizing conflict research and how to recognize it; and questions about conflict and negotiation that continue to intrigue her. These questions and her responses to them are listed below.

A Dialogue with Linda L. Putnam

- (1) You and Bill have been vocal supporters of interaction analysis as an effective way to understand the links between communication and conflict outcomes. What have we learned about conflict from looking at interaction structures?

Studying interaction structures has contributed two important findings for conflict studies: (a) uncovering the microprocesses that escalate and de-escalate a conflict and (b) showing how communication patterns develop into phases that define the rhythm and flow of conflict. As Bill Donohue notes in this essay, scholars who employ interaction analysis have unlocked the key to the ways that conflict gains a momentum of its own, one that spirals out of control. Specifically, interaction analysis reveals that conflict escalation first occurs in microprocesses through producing self-perpetuating cycles, engaging in serial arguments, and reciprocating contentious tactics (e.g., threats, attacking arguments, demand-withdrawal patterns, excessive interruptions, rude comments). Scholars have replicated this important finding in multiple studies across an array of contexts, including bargaining and negotiation (Brett, Shapiro, & Lytle, 1998; Donohue, Diez, & Hamilton, 1984; Olekalns & Smith, 2000; Putnam & Jones, 1982b; Weingart, Prietula, Hyder, & Genovese, 1999), marital relationships (Caughlin, 2002; Gottman, 1979), and hostage negotiations (Taylor & Thomas, 2008) and demonstrated that these escalated patterns often lead to stalemates; distressed interactions; the development of vicious cycles and repetitive conflicts; and a spiraling growth in the number of parties, issues, and consequences to a conflict situation.

In contrast, interaction analysis also reveals that buffering and deterring escalatory patterns occur through using opposite or complementary tactics. Specifically, responding to contentious tactics with a complementary or opposite move (e.g., balancing offensive with defensive approaches, coordinating linguistic patterns, conveying supportive messages, and talking about the communication process itself) buffers against escalation and fosters satisfactory agreements. Prior to this work, conflict scholars viewed escalation as primarily a perceptual concept linked to ingroup and outgroup relationships, stereotyping, and distortion (Pruitt, Rubin, & Kim, 1994), but interaction analysis research reveals how these patterns develop and form into stages of conflict activity, ones that have fundamental implications for conflict outcomes.

Secondly, interaction analysis reveals how phases develop from sequential communication patterns and have direct impact on conflict outcomes. Early research on conflict development posited distinct linear phases, with distributive or competitive processes in the first stage and integrative or cooperative exchanges in the middle or later stages. Negotiators, however, are more likely to reach satisfactory agreements if they mix the two types of processes or move back and forth between them rather than developing distinct stages (Olekalns, Brett, & Weingart, 2003; Putnam, 1990). Moreover, communication patterns that consist of influence and information sequences lay the groundwork for aligning positions, engaging in concession making, and developing high mutual gain settlements (Adair & Brett, 2005). One big conclusion that we can draw from examining the work on interaction analysis is that conflict is like a dance in which parties need to understand the rhythm of movement, adapt to their partner's moves and countermoves, and treat communication as a system of ebbs and flows rather than a set of tactics (Young

& Schlie, 2011). This metaphor aptly captures what we have learned about conflict from interaction analysis studies; that is, how disputants enact the process has a direct influence on the outcome, not only in terms of agreement and successful settlements but also in terms of future conflict development.

(2) How can interaction analysis contribute to new questions and insights about conflict and negotiation?

Interaction analysis (i.e., studying communication sequences) can contribute to new questions and insights about conflict and negotiation through incorporating nonverbal coding and through applying this approach to examining emotional expression. As Adair and Loewenstein (2013) highlight, meaning levels in negotiation often stem from combining verbal and nonverbal communication into multiple coding schemes. Currently, scholars are using these expanded codes to decipher the role of single versus multi-issue offers in distributive and integrative bargaining and ways of operationalizing influence tactics. Expanding the repertoire of interaction to nonverbal codes, such as pitch, volume, facial expressions, head movements, posture, and eye gaze, is particularly critical for cross-cultural negotiations (Adair, Okumura, & Brett, 2001).

In keeping with Deanna Geddes' insights on emotion in conflict, scholars are also using interaction analysis to code emotional expressions through focusing on vocal tones and facial expressions as well as word levels and pronoun references that capture subtle meanings, contradictions, and the role of communication in negotiation (Adair & Loewenstein, 2013). These advances in interaction analysis provide avenues for capturing the meanings, the nuances of talk, and the ways that improvisation occurs in conflict and negotiation through subtle cuing among disputants (McGinn & Keros, 2002). Specifically, nonverbal mimicry (similar to linguistic style matching) as a form of improvisation significantly impacts negotiation outcomes, especially when it occurs in early stages of conflict (Adair & Loewenstein, 2013). It also holds considerable promise to detect how parties come to understand their own and the other disputants' needs and interests as well as the relational challenges they face in different phases of conflict.

Continued research on interaction analysis can help scholars study the effects of microlevel contradictions between verbal and nonverbal mismatches, progression of communication patterns across multiple conflicts and negotiations over time, and turning points or breakpoints that define the direction of conflict and negotiation (Adair & Loewenstein, 2013; Druckman & Olekalns, 2013). Communication sequences, framing, and levels of meaning are directly tied to critical moments and turning points in conflict, even though this level of work typically centers on shifts in conflict events. By combining them in sophisticated and complex tracking of conflict interaction over time, scholars can bridge the micro- and the macrolevels of conflict in social changes, account for past negotiations that impinge on future interactions, and show how disputants become "in sync" or synchronization. Synchronization through the use of linguistic style matching, nonverbal mimicry, and convergence in communicative framing are critical to moving conflict forward and triggering stage transitions in negotiation (see Donohue, 2015).

(3) You have advocated for (indeed, lived out) enhanced cross-disciplinary research partnerships. Your ICA address called for a "concerted effort to connect our many voices." Where and how did this effort begin for you? What worked for you in terms of weaving this into your scholarship?

When I entered the field of communication and conflict management, I became aware that this enterprise was truly cross-disciplinary. I drew on conflict theories and research findings developed in psychology, sociology, and management and found an intellectual home in interdisciplinary organizations such as the International Association for Conflict Management. Thus, my goal was to pull together knowledge about communication and conflict from a variety of fields (Putnam & Jones, 1982a) and to recast it through the lens of key constructs from communication studies. These efforts began in graduate school and extended into my early research on interaction analysis and negotiation as well as my later work on discourse studies on negotiation and communicative framing in environmental conflicts.

Incorporating many voices into both theory and research seems fundamental to these cross-disciplinary partnerships. Multiple voices enter into theory development through building on the interdisciplinary work of scholars who paved the way for communication and conflict studies (Pruitt & Lewis, 1975), recasting it through a communication lens (i.e., making communication central), and incorporating the many voices that could use this work in their own efforts. Thus, in doing my work, I engage in a dialogue among cross-disciplinary scholars, theorists and researchers, and researchers and practitioners (as Tricia Jones highlights in her discussion of praxis). Importantly, the interdisciplinary community of conflict researchers and the context-based scholarship embedded in negotiation, conflict, and mediation studies embraces this ideology of building knowledge collectively. Thus, unlike many other fields of study, conflict scholars believe in multidisciplinary as a basis for advancing knowledge and generating new ideas. This acceptance of cross-disciplinary scholarship, citing and building on each other's work, and partnering to advance both theory and research is the foundation that makes it possible to connect our many voices and the source of forming knowledge communities that shift the direction of a field.

(4) From your perspective, what does revitalizing conflict research mean and look like to you?

As noted in this essay, revitalizing conflict research means introducing alternatives or new perspectives that breathe new life or added vigor to theory and research. For me, it pushes the envelope by focusing on cutting-edge questions and issues that need to be addressed in a particular way. For example, extending interaction analysis research to capture meanings and emotional expressions are ways of breathing new life into scholarship on communication sequences, one that moves beyond conflict strategies and tactics. Relatedly, my sojourn from interaction analysis to discourse research in negotiation aimed to develop new ways of thinking about communication as potentially redefining the very nature of a dispute. My struggle with trying to unpack conflict transformation, specifically how interactions lead to redefining issues and relationships and how communication patterns extend across contexts, called for radically different theory and research perspectives. Conflict framing, and its vastly different orientations, provided a way to examine the sociohistorical development of communication patterns over time, shifts in meanings and understandings, and ways that parties came to embrace different definitions of their conflict situations.

So for me, revitalizing centers on a concern, a practice-based issue, or a fundamental question that cannot easily be addressed through current methods and approaches. It introduces alternative perspectives to explore how new ways of thinking might address the problem or issue. It involves trial and error learning (as Tricia Jones so aptly points out in this essay), engaging in theory development and research, and drawing on praxis. Importantly, revitalizing aims to advance current academic thinking about the nature of constructs, their relationships, and how they contribute to a phenomenon. For example, taking a communication perspective to conflict framing challenged the traditional view that framing was a cognitive or mental activity that centered on individual decision making (Putnam & Holmer, 1992). By introducing communication approaches to framing, scholars began to address shifts in framing through linguistic practices such as labeling, bracketing, and cocreating alternative understandings of a conflict situation (Putnam, 2014).

(5) What are some questions pertaining to conflict and negotiation that continue to intrigue you?

A central question that continues to intrigue me is the role of dialectics, contradictions, and paradoxes in conflict transformation (Putnam & Powers, in press). Triggered by a trade book on paradox as the "new metaphor" for conflict (Mayer, 2015), I have returned to the research on dialectics, contradictions, and paradoxes as communicative processes that underlie conflict situations. I am particularly interested in the ways that communication constitutes conflict as a dance of opposites (Cloe, 2013) or as a dialectic that holds opposite poles together in continual play.

Conflict by definition is a mixed-motive activity that embraces contradiction through simultaneously engaging in cooperation and competition, trust and distrust, and information concealing while revealing.

Research programs are replete with a host of dualities that cross studies on relational paradoxes (Donohue, 2001), dialectics in mediation (Jones, 1994), and binaries that underlie organizational and social justice disputes (Jameson, 2004; Jones & Bodtger, 1998). Although the field has produced excellent exemplars of conflict as paradoxical and dialectical process, scholars need to integrate this work and then theorize from it to develop dimensions, processes, strategies, and practices linked to conflict transformation. Drawn from studies that cross multiple contexts, four key dialectics (i.e., cooperation or competition, autonomy or connectedness, rational or emotion, and detached or attached) form a potential foundation for continued theory development on communication and conflict (Putnam & Powers, 2015).

This theory development needs to center on actions, interactions, and responses to the interplay of opposites over time and across different levels of dispute management. Research shows that the selection of one pole over the other (e.g., choosing a principled stance vs. a compromising position) often pushes conflict in extreme directions (Collier, 2009; Putnam, 2010b). Seeking a balance or a midpoint between opposites also limits thinking while accepting ambiguity, altering conflict boundaries, and engaging in complimentary interfaces (i.e., in which parties cast one pole as necessary to achieve the other) that promote dialectical interplay. The practice-based literature also offers an array of approaches that sustain the interplay of opposites, including engaging in dialogue, promoting transcendent communication, employing reflective questioning and reframing, and avoiding premature closure.

Questions that arise from this work center directly on the very nature of conflict management itself, not as a resolution or a settlement but as keeping dialectical tensions in play, finding ways to move forward, and engendering creative responses to oppositional pulls. Specific queries that drive my thinking include the following: How can we conceive of communication and conflict as engaging opposites, incorporating multiple voices, and transforming disputes? How do micropractices of dialogue and reflective practice arise from the interplay of opposites? What is the logic of interaction that characterizes alternative directions in this dance of opposites? How do paradoxes become integral to this dance and how do participants embrace them in treating conflict as the interplay of opposites? These questions and others seem fundamental to advancing the field through embracing dialectics as a lens for understanding conflict transformation.

Overall, in reflecting on this essay, I am indebted to my colleagues for their provocative ideas and stimulating insights about conflict research. They ignite my sense of imagination and contribute to building a community of genuine support. I extend my deepest gratitude to Greg Paul, Deanna Geddes, Tricia Jones, and Bill Donohue for this warm and heartfelt tribute and for their friendship and supportiveness throughout my career.

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