

Dissipating Interpersonal Argument:  
An Autoethnographical Study of Intersubjectivity, Conflict and Change

by

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## **Abstract**

The animating question that guides this thesis is how can polarized interpersonal argument dissipate so that new possibilities can emerge? Through a multilayered autoethnographical research method, an account of emergent change is developed that integrates foundational concepts of intersubjectivity and conflict to contend that the dissipation of interpersonal argument can be made more probable by altering the intersubjective processes in which it emerges.

The research's autoethnographical framework focuses on the interiority of the researching self while investigating interpersonal argument through three aspects of intersubjectivity: activities of consciousness, interactions in spaces of encounter, and the dynamic interplay of contextual systems of meanings. Four autoethnographic case studies empirically illuminate how the discernment of threat can instigate the sometimes choiceless decisions to defend through conflict behaviors. These inquiries into interpersonal argument through the subjectivity of the researcher explore how diminishing the constrictive effect of threat, instigating reflexivity, changing spaces of encounter, and mobilizing other social meanings can contribute to a more probable emergence of change.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Introducing the Research Question.....	2
Investigating the Research Question: Autoethnography .....	4
Intersubjectivity and Conflict: Conceptual Tools .....	5
Summary of the Chapters .....	8
Chapter 2: Autoethnography.....	13
Defining Autoethnography.....	14
Accounting for the Rise of Autoethnography as a Method: Reflexivity .....	14
Reflexive and Epistemological Preoccupations in Autoethnography.....	17
Kinds of Autoethnography: Evocative, Analytic, and Layered Accounts.....	19
Assessing Quality in Autoethnographical Research .....	25
Privileging Individual Subjectivities as a Level of Analysis .....	27
Critique of Introspection and Presenting Interiority as Data .....	29
Accounting for Quality: Responding to Contestations .....	31
Conclusion .....	33
Chapter 3: Intersubjectivity, Conflict and Change.....	36
Intersubjectivity.....	37
Extending Bohleber’s Tripartite Framework .....	38
Reading Intersubjectivity Theory in Relation to Conflict Theory .....	40
Supporting Conceptual Resources from Other Literatures.....	45
Summary: Intersubjectivity .....	52
Conflict Theory and Change.....	53
Operations of Consciousness: Knowing, Valuing, and Deciding .....	55
Conflict Behavior: A Decision to Defend Based on the Valuing of Threat .....	57
Conceptualizations of Change.....	60
Conclusion .....	66
Chapter 4: A Methodological Prologue to the Cases .....	69
Summary of the Cases.....	70
Criteria for Case Selection .....	71
Criteria of ‘Change’ and ‘Distinct’ .....	72

Criteria of ‘Recountable’ and ‘Interesting’ .....	73
Accounting for the Selection of Material and Presentation of Analysis .....	74
The Investigation’s Layered Accounts .....	76
Appropriate Closure and Identifying Implications of the Research .....	79
Quality Notes .....	80
Conclusion .....	82
Chapter 5: Intransigent Conflict .....	84
The Vignette .....	85
Reflexive Commentary .....	89
Intersubjectivity .....	94
The Debriefing Inquiry .....	105
Chapter 6: Outrage .....	110
The Vignette .....	111
Reflexive Commentary .....	119
The Debriefing Inquiry .....	131
Chapter 7: Listening to Another Mind .....	138
Reflexive Commentary .....	148
Debriefing Inquiry .....	160
Chapter 8: Tension in the Group .....	163
The Vignette .....	164
Reflexive Commentary .....	172
The Debriefing Inquiry .....	188
Chapter 9: Epilogue .....	194
Overview of the Cases .....	195
The Methodological Arc .....	195
The Conceptual Arc: Intersubjectivity, Conflict, and Change .....	205
Conclusion .....	227
Chapter 10: Conclusion .....	229
Methodology: Summary, Contributions, Further Research .....	230
Conceptual Tools: Intersubjectivity, Conflict, and Change .....	236
Conclusion .....	249
References .....	251

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*A conflicted working group is involved in a lengthy, high-stakes decision-making process. During one meeting, there is a heated exchange among three participants, which threatens to derail the entire process. The tension is discussed; the participants become less confrontational; the discussion moves on and the group generates ideas that had not been imagined previously.*

*A consultant is angry with a colleague because she refuses to work with another associate. During a conversation with an attuned listener, the consultant changes from harshly judging the colleague to developing a plan to speak with her about her concerns.*

*A mother is preoccupied with hostility directed at the hockey association that will likely exclude her deserving daughter from a competitive hockey team. In discussing her concerns with a skilled confidante, she changes from deliberating hostile actions to considering non-conflictual options.*

*Two life-partners have a chronic dispute about a household matter. Although it is a seemingly trivial issue, they escalate into argument very quickly. The helpful momentary intervention of a friend enables a radical and enduring dissipation of the dispute.*

## **Introducing the Research Question**

Human beings are complex. We (some of us more than others) get into polarized argument with people around us, and we get out of those arguments, too. This thesis is devoted to the exploration of what is happening when an individual shifts away from oppositional dispute with another person. More specifically, the question that has guided this project is: how can polarized interpersonal argument dissipate so that new possibilities can emerge?

The question is significant because polarized interpersonal arguments are manifested widely and plague most of us to some degree; not only that we ourselves can become embroiled in them, but also that we can be affected by others' polarizing disputes. Moreover, polarized interpersonal arguments can often arise in the course of contexts in which many individuals are involved, such as meetings, negotiations, or everyday activities, thereby preventing progress towards hoped-for futures for organizations, groups, or individuals. In this way, the phenomenon of interpersonal argument is common, and it has impact; by these two criteria an investigation into the topic is significant.

Interpersonal arguments are diverse and various, and the conflict behaviors enacted in these arguments can range from frozen silence to rageful violence. Similarly, changes in conflict can range from states of profound reconciliation to a grudging agreement to refrain from further attack. The research question of this thesis, then, is fundamentally interested in the process of change toward new possibilities; those new possibilities might include 'conflict

resolution' or 'conflict transformation,' but the focal point of investigation is the process of change itself.

A significant framing of this project is that arguments between individuals involve a dynamic process of knowledge production and decision-making. Interpersonal arguments are encounters in which implicit and explicit knowing, valuing, and deciding—about self, other, and the social—are produced and circulated. Although knowing, valuing, and deciding can be said to take place in many kinds of contexts, interpersonal arguments are particular sites in which knowing of self and the other is contested, maintained, and possibly changed. Therefore this investigation is grounded in interpersonal argument as a useful site to explore knowledge production and decision-making by selves in relation to others.

Framing interpersonal argument in this way further orients the investigation to a study of how individuals can change their minds and respond differently; how the self can come to know the other differently, or how the self can make different decisions in relation to the other, or others. This framing means that the subjectivity of the self can be identified and investigated as a unit of analysis within the complex social contexts in which arguments are situated.

Considering this approach to the central research question about the dissipation of interpersonal argument, subsidiary questions emerge: what is a useful investigative process by which 'changing minds' among individuals in argument can be explored? What conceptual tools can illuminate an investigation into the subjectivity of self in relation to others within complex social contexts?

How does ‘understanding differently’ come about—and what is the impact on interpersonal argument?<sup>1</sup>

### **Investigating the Research Question: Autoethnography**

*How* to study the phenomenon of interpersonal argument is a topic of considerable interest to sociologists. In the 1960s, Harold Garfinkel and his students investigated the violation of taken-for-granted norms—and the interpersonal disputes that often ensued—which inspired generations of sociologists to take up ethnomethodology and the study of how ordinary people make sense of the world. A microsociological focus on everyday interactions as sites of inquiry became a fruitful and generative way to illuminate fundamental questions of knowing self in relation to another in complex social contexts.

The turn to *self-reflexive* ethnography, intimately connected to the rise of reflexivity within sociological thought, can be traced through many lineages: the Chicago School’s development of fieldwork-oriented interactionism; David Hayano’s introduction of the term ‘autoethnography’ in the mid-1970s that heightened methodological focus on the role of the investigator’s interiority; and the more generalized “crisis of representation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3) that generated autoethnography as an experimental methodology (Anderson, 2006a).

This thesis takes an autoethnographical stance to interrogate the microsociological phenomena of polarized interpersonal argument and change. An autoethnographical stance is one in which the researcher’s subjectivity is illuminated as a ‘self’ in relation to a partially, contingently known ‘other.’ As such,

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<sup>1</sup> This study is not animated by the evaluative claim that conflict itself is bad, and that transformation of it is good. There have been many exemplars of ethical conflict who engage in conflict as a righteous struggle against degenerative social contexts (Keane, 2016).

the theory and practice of autoethnography affords a focus on the researcher's subjectivity, while attending to the subjectivities of other selves in complex intersubjective spaces of encounter. The conceptual tools that autoethnography provides include the explicit relationship between the knower and the known (Holman Jones, 2005), the multiple forms of knowing and representing possible in academic texts (Ellis, 2000), and the importance of context in the production and circulation of knowledge (Anderson, 2006a).

Autoethnography's capacity to illuminate the subjectivity of self in relation to another enables a nuanced and subtle attention to, and sustained interrogation of, the complexity and contingency of how knowledge about the self and the other is created, contested, maintained, and/or changed in contexts of interpersonal argument. In illuminating the subjectivity of self in relation to another through an autoethnographical investigation, further conceptual tools are required to analyze interpersonal argument as an *intersubjective* space of encounter.

### **Intersubjectivity and Conflict: Conceptual Tools**

The conceptual tools of this analysis are generated by placing two distinct literatures—on intersubjectivity and interpersonal conflict—in 'creative conversation' with each other, supplemented by certain concepts from the anthropology of ethics. In placing these literatures in conversation, a number of analytical resources become available, including a tripartite approach to understanding intersubjectivity, as well as concepts addressing conflict and

change. Each of these clusters of conceptual tools—intersubjectivity, conflict, and change—will be briefly introduced below.

Intersubjectivity is a theoretical concept that has been articulated and mobilized to analyze a variety of phenomena within disciplines as varied as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and education. For this project, Bohleber's (2013) comprehensive summary of three major themes of intersubjectivity is adapted through a reading of Price's (2013) identification of salient aspects of conflict analysis, supplemented by Keane's (1997, 2014, 2016) work on the anthropology of everyday ethics.

A three-part analytical framework is proposed, in which intersubjectivity is conceived as: operations of consciousness through which the self comes to (partially) know the other; dynamic spaces of encounter through which individuals enact and can alter their knowing of self and other; and complex systems of meanings that generate, and are generated by, these encounters and operations of consciousness. This tripartite framework connects the self, other, and social through cognition, encounter, and context, supported by conceptual tools related to interpersonal conflict and change.

Conceptual resources about conflict are drawn from the emergent 'insight approach' to inform the analysis through which this investigation is framed. The insight approach (Melchin & Picard, 2008; Price & Bartoli, 2012; Price, 2013) contends that individual cognition, patterns of interaction, and complex social contexts all have a role to play in conflict. In attending to the aspect of individual cognition, specific cognitive operations can be discerned and identified as

knowing, valuing, and deciding. These operations, often pre-reflective, are functionally related, insofar as a *decision* to engage in conflict depends upon what is *known* about the conflict and what is discerned as *valued*, or significant, about it.

The insight approach further contends that conflict behavior is the result of decisions that are oriented to defend, because of a discernment of threat. Conflict, then, can be understood as mutually defensive interactions, arising from apprehensions of threat (Melchin & Picard, 2008; Price & Bartoli, 2012, Price 2013). These concepts of knowing, valuing, and deciding related to 'threat' and 'defend' are used throughout this autoethnographical investigation to examine the emergence and dissipation of argument.

In examining how interpersonal argument can *change*, Keane's (2014a, 2016) work on everyday interactions supplements the insight approach's account of change in conflict. Keane contends that ordinary conversations are sites of account-giving encounters that can instigate ethical reflexivity to produce or alter a judgment or decision. This conception adds to the insight approach, which contends that reflexivity can be generated in conditions where the constrictive effect of threat is diminished and the operations of consciousness are more expansively activated. In such conditions, new opportunities to know, value, and decide are instigated, thereby offering the occasion for new possibilities to emerge.

In summary, the creative conversation among literatures on intersubjectivity, conflict, and the anthropology of ethics establishes the

conceptual tools through which the autoethnographic stance of this investigation is founded.

The principal claims of this thesis are as follows: intersubjective processes are enacted when interpersonal argument is activated and altered. These intersubjective processes can be understood as operations of consciousness; constituted in spaces of encounter; and carried in social systems of meanings. The operations of consciousness—of knowing, valuing, and deciding—are elicited and enacted in spaces of encounters and shaped by systems of meanings. Attending to these intersubjective activities (of knowing, valuing, and deciding) in their domains of enactment (consciousness, encounter, and social systems of meanings) can yield new possibilities. Moreover, the process of investigating conflict, of performing research, also involves intersubjective processes of knowing, valuing, and deciding. Addressing these processes more explicitly can open possibilities for change—in conflict as well as in the reflexive form of research I pursue.

### **Summary of the Chapters**

The claims of this thesis are described and elaborated in the subsequent chapters, which are briefly summarized here. Chapter 2 addresses the theoretical and methodological dimensions of autoethnography as a research process that explicitly investigates humans as both the subject and object of knowledge. The chapter defines and situates the rise of the autoethnographic method in the reflexive turn in sociological thought. It considers dominant approaches to, and

contestations of, the method, as well as criteria for evaluating its quality. The specific autoethnographical stance of this research is then described.

Chapter 3 engages with the complex topic of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change. It identifies an analytical framework of intersubjectivity that is relevant to the complexity of the individual, interaction, and social dimensions of conflict. It identifies a theory of conflict that illuminates interpersonal argument as an intersubjective process of knowledge production and decision-making. The theory of change, or dissipation, of conflict is then articulated to account for how knowing, valuing, and deciding might be changed so that new possibilities can emerge.

Chapter 4 is a methodological prologue, which accounts for the research process that generated the four cases forming the investigative core of the thesis. After briefly describing the four cases, the chapter accounts for their selection and reflexive presentation, recognizing that writing itself is a form of research through which analysis is performed. Further, the chapter describes the process of eliciting and incorporating feedback, which acknowledges and responds to the research challenge of representation of self and other. The chapter attends to the issue of coming to appropriate closure as well as the setting aside of promising paths of inquiry beyond the scope of the research question. The device of “quality notes” (Marshall, 2004) is introduced, which are a series of in-text reflections that form a meta-commentary to recognize and account for research as a dynamic, reflexive, iterative process of inquiry.

Chapters 5 to 8 present the four case studies that apply this particular autoethnographic methodology to explore the research question of how polarized interpersonal argument can dissipate so that new possibilities can emerge. Chapter 5, entitled “Intransigent Conflict,” is an introduction to the reflexive methodology and the application of my conceptual tools. It is a case involving a dispute with my life partner and a spontaneous change of mind effected through the intervention of a helpful friend. It sets out and applies key concepts about intersubjectivity, conflict, and change through tracing the dissipation of polarized argument through a fresh discernment of significance about my partner’s behavior.

Chapter 6, “Outrage,” develops the concepts of conflict, intersubjectivity, and change more fully through an examination of an impending argument between myself and decision-makers in a hockey association. Through my inquiry into a mind-changing conversation with a skilled confidante, I explore the role of questions in eliciting ethical accounts that can provide opportunities for change. I discern a significant concern that dynamizes the conflict for me, and in doing so, recognize that polarized argument is a less preferable option to pursue than other courses of action.

Chapter 7, “Listening to Another Mind,” is an exploration of my role as a ‘listener,’<sup>2</sup> in which I attend to the changing mind of my consultant friend who is in conflict with a colleague over her refusal to work with another associate. This

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term ‘listener’ and ‘speaker’ lightly throughout this dissertation to differentiate two roles in a dialogue that can be taken up by both parties. By ‘speaker’ I mean one whose mind is the explicit focus of attention. A ‘listener’ is one who is attending to the other. Better terms for these roles might be available—if so, I would welcome their discovery.

case advances further the concepts of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change, insofar as his polarized argument changes to more collaborative engagement through our intersubjective account-giving, in which he comes to know his colleague differently. This case also explores the everyday, ethical valuing of 'the good' as well as the microprocess of intersubjective ethical negotiation that can take place in (conflictual and non-conflictual) spaces of encounter.

Chapter 8, "Tension in the Group," is an inquiry into an interpersonal argument that arose during a group process in which I was a facilitator. In this case, I work with the concepts of intersubjectivity and conflict in a much more complex context, to reflect on the process by which the meeting became blocked by conflict and then dissipated for new possibilities to emerge. I explore dissension that does not engender conflict, before examining the conflict that eventually erupts and subsides. This case study acknowledges the multiplicity of decisions that were involved in effecting change, recognizing that the account that is rendered is partial and incomplete, without necessarily being inaccurate or invalid.

Chapter 9 is a summative epilogue to the cases, which are crafted as distinct but interdependent investigations involving discernable methodological and conceptual arcs. The chapter's description of the methodological arc traces the development and refinement of the research process throughout the multi-reflexive investigation of interpersonal argument. The conceptual arc is recognized as a progressive and cumulative application of the analytic frameworks on intersubjectivity, conflict, and change. The application of the

conceptual frameworks becomes more sophisticated in the progression of the research, as the cases move from an interpersonal argument to a dispute within a working group's high-stakes meeting. The conclusion, Chapter 10, recapitulates the intellectual journey of the thesis, describes the implications of this work, and identifies potential opportunities for further research and dialogue.

This thesis is a reflexive study of self-and-other, an inquiry into inquiring, and an exploration of subjectivities that know, value, and decide. As such, the production of knowledge in the thesis itself is reflexively made explicit, even as it seeks to explicate the knowledge that is contested and maintained in instances of interpersonal argument. The reflexivity made possible in this account depends on the theoretical and methodological stance of the autoethnographical research process. The following chapter considers this stance, and the conceptual and methodological foundations that support it, in greater depth and detail.

## **Chapter 2: Autoethnography**

The previous chapter introduces the research question of how polarized argument among individuals can dissipate so that new possibilities can emerge. It frames interpersonal argument as a dynamic process of knowledge production and decision-making, thereby identifying the subjectivity of the knowing-and-deciding self as a salient unit of analysis. It introduces autoethnography as a method that illuminates the subjectivity of self and other, or more precisely the subjectivity of the researcher's self in relation to the (partially and contingently) known other. As such, the method offers the researcher a means to explore the relationship between the knower and the known, the multiple forms of knowing and representing that are possible, and the importance of context in the production and circulation of knowledge.

This chapter elaborates on the claim for autoethnography's capacity to investigate interpersonal argument as a process of knowledge production and decision-making of the self in relation to another. The chapter begins with a definition of autoethnography and a consideration of its rise as a methodological and epistemological response to emergent sociological themes, particularly reflexivity. Subsequent to that consideration is a description of the dominant approaches in the autoethnographic literature. Contestations to the method are then explored, followed by an articulation of the specific autoethnographical stance undertaken in this investigation, a stance that is responsive to its contestations and grounded in an accountability for quality.

## Defining Autoethnography

Autoethnography has multiple definitions and a variety of nomenclatures, including personal narratives, narratives of the self, self-ethnography, or radical empiricism (Anderson, 2006a; Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). Wall (2000) observes that some authors use an autoethnographic method without labeling it as such; others characterize a wide range of writing under the umbrella of autoethnography.<sup>3</sup> Reed-Danahy's (1997) much-cited definition identifies autoethnography as a process in which the researcher draws "on her own lived experience to connect the personal to the cultural and place the self and other within a social context" (p. 4). Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2010) similarly define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (para. 1).

Autoethnography, then, is a method that attends explicitly to the subjectivity of the researcher as well as the context in which the researcher is situated. The method is defined by first-person analysis through which the researcher reflexively describes and systematically investigates phenomena to generate insight into broader social and cultural contexts.

### **Accounting for the Rise of Autoethnography as a Method: Reflexivity**

Numerous scholars attribute the contemporary surge in reflexive and autoethnographical approaches to the convergence of several profound influences: the recognition of the problematically intimate relationship between

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<sup>3</sup> The heterogeneity of the method becomes even more complex when the term 'autobiography' is considered. Some researchers have identified 52 different types of autobiography, ranging from confessions to testimonies (see Brown, 2006).

social science research and colonialism; an interest in rhetoric and how social science constructs its object and authority; and a critique of epistemology based on the objective observer (Atkinson, et al., 2007, pp. 62- 65; Davies, 2008; Holman Jones, 2005; Maguire, 2006). These influences produced what Holman Jones (2005) calls “crises of representation, legitimation and praxis” (p. 766).

The reflexivity inherent in autoethnography and other contemporary methodologies is part of a widespread response to those convergent critiques around legitimation, representation, and praxis in the social sciences. Lynch (2000) and May (2009), in their surveys of reflexivity, observe that the contemporary imperative to ‘be reflexive’ is so widespread that for a scholar or text to be labelled “unreflexive” is essentially synonymous with “inadequate” (May, 1999, para.1.1).

In his review of reflexivity, May (1999) notes that the interest in the knowing subject’s relationship to that which can be known has been a preoccupation dating back to the early philosophers. He argues that the contemporary significance of reflexivity, however, is the need to consider “the mode and consequences of this relationship between knower and known – consequences that relate to the status of social scientific knowledge” (May, 1999, para. 1.1). In his usage of the word ‘status’, May is able to convey the dual concept of both *relative influence* as well as the *condition or validity* of certain knowledge. In this way, the reflexive imperative in contemporary social science research, reflected in the autoethnographic method, is intimately linked to

questions of the production and circulation of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

A brief summary of the rise of reflexivity helps to situate the autoethnographical method within sociological thought, as well as to acknowledge that debates about autoethnography reflect more widespread discussions about the production and circulation of knowledge itself. May (1999) traces the rise of reflexivity in sociology through some of its foundational thinkers: from Schutz's insistence that pre-reflexive everyday knowing and sociological knowledge be compatible in order to be judged as adequate; through Garfinkel's argument that everyday sociological knowing cannot be understood without situating it within social contexts; to Giddens' recognition of the interactive dynamic between everyday knowledge and sociological knowledge; and, finally, to Bourdieu's call for the social location of the researcher to be highlighted as a significant factor in the production of sociological knowledge.

Describing the postmodern turn in reflexivity, Macbeth (2001) and Lynch (2000), other surveyors of reflexivity literature, point to a tension regarding self-referential de(con)struction and the transferability of knowledge. Lynch, for example, critiques a radical reflexivity that undermines objectivity to the point that the object is said to be indistinguishable from the play of its images. He critiques the postmodern sense of the futility of representation, in which sociology loses its relevance for understanding and explanation, where a postmodern reflexivity loops back upon itself to undermine the possibility for social learning or transferable knowledge content. Instead, Lynch advocates for

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<sup>4</sup> Macbeth, like May, suggests a two-fold approach to reflexivity—one that recognizes the production of knowledge at the level of the researcher and the other that recognizes the social circulation of knowledge.

ethnomethodological attention to the ways that the meaning of a phenomenon is reflexively bound to discursive, pragmatic, and professional circumstances (p. 45).<sup>5</sup>

One can trace significant aspects of reflexivity inherent in the autoethnographical method's development and the debates that surround it. Although contested as a method for its attention to individual subjectivity and potential overshadowing of more abstract or transferable insights, autoethnography produces and circulates sociological knowledge that is reflexively generated and contextually attuned. The method attends to the pre-reflexive and everyday knowing of the researcher, who is situated as a producer and consumer of more abstract sociological knowledge. Autoethnographical accounts illuminate the researcher as both a subject and object of knowledge-production, highlighting the contingency and contextuality of the process of generating and circulating knowledge in the social sciences.

### **Reflexive and Epistemological Preoccupations in Autoethnography**

There are widely shared epistemological preoccupations across the autoethnographical spectrum that highlight the method's efforts to investigate questions of knowing and subjectivity. Holman Jones (2005) contends that autoethnography is primarily preoccupied with "what is the nature of knowing, what is the relationship between the knower and the known, how do we share what we know and with what effect" (p. 766). Because autoethnography attends

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<sup>5</sup> May (2011), on the other hand, rejects an ethnomethodological approach because he believes it limits the consideration of relations between the general and particular (p. 26).

to the subjectivity of the knowing self, it makes the process of knowledge production explicit, thereby opening it to investigation. Duncan (2004), for example, uses autoethnography to articulate and investigate tacit knowledge, or knowing-in-action, that is characteristically difficult to make verbally explicit but is possible, through systematic reflection, to describe. She investigates her subjectivity as a producer of hypermedia design to critically reflect on her tacit knowledge and the cultural context in which this knowledge is produced and changed.

Since the researcher is a primary producer, consumer, and disseminator of knowledge in these texts, autoethnography affords “more systematic attempts to understand how knowledge is constituted through the self” (Brigg & Bleiker, 2010, p. 780). This requires a persistent attention to the subjectivity of the researcher and the process through which knowledge is produced. This kind of reflexivity is much more explicit and sustained (on knowledge production as a process) than a sketch of the author’s biography or social position that is sometimes presented as reflexivity (Brigg & Bleiker, 2010; Collins & Gallant, 2010).

Rather than briefly acknowledging the researcher’s subjectivity, autoethnography engages with that subjectivity as an object of inquiry. In this way, the “subjectivity of the knower needs to be worked through rather than merely alluded to if a scholar is to adequately grapple with the ambiguous placement of humans as both the subject and object of knowledge” (Brigg & Bleiker, 2010, p. 784). Hayden (2009) provides an example of this enduring

explicit attention on the researcher's cognition and affect in difficult encounters. She describes being accused of racism by a Salvadoran man during her field work as an American anthropologist in Costa Rica. In doing so, she autoethnographically investigates "what do people know about us, how do they know it, and how well does it agree with what we think we know about ourselves" (p. 81). In addition to the cognitive and affective aspects of her inquiry into an everyday conflict, she situates this investigation within wider debates about intersubjectivity and semiotics to argue for a dialogical understanding of the researching self (Hayden, 2009).

Autoethnography's epistemological preoccupations—of investigating the knower and the known through the subjectivity of the researcher—thus situates it as a methodology within a broad range of reflexively-oriented approaches to research. Autoethnography enables overt reflexive attention to both the researching self and the knowledge produced through that research, thereby opening each of those aspects to inquiry. Among autoethnographic researchers, although there is a widespread acknowledgement and orientation to the importance of the visibility of the researching self, there is considerable divergence in the range of autoethnographic research that is produced.

### **Kinds of Autoethnography: Evocative, Analytic, and Layered Accounts**

The range of autoethnographic writings includes literary and evocative texts (Rambo, 2005; Tillmann-Healy, 1996); analytic studies using multiple data sources (Anderson 2006a; Duncan 2004); and texts that combine personal introspection and theoretical reflections, also known as layered accounts (Ronai,

1995; Sparkes, 2000). These genres can be distinguished by their differential attention to the researcher's self and interaction with others; their expression of emotions and analysis; and their textual or literary strategies to convey insights.<sup>6</sup> The following section articulates two poles of autoethnography—evocative and analytical—before identifying and describing layered accounts as the specific autoethnographic method undertaken in this dissertation.

### **Evocative autoethnography.**

Certain proponents of autoethnography advocate a literary style that proffers “stories rather than theories,” in which emotion and personal experience are privileged with the goal to “sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, para. 4). Topics addressed in this kind of autoethnography include intensely personal, affect-intense experiences such as bulimia (Tilman-Healy, 1996); childhood sexual abuse (Fox, 2006); and abortion (Ellis & Bochner, 1992). The stories are presented as personal narratives (Ellis & Bochner, 1992); dramatic scripts (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012; Richardson 1995); poetry (Spry 2001); or performance (Holman Jones, 1995).

These accounts are often presented as texts without analytic or theoretical commentary, in which the reader is implicitly invited to take on interpretive and analytical work, rather than having it provided to them by the author. With their literary style, intimate subject matter, and aesthetic choice to abandon explicitly

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<sup>6</sup> Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) also recognize elements of autoethnography that distinguish its various forms that include differential attention to: the study of others, traditional analysis, the interview context, and power relationships (para. 8).

sociological interpretation or commentary, these texts attempt “to defy and blur the boundaries between the arts and social sciences” (Rambo, 2007, p. 364). This evocative style is considered by some proponents to be definitional of autoethnography itself (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 445; Holman Jones, 2005, p. 765), thereby making the term ‘evocative autoethnography’ redundant.

These autoethnographical accounts afford particular access to cognitive and affective phenomenon that dynamize human behaviour. Social context is interrogated through the complex subjectivity of the researcher—a subjectivity which is described through the actions taken by the researcher, as well as the microprocess of knowing and deciding that activate those actions. The forms in which this evocative autoethnography research is presented are dramatic and aesthetically motivated, so that poetry and personal vignettes are recognized as valid sociological genres.

There are concerns about this kind of research that avoids interpretation and presents intimate, dramatically rendered experiences as sociological knowledge. Coffey (1999) and Clough (2000), for example, are critical of the confessional, self-revelatory nature of many of these evocative autoethnographic narratives, arguing that these narratives connect to wider social trends of ‘trauma culture,’ that reveal trauma without delineating how it constitutes sociological knowledge (Clough, 2000, p. 287). This concern about the representation of knowledge, as well as the transferability of insights, is one that informs the work of other autoethnographers who demonstrate a more analytic orientation.

### **Analytic autoethnography.**

This realist or analytic autoethnography uses the “narrative visibility of the researcher’s self” (Anderson, 2006a, p. 378) as only one data point among many empirical sources that might include interviews, participant observation, documents, and other artifacts. Identified as a “specialized subgenre of analytic ethnography” (Anderson, 2006a, p. 388), this approach rejects the evocative autoethnographer’s refusal to interpret or reflect more abstractly. Instead, analytic autoethnography seeks connections to broader social science theory in order to “gain insight into broader sets of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves” (Anderson, 2006a, p. 380). Murphy’s *The Body Silent* (1990) is an exemplar of this analytic autoethnography, which examines the phenomenon of illness to develop an analytic framework to understand disability, and is informed by Murphy’s own intimate personal experience with spinal cord disease.

Although they share evocative autoethnographers’ commitment to reflexivity as a visible and active researcher in the text, analytic autoethnographers value an approach that can transcend the specific context of the investigation to make broader, more generalizable knowledge claims. What characterizes an approach as analytic, then, is that the researcher’s subjectivity is considered salient, but of relatively less importance than the empirical data ‘outside’ the researcher’s subjectivity.

Although recognizing the importance of analysis, evocative autoethnographers contend that there is a false distinction between evocative and analytical texts. Holman Jones (2005) argues that evocative performance

autoethnography is “theoretically grounded at the outset and methodologically heuristic in process and product, advancing itself as a praxis of inquiry as it performatively *does* analysis” (p. 501). Ellis and Bochner (2006) contend that “we think of what we do as both evocative and analytical. The difference is that we use stories to do the work of analysis and theorizing” (p. 436). They argue for a recognition of the validity of multiple forms of knowledge and representation in social science research.

### **Layered accounts.**

Between these two poles of evocative and analytic autoethnography, layered accounts are aesthetically analytical introspective narratives juxtaposed with more abstract theoretical reflection. In this sense, Sparkes (1996) creates a layered account by recounting a personal, cognitive, emotional experience of physical injury, which he then juxtaposes with a theoretical reflection on masculinity and broader issues of identity dilemmas in British culture.

Acknowledging the dual attentions of a layered account, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define the method as a “strategy for putting oneself into one’s text and putting one’s text into the literatures and traditions of social science” (p. 494). The strength of a layered account is its capacity to generate “multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation” (Ellingson, 2011, p.599), insofar as the method enables attention to the researcher’s subjectivity while investigating or asserting more abstract knowledge claims. The dual object of attention—of the researching self as well as the conceptual context in which that self is situated—is a significant feature of the layered account.

The dynamic, flexible multiplicity of the layered account's method and genre is another significant feature. One approach to this method, for example, is that a first-person account is generated so that the cognition and affect of the researching self is investigated and dramatically presented. This presentation can take the form of a dramatic narrative, a short vignette, or a fragment of memory (Rambo, 2007; Sparkes, 1996). This first-person account itself then becomes an object of investigation undertaken in a theoretical, third-person analysis (Marshall, 2004). This multiply reflexive form enables an investigation that represents a dynamic complexity of self in relation to social knowledge, whereby first and third person points of view dynamically interact to create complex accounts of the phenomenon being investigated. In sum, a layered account enables the researcher to investigate their researching-self's cognition and affect as data, as well as to investigate the broader claims of social knowledge that their cognitive and affective self is researching.

To summarize the discussion in this section, autoethnography is a heterogeneous method that asserts the researcher's subjectivity to be a valid and significant source of data. There are various degrees to which the researcher's subjectivity is privileged and expressed, as well as a divergence of views on the expressive and theoretical valences of the analysis performed. The layered account is presented as the method through which interpersonal argument is investigated in this project, as it provides a means to examine interpersonal argument in first and third person accounts, thereby generating a multiply reflexive account of polarized argument and its dissipation.

## Assessing Quality in Autoethnographical Research

There is considerable debate among practitioners of autoethnography about how to evaluate the merits, reliability, or quality of the method. Some scholars accept socially sanctioned criteria applied to qualitative methods and seek to demonstrate autoethnography's capacity to meet these criteria through a translation of the standards (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012).<sup>7</sup> Other scholars reject the established social scientific criteria that focus on validity and credibility, and instead propose alternative criteria such as aesthetic merit or evocation of emotional response (Ellis, 2000; Richardson, 2000).<sup>8</sup>

Instead of arguing for—or against—*a priori* criteria to evaluate the quality of research, there is an emergent recognition of the importance of context in the process of judging the merit of specific autoethnographical work. This is a process whereby the research is acknowledged as situated within the contextually relevant practices and intentions of particular “knowledge communities” (Briggs & Bleiker, 2010) or “ecologies of knowing” (Altheide & Johnson, 2011). Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) refer to the importance of

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<sup>7</sup> Hughes, Pennington, and Makris (2012) devote their text to translating how autoethnographies might meet the criteria for evaluating qualitative research established by the American Educational Research Association (AERA). These criteria include problem formulation; study design; sources of evidence; measurement; classification; analysis and interpretation; generalization; and ethics (p. 210). For each topic, Hughes et al. identify how autoethnographies can meet the established criteria. These criteria govern the funding of research, thereby exercising considerable power in producing what is recognized as knowledge (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 585; Denzin, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Denzin (2006) rejects AERA standards altogether, arguing that the amount and detail of criteria would exclude almost any text. Richardson (2000), too, rejects these criteria and argues for nonfoundationalist criteria which includes a) a substantive contribution to an understanding of social life, b) aesthetic merit, c) reflexivity, d) emotional and intellectual impact, and e) a clear expression of cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of reality (p. 937). Ellis (2000) frames criteria as questions: “Is the work honest? Does the author critique and show herself? Does the writer (or reader) have an emotional epiphany? Does the story enable the reader to understand and feel the experience it seeks to convey” (p. 275).

recognizing research as situated in an “epistemic community” whereby this community is shaped by theoretical and methodological commonalities in defining research questions and generating knowledge (p. 19).

Recognizing the contextual practices and norms in which the autoethnography is situated means that the focus on quality shifts away from demonstrating compliance with *a priori* established criteria towards providing “evidentiary narratives” (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 587) that identify the challenges and account for the researcher’s choices in their research endeavour. These evidentiary narratives account for the process of acquiring, organizing, and interpreting data related to the specific purpose and context of the research. As such, reflexive accounting is “tied to practices and intentions and ultimately ‘our justifications’ for using this method” (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 588), and grounded in the context of the epistemic community and its inherent discursive, epistemological, and professional norms. It is another way that autoethnography seeks to make explicit the production of knowledge, situating it reflexively within the context of the social circulation of knowledge. In this dissertation, chapters 4 and 9 are evidentiary narratives of this kind; they identify the criteria of quality that animate the research and account for the process through which the research is advanced.

Having examined the justifications for using the autoethnographical method and introduced the concept of evidentiary narrative to account for the method’s quality, this chapter now turns to a consideration of significant

contestations to autoethnography, followed by a responsive articulation of the specific autoethnographical stance taken in this research.

### **Privileging Individual Subjectivities as a Level of Analysis**

The privileging of individual subjectivities, exemplified in autoethnography, is problematic for a variety of different reasons, including its reproduction of Western individualism (Lai, 2008; Kamboureli, 2008; Bishop, 2008), its level of analysis at the individual rather than social (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Hill Collins, 1997), or its presentation of a unified stable self (Gannon, 2006). For postcolonial critics such as Kamboureli (2008), autoethnography “perpetuates the dialectic of normative and other subjectivities” (p. 38), in which a self-knowing individual subjectivity is constituted in relation to a foreign ‘other,’ however foreignness is understood. In this regard, the narrative’s problematic textual privileging and self-constituting risks subsuming or erasing the subjectivity of the other. Bishop (2008), in a different way, argues that privileging the self for investigation is not compatible with Kaupapa Maori’s understanding of quality in research. The creation and circulation of knowledge in Maori contexts privileges the act of being in a relational part of a group process, rather than examining individual subjectivity per se.

Autoethnography, with its attention to the individual subjectivity of the researcher, has also been criticized as an inadequate level of sociological analysis. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue against the “self-fascinated observation of the observer’s feelings” (p. 247), or attention to individual interactions. Instead, they advocate an examination of the social conditions which

make certain interactions possible, particularly “the emergence and progressive constitution ... necessary to produce a social concept or category (such as the category of ‘profession’)” (p. 243). Hill Collins (1997), in her reading of feminist standpoint theory, also highlights the importance of the group—rather than the individual—as a level of analysis. In this reading, individuals are not a proxy for groups, and a focus on individual experience will not yield the insights necessary to transform oppressive social relations that are structured in fundamentally inequitable ways.

A poststructuralist critique of autoethnography, on the other hand, does not criticize the method for its privileging of the individual over social or structural investigation. Instead, autoethnography does not sufficiently problematize the individual in its multiplicity and complexity. Gannon (2006), for example, critiques autoethnography by stressing the (im)possibilities of writing the self, advocating instead the textual strategies of Barthes, Derrida, and Cixous, who highlight their unreliable and contradictory multiple narrative selves through discontinuous fragments that are informed by memory, the body, and others (p. 491).

To summarize, there are a variety of critiques of autoethnography’s attention to individual subjectivities. The privileging of the individual self can be seen as problematic if the method’s self-referentiality is seen to erase the other’s subjectivity, to ignore the social relationality in which the self is situated, or is unable to address the structure of inequitable social relations through personal narratives. From another theoretical perspective, autoethnography does not

sufficiently problematize the multiple, contradictory, embodied self that characterizes postmodern texts.

### **Critique of Introspection and Presenting Interiority as Data**

In addition to the problem of the individual as the level of analysis, autoethnography's focus on introspection also raises critical challenges, particularly when the introspective focus is directed upon experience as an object of inquiry. Delamont (2007) argues that autoethnography's weakness is a focus on the researcher's experience rather than a presentation of their analytical conclusions. Her critique of autoethnography is similar, but not identical, to Scott's (1991) critique of experience as an unproblematically foundational source of data.

Scott (1991) argues against the concept of self-knowing subjectivities and their foundational experiences, contending that the privileging of experience "precludes analysis of the workings of (a) system and of its historicity," thereby reproducing rather than contesting given ideological systems (p. 779). Instead, she argues for an examination of historical contingency and critical scrutiny of explanatory categories usually taken for granted, including the category of 'experience' (p. 780).

In addition to the critiques of the foundations of the method, there are challenges related to the rendering of interiority as data. Throop and Murphy (2002) highlight Bourdieu's and Husserl's skepticism towards introspective accounts of experience, insofar as the introspection of current experience requires a kind of attention that alters or destroys the experience being observed

(p. 193). Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel (2007) share this criticism regarding the unreliability of introspection in their extended critiques of the method.

Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel's (2007) concern is the truthfulness, trustworthiness, or accuracy of accounts. They argue that because there are not well-developed methods to attend introspectively to experience, there are limited concepts and categories available to characterize it. For them, reports of experience are likely to be influenced and distorted by pre-existing theories and biases, both cultural and personal: "most subjects misrepresent their own experiences to a greater or lesser degree, usually as the result of incorrect presuppositions about the characteristics of their own experiences" (Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 263).<sup>9</sup> Given the variability and susceptibility to bias and error of introspective accounts, Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel argue that these accounts must be treated with skepticism and caution.

In raising these issues, Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel (2007) point to a key question about the object of introspective inquiry: to what does an autoethnographically introspective method attend? Gould (2006) makes a distinction between narrative and metacognitive introspection in social scientific research methods. Metacognitive introspection, he suggests, is the act of watching thoughts and feelings in real time, while narrative introspection is the act of watching the construction of stories and explanations (Gould, 2006). In this

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<sup>9</sup> Hurlburt has developed a "science of experience built out of redundant sets of independent reports" (Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 263). With this aim, Hurlburt has developed a carefully defined Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) method and criteria to establish the credibility of reports on inner experience, a method that includes a random beeper that signals a reminder for the subject to record that moment's inner experience, followed by specific and detailed interview strategies that support a bracketing of presuppositions.

characterization of introspective methods, Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel appear to be concerned with metacognitive introspection, while autoethnography attends to a narrative introspection of stories and explanations. This differentiation of introspective accounts points to the importance of context in the analysis and evaluation of autoethnography as a method. There are different kinds of introspective methods, various applications of those methods, and diverse research questions that animate their application.

To summarize the above section, detractors of autoethnography argue that the self-referentiality of the method is overly experiential, in which the personal can problematically overshadow the political, limiting sociological work to biographical involvements and subjectivities so that a self-absorbed subjectivity might lose sight of the culturally different other. Moreover, introspection can be seen as an unreliable form of research—not only can presuppositions distort or misrepresent experience, but introspective data cannot account for the macro forces beyond the awareness of any subjectivity.

### **Accounting for Quality: Responding to Contestations**

As noted above, these criticisms are directed toward autoethnography in general, and the generality of the critique obscures the specific texts or contexts in which an autoethnographical text is produced and circulated. It would be mistaken, for example, to claim that first-person texts cannot address or analyze oppressive social relations. Consciousness-raising circles of feminist scholars demonstrated in the 1960s how working critically with the personal is of profound political consequence, while first-person accounts were instrumental in effecting

wider social change (Keane, 2016). Similarly, first-person introspective accounts are being used as a postcolonial tool for social justice to interrogate researchers' own privileged whiteness as part of the socially engaged inquiry undertaken by the European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness (2002).<sup>10</sup> Through these accounts, it is possible for a first-person researcher to identify themselves as a change agent, even as they seek to question change and agency. In this way, a stable and coherent self can be interrogated without entirely undermining a sense of social learning or transferability of knowledge claims. This interrogation does not erase the subjectivity of the other, rather it advances the notion that the self and other are mutually constituted (Marshall, 2004).

Turning to the more positivist concerns about the bias, distortion, or lack of trustworthiness of introspective accounts, the method's 'reliability' depends upon the kinds of knowledge claims deemed valid in the epistemic community in which the research is situated.<sup>11</sup> Like many qualitative methods, autoethnography does not claim reproducible results produced by an objective observer (Ellis & Bochner, 2010). The epistemology of the method includes the recognition that introspective accounts that reveal presuppositions are not distortive bias, but are instead part of a dynamic interaction between the individual's current cognition and previously acquired implicit and explicit knowledge. Evaluating the quality of autoethnography, then, does not depend on the corroborated 'trustworthiness' of

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<sup>10</sup> This is a group of "six white scholar/practitioners" who research "what it means to be a member of a dominant group" to take more effective action for social justice. They publish under the group name of European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness to affirm their stance that knowledge production is collaborative. See <http://www.iconoclastic.net/eccw/> (n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> Hurlburt's and Schwitzgebel's (2007) concern about the trustworthiness of reports of inner experience leads them to wonder, for example, if a subject's inner experience was visual or auditory; if auditory, did the 'voice' that the subject heard have an accent? (p. 63).

the data. Instead, the criteria of accountability and reflexivity have greater salience for assessing quality in the epistemic communities from which autoethnographies emerge (Richardson, 2000).

Responding to the critiques of autoethnography in this way highlights the importance of recognizing the context in which the self-referentiality or introspection of the method is produced. These criticisms may be valid in their critique of specific texts, where a personal account erases another's subjectivity or fails to account for structural social relations in which the account is situated. A self-referential method is not appropriate for research questions that address a variety of transpersonal, macrosocial, or other phenomenon. These criticisms leveled against autoethnography's level of analysis, then, are related to the challenge of appropriately aligning the research question with the methodology, rather than the adequacy of the method itself. They also call attention to the importance of evidentiary narratives that are accountable for the presentation of self in relation to other, as well as the conceptual frameworks that shape the levels of analysis undertaken in the research.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter's exploration of the theory and practice of autoethnography began with a definition and sketched key sociological themes, particularly reflexivity, that situated the method within sociological conversations and debates. After a review of dominant approaches in the autoethnographic literature, which addressed their convergences and differences, the layered account was identified as a robust method to investigate interpersonal argument.

Subsequently, the chapter explored the importance of reflexive accounting for assessing quality of research within the context of specific epistemic communities. Key contestations to autoethnography were considered and countered by recognizing the importance of context, and purpose, in evaluating autoethnography as a method.

### **The Autoethnographic Stance in this Project**

As introduced above, a layered account advances a first and third person analysis of the microsociological phenomenon of interpersonal argument as knowledge production and decision-making. The particular layered account that has been developed for this thesis is described briefly in this section and elaborated in greater detail in chapter 4. In the first-person aspect of the research, the object of investigation is the researcher's knowing, feeling, and deciding about interpersonal arguments encountered both personally and professionally. This affords access to the cognitive and affective elements of interpersonal argument as it arises and dissipates. These elements of the research are presented in a dramatically rendered, first-person analytical vignette that expresses, and reflects upon, those affective and cognitive dimensions. This first-person account subsequently becomes an object of investigation undertaken in a theoretical, third-person analysis, which situates the text within broader, more abstract conceptual contexts of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change. Thus the multi-reflexive accounts dynamically interact in their analysis and reflection to create complex accounts of the phenomena of interpersonal argument and change.

Having established the claim for an autoethnographical stance to investigate interpersonal argument, it becomes important to identify the theoretical foundations on which the stance can be taken, as well as the conceptual frameworks through which the research is advanced. These foundations and frameworks are the focus of the following chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Intersubjectivity, Conflict and Change**

In considering the question of how polarized argument among individuals can dissipate so that new possibilities can emerge, interpersonal argument is characterized as a dynamic process of knowledge production and decision-making by selves in relation to others. I have argued that autoethnography is an appropriate investigative method for this thesis, whereby the subjectivity of self-in-relation-to-other can be identified and investigated as a unit of analysis within the complex social contexts in which interpersonal arguments are situated.

To support this autoethnographical stance of inquiry into interpersonal argument, several conceptual tools are needed related to intersubjectivity, conflict, and change. Of central importance is the identification of an analytical framework of intersubjectivity that is relevant to the complexity of the individual, interactive, and social dimensions of interpersonal argument. Additionally required is a theory of conflict that can illuminate interpersonal argument as an intersubjective process of knowledge production and decision-making. A theory of change, or dissipation, of conflict is also needed to account for how knowing, valuing, and deciding might be changed so that new possibilities can emerge.

This chapter sets out these conceptual tools through which the autoethnographical stance is supported. Two distinct bodies of literature—on intersubjectivity and interpersonal conflict—are placed in ‘creative conversation’ with each other. By juxtaposing key concepts from the emergent ‘insight approach’ to conflict with a thematic analysis of intersubjectivity, the first section

proposes a three-part analytical framework, which is supplemented by concepts from the anthropology of ethics. Section two identifies core ideas about conflict that inform this study, drawn from the insight approach to conflict, which accounts for conflict as a process of knowledge production and decision-making—of knowing, valuing and deciding. An approach to analyzing change is then generated through connecting concepts from the anthropology of ethics with the insight approach’s account of change in conflict.

### **Intersubjectivity**

Intersubjectivity is variously defined in diverse literatures spanning numerous disciplines. As a term it conveys rich semantic possibilities, with a root that simultaneously conveys consciousness and agency as well as a prefix that expresses connection. The study of intersubjectivity is complex, and the potential depth and breadth of that study extends far beyond the scope of this investigation. Rather than exploring intersubjectivity theories as ends in themselves, the intent of this section is to identify conceptual resources on intersubjectivity which can support an autoethnographical investigation of interpersonal argument and change.

The point of departure is Bohleber’s (2013) summative review of intersubjectivity literature. Within the epistemic community of psychoanalysis, Bohleber identifies the rising interest in intersubjectivity as related to greater recognition of the “subjectivity of the analyst as an instrument of knowledge” (p. 799).<sup>12</sup> He reviews the way that intersubjectivity has been extensively examined

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<sup>12</sup> Characterized in this way, intersubjectivity theory can be seen as a confluent development to the rise of reflexivity and the development of the autoethnographic method.

and applied in various literatures, noting the lineage of the concept through Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Buber, Gadamer, Levinas, and Habermas.

In his extensive discussion of the various approaches that grasp and apply this concept, Bohleber (2013) reviews intersubjectivity from the origins in German-language philosophy and psychoanalysis to the varied perspectives that followed, including: American ego-psychology's conception of interacting intrapsychic worlds (p. 802); phenomenological systems-theory focus on the way context constitutes subjects who are knowing and known (p. 803); Ogden and Benjamin's separate but related notions of the intersubjective as a 'third entity' shaped by the interactions of participants (pp. 804–806); and Bion's conception of intersubjectivity as a process of meaning-making between intrapsychic worlds (pp. 813–814). Bohleber acknowledges the influential research on the development of intersubjectivity, particularly in the way that infants and caregivers exert mutual and reciprocal influence, regulating and recognizing each other, giving rise to the claim that “another person is needed to experience our own self” (2013, p. 800).<sup>13</sup>

### **Extending Bohleber's Tripartite Framework**

Bohleber (2013) concludes his review by suggesting that the “communality” of the various theories on intersubjectivity lies in “conceptualizing the new that can arise between two analytical partners” (p. 821), even as he recognizes the multiplicity and diversity of views. He offers a summary of three

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<sup>13</sup> For a foundational review of intersubjectivity as the emergence and development of 'self-and-other' awareness in infant-caregiver relations, see Trevarthen and Aitken (1996).

broad thematic approaches to intersubjectivity, noting that they do not necessarily allow mutual integration.

The three broad themes he identifies in the literature are the intersubjective as *interactive activity* between autonomous subjects; as *mutually constituting space* through which the self comes to terms with him/herself and “undergoes change through his experience” (Bohleber, 2013, p. 822); and, third, as a *system* which is the “contextual precondition” for individual experience, formed by complex intersections of “fields” or “structures” of experience (p. 823).

Addressing his epistemic community, Bohleber’s (2013) interest is to explore intersubjectivity as it relates to the analytical dyad. This psychoanalytic context gives rise to his central question about intersubjectivity as a concept and “which conscious and unconscious processes are associated with its conception” (p. 801). Despite his specifically psychoanalytic interest, which differs from the sociological one of this inquiry, Bohleber’s thematic summary of intersubjectivity is compelling. His view—that intersubjectivity can be seen as interactive activity (of subjects), dynamic mutuality (of self and other), and complex system—stimulated a generative series of questions relating to this project of interpersonal argument and change.

If intersubjectivity is an activity of individual subjects, what are the minds of subjects *doing* when they encounter another, or how is intersubjectivity *done*? If intersubjectivity is a mutually constituted space of encounter, what is the constituting process between self and other? How does change happen in this

encounter? If intersubjectivity is also a complex intersecting system of meanings, what is the significance of that system and how is it manifested?

In asking these questions about intersubjectivity, it becomes possible to consider interpersonal conflict as a form of intersubjective engagement because the questions equally apply. If interpersonal conflict is seen as interactive activity, what are subjects *doing* with their minds when they engage in conflict with each other? If conflict is enacted in a mutually constituted space of encounter, what is happening when parties interact in conflict? How might change be accounted for? If conflict is embedded in systems of complex meanings, how does this 'contextual precondition' shape the enactment of a particular conflict between subjectivities?

### **Reading Intersubjectivity Theory in Relation to Conflict Theory**

Asking questions in this way is significantly shaped by my reading of Price's (2013) articulation of the insight approach to conflict.<sup>14</sup> Price argues for a multi-dimensional understanding of conflict that reflects the relationships among individuals' cognition, their conflict behaviors, and the social structures that contextualize them. Inspired by the philosopher Bernard Lonergan, Price argues that the explanatory power of the insight approach comes from its focus on the operations of the mind in conflict, rather than exclusively on the content of the conflict.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Because I draw heavily on the conceptual resources of conflict theory, I use the terms 'interpersonal argument' and 'interpersonal conflict' interchangeably.

<sup>15</sup> Applying Lonergan's insight theory to the study of conflict, the insight approach is being adapted and applied in a variety of contexts, including peacebuilding (Price & Bartoli, 2012), policing (Price & Price, 2015); theology (Price, forthcoming), and theatre (<http://www.intersections.org/tea-projects>). See also Picard (2016) for longer descriptions of the application of the insight approach in various contexts.

Instead of only asking “what is this conflict about,” which is a focus on the *outcome* of conscious activity, Price (2013) contends that a more useful question is “what are we doing when we use our minds to lock ourselves into conflict with each other” (p. 110), which is a focus on the *process* of the conscious activity itself. Price asserts that an explanatory account of conflict requires attention to the activity of consciousness, by paying attention to empirical evidence of what minds are doing in conflict, and how decisions to engage in conflict are based on specific intelligible cognitive acts (2013, p. 114). This approach resonates with the reflexivity orientation taken in this thesis.

As will be discussed in greater detail, Price (2013) identifies specific cognitive operations as knowing, valuing, and deciding. Importantly, he recognizes that individual cognition is dependent upon the complex social context in which cognition takes place and meaning is instantiated. Price therefore asserts an approach to conflict that accounts for the intersubjective process of knowing, valuing, and deciding of the self in relation to the other within complex social processes. Thus, in addition to identifying the significance of conscious activity in how a self comes to partially know the other, Price recognizes the sociality of that knowledge production and decision-making.

Bohleber (2013), then, introduces the possibility of a three-part framework to understand intersubjectivity (of interactive activity, mutually constituting space, and complex systems of meaning) even though he notes that the three parts might not lend themselves to mutual integration. Reading Price (2013) in relation to Bohleber, a three-part approach to intersubjectivity can be created, where the

three parts can be differentiated while their potential connections are explored. The three interrelated aspects of this approach are set out below.

**First aspect of the framework: operations of consciousness.** In examining the phenomena of knowledge production and decision-making (inside and outside of conflict), the insight approach calls attention to the process of conscious activity, of what minds are doing as they know and decide. Using Lonergan's insight theory, Price (2013) articulates these operations as *knowing*, *valuing*, and *deciding*. The operation of knowing is oriented to determining what is 'accurate,' 'factual' or 'true'; the operation of valuing is oriented to what is 'good'; and the operation of deciding is oriented to what to do.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, *knowing* involves the process of generating understanding and verifying accuracy or veracity; *valuing* involves the process of discerning significance or registering meaning; and *deciding* involves identifying options and selecting courses of action. As will be discussed further, these are operations of consciousness but they are not necessarily self-conscious, insofar as knowing, valuing, and deciding often take place pre-reflectively. They are also functionally related, whereby a decision about a situation is predicated on knowledge about that situation as well a sense of its significance. For the purposes of this dynamic three-part analytical approach to intersubjectivity, then, the first aspect is defined as operations of consciousness through which the self comes to (partially and contingently) know the other, register the significance of that knowledge, and make responsive decisions in relation to that knowing and valuing.

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<sup>16</sup> See also Cronin (2006) and McShane (1975) for an articulation of operations of consciousness based on Lonergan's work.

**Second aspect of the framework: “spaces of encounter.”** The second aspect of the analytical framework addresses the mutually reciprocating influence that selves and others exert upon each other. Keane (2014a) identifies a space, or scene, of encounter as one in which “participants interactively define themselves and each other” (p. 7), a process which is subject to ongoing construction and transformation, entailing enactments of power and meaning in complex and contingent ways. Keane (2016) mobilizes the concept of spaces of encounter to describe how the self and the other reciprocally influence each other in combining, expressing, and enacting complex meanings that are often of an ethical nature. A ‘space of encounter’ is a useful concept insofar as it articulates an interaction among individuals as well as a space that is constituted by, and constitutes, the individual and social.

The concept of ‘encounter’ is more problematic within the epistemic community in which Bohleber (2013) is situated. He prefers the notion of “mutually constituting space” (p. 820) because the word ‘encounter’ is a particularly fraught term in psychoanalysis, as it involves vigorous debate about the unconscious and conscious processes involved, and the extent to which the encounter is a process or product of interaction. Keane’s anthropological usage of the term—as a physical or virtual space that mediates the social and the individual—is suitable to the purposes of this tripartite analytical framework, as it denotes a mutual, reciprocating influence that can reinforce or alter knowledge and decisions. This differential understanding and application of the word ‘encounter’ between Bohleber and Keane points to the importance of working

accountably within the specific epistemic communities in which research is situated.<sup>17</sup>

**Third aspect of the framework: complex systems of meanings.** Just like the term ‘encounter,’ the notion of ‘systems of meanings’ needs to be articulated purposefully, as it is a term laden with significance in various epistemic communities. Bohleber (2013) uses the term *system* to convey the contextual precondition for individual experience of intersecting “fields” or “structures of experience” (p. 823). In the adapted tripartite framework proposed here, the concept of systems of meaning is much broader than Bohleber’s sense of structures of experience. The concept encompasses the vast complexity of cultural values, narratives, linguistic practices, institutions, and more, through which power and significance are socially circulated, taken up or modified by individual minds, and enacted or negotiated in encounters (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013; Keane, 2016). It is a concept that conveys the sociality which generates, and is generative of, spaces of encounter and operations of consciousness. These complex systems of meanings shape but do not determine the space of encounter and intelligibility discerned; in their complexity, they exert influence beyond first-person awareness, and yet can be investigated reflexively. These complex systems of meanings, then, are the third aspect of the proposed tripartite approach to intersubjectivity.

**The proposed tripartite analytical framework: summary.** Influenced by these readings of Bohleber, Price, and Keane, a three-part approach to

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<sup>17</sup> Price (2013) does not identify ‘space of encounter’ as a unit of analysis, but his articulation of ‘institutions’ accounts for the roles, tasks, and patterns of co-operation that shape spaces of encounter in relating and orienting the self to the other and the broader social context.

intersubjectivity is proposed. These aspects are distinct, and dynamically related. One aspect of intersubjectivity is the interacting acts of individual consciousness between two autonomous subjects, which is a dynamic movement of cognition by which the self grasps the intelligibility of another's knowing and deciding, their intending and acting. In a second aspect, intersubjectivity is understood as a product, a *space of encounter* of mutual and reciprocating influence that is dynamically and socially created among actors. In a third aspect, intersubjectivity is *complex systems of meanings* generated from contextual dynamic social narratives, institutions, practices, ideas, artifacts, and more. In sum, this tripartite approach of intersubjectivity—as operations of consciousness, space of encounter, and complex systems of meaning—is the foundational conceptual framework in which this autoethnographical research into polarized interpersonal argument is conducted.

### **Supporting Conceptual Resources from Other Literatures**

Having established a dynamic three-part framework, it becomes possible to read other intersubjectivity literature in light of this analytical frame, where supporting and diverging perspectives emerge and become open to scrutiny. This section explores the ways in which other literatures have mobilized similar concepts of intersubjectivity to investigate phenomena or advocate for a method. This is not a comprehensive examination of intersubjectivity literature; instead it is a recognition of similarities and divergence that enables a more robust articulation of the framework I propose.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A discussion of intersubjectivity could elicit references to vast other literatures: Husserl, Schutz, Mead, cognitive sociology, the philosophy of self-consciousness, social psychology and many

Epistemic communities of neurobiology, education, psychoanalysis, and sociology use concepts of intersubjectivity that are attuned to different units of analysis proposed in the tripartite framework: the individual self seeking to know the other (Siegel, 2012); mutually influencing individuals in classroom learning activities (Matusov, 1999; Stahl, 2014); complex systems of emotional, social worlds enacting spaces of encounter between analyst and analysand (Stolorow, 2013); trajectories of meaning through which individual consciousness flows (Gillespie & Zitoun, 2012); and ‘affordances’ through which the individual’s knowing and deciding is generated and generative (Keane, 2016). Reviewing these conceptions of intersubjectivity highlights the dynamic interplay among the aspects identified in the proposed framework. It also introduces key concepts that will be taken up in the sections on conflict and change.

A neurobiological interest in the intersubjective process of knowing the other attends to the physiological dimensions of cognition, even as it recognizes the power of interaction to affect that physiology (Rock, 2006; Siegel, 2012). Siegel (2012) identifies the role of the neural activity of the brain—the limbic region’s role in appraising meaning and integrating emotion—while recognizing that consciousness of self and other is also an activity of the mind, differentiated from the brain. The definition of intersubjectivity, for Siegel, is “the shared experience created in the joining of two or more minds, revealing how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (2012, para. A1-43). This neurobiological approach to intersubjectivity attends to the process of cognition and the dynamic

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others. This thesis requires careful navigation through significant bodies of literature, requiring the recognition that a single dissertation, with a specific focus, must mindfully manage scope, being accountable for choices as it does.

mutual influence of individual minds upon each other, highlighting the first two dimensions of the tripartite framework.<sup>19</sup>

From the educational epistemic community, intersubjectivity has been characterized as interactive activity that influences the cognitive performance of learning (Matusov, 1996; Nathan, Eilan, & Kim, 2007; Stahl, 2014). The first two aspects of the proposed tripartite framework are illuminated insofar as interactive activity is the privileged unit of analysis, where individuals' learning is seen as an intersubjective process of "building collaborative knowing" (Stahl, 2014, p. 324; Matusov, 1996) Given the epistemic community's concern with classroom dynamics, their focus is on the joint activities that can influence—or impede—individual cognition and learning (Stahl, 2014). These two examples from education and neurobiology show how intersubjectivity is mobilized as a concept to illuminate particular phenomena within specific epistemic communities. More specifically, these examples illustrate the application of two aspects of the individual cognition and spaces of encounter that are proposed in the framework as well as their dynamic interplay.

A more sociological interest in intersubjectivity illuminates the relationship between intersubjective "systems of meaning," individual cognition, and decision-making (Crossley, 1996; Prus, 1996). Gillespie and Zittoun (2013), as prominent sociocultural psychologists, provide a metaphorical analysis of the relationship between consciousness and intersubjective systems of meanings. Personal

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<sup>19</sup> It also reveals a significant divergence, in that the proposed framework does not attend to the physiological foundations of consciousness, operating at a level at which we are mostly unaware and over which we have little control. Although worthwhile, this biological account lies beyond the scope of the epistemic context in which the tripartite framework is situated.

meaning is generated by individual minds as they encounter “the vast universe of cultural values, narratives and human accumulated experience” (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013, p. 528), as well as other selves within those complex contexts. They use metaphors of architecture and movement to express the dynamic interconnection between the individual and social. They suggest that complex intersubjective systems and artifacts guide experience, creating “trajectories of meaning” through which “consciousness flows,” as a canal guides the flow of water through its passages (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013, pp. 524–525).

Keane’s (2016) concept of “affordance” usefully captures a part of the complexity of the social in relation to personal meanings. In contrast to Gillespie and Zittoun’s (2013) metaphor of architecture and canals through which consciousness flows (or is carried) somewhat more passively, Keane suggests that individuals *afford* themselves of a complex variety of materials—from physical objects to teachings to internal states—to make cognitive evaluations and decisions. The concept of affordance means that individuals (and groups) combine and draw upon these complex materials in spontaneous and deliberate ways to generate meaning, structure interactions, and make decisions. Keane (2014a) builds on Mead’s observation that the chair invites you to sit, but he adds that it does not determine that you will do so. You may use it as a ladder, firewood, or not at all (p. 7). The concept of affordance is useful for this project in that it denotes the individual social actor affording themselves of complex meanings and materials, combining them and recombining them, actively and passively, aware and unaware that they might be doing so. The concept of

affordance is applied in greater detail in the theory of change; for the purposes of the tripartite frame, it highlights the conceptual relation between individual cognition and complex systems of meaning. That is, consciousness can be passively carried by these systems of meaning, and individuals can also (reflexively) actively afford themselves of varieties of meaning.

Psychoanalytic approaches examine intersubjectivity through the complexity of spaces of encounter (Stolorow, 2013; Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Stern, 2004). One of the more prominent thinkers in intersubjectivity theory, Robert Stolorow (2013) uses the term intersubjectivity to mean “systems of interacting, differently organized, mutually influencing emotional worlds” (p. 285). Within this unfathomable complexity, intersubjectivity is articulated as “our existential kinship-in-the-same darkness” (p. 388), and is the condition for both trauma and change. Stolorow connects this concept of intersubjectivity to advocate for encounters in which the “mutative power of human understanding” (2013, p. 388) can produce more attuned psychoanalytic practices that can facilitate change. The mutative power relates to expanding the emotional horizons of both therapist and patient, to tolerate complexity through a sense of connection rather than disorientation or disjuncture.<sup>20</sup> This idea of expanding horizons is taken up in the theory of change below.

In sum, various scholars mobilize a concept of intersubjectivity to analyze phenomena or to advocate for particular methods, oriented to different units of

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<sup>20</sup> Relational psychoanalysts such as Stolorow and Atwood (1992) would contest the proposed tripartite framework in their rejection of the notion of a pre-given, discrete individual mind; they seek to dispel the “myth of the isolated mind” (p. 7), arguing instead for the notion of consciousness as intersubjectively co-created.

analysis proposed in the tripartite framework. These conceptions have points of convergence with, and divergence from, the tripartite framework in their understanding and application of the term. In exploring these convergent and divergent conceptions, the complex interplay of the three aspects of the framework is revealed and affirmed.

Thus, a more elaborated articulation of my approach is that intersubjectivity can be understood in one aspect as a dynamic movement of cognition by which the self grasps the intelligibility of the consciousness of another, as Price (2013) and Siegel (2012) contend. In a second aspect, intersubjectivity can be understood as a *space of encounter* of mutual and reciprocating influence that is dynamically created among actors, as Keane (2016) and Matusov (1996) depict. In a third aspect, intersubjectivity is *complex systems of meanings* generated from complex social and cultural patterns, as Gillespie and Zittoun (2013) and Keane (2016) advance.

### **A Conceptual Point of Contrast: Coelho and Figueirido's Analytical Framework**

As a conceptual point of contrast, Coelho and Figueirido (2003) codify intersubjective theories quite differently from this three-part approach. Animated by the question of “how is it possible to know the other, another consciousness” (p. 196), Coelho and Figueirido summarize and organize theories of ‘knowing otherness and self’ into four different matrices. They identify two opposing quadrants as *trans-subjective* and *traumatic* intersubjectivity. Whereas the trans-subjective concept (identified in their readings of Scheler, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty) is characterized as a primordial pre-subjectivity through which

there is no differentiation between self and other, traumatic intersubjectivity (Levinas' concept of the other) reveals an unknowable alterity which exceeds the self's capacity to understand.

In addition to identifying intersubjectivity as two poles of self and others in primal relations of knowing and not-knowing, Coelho and Figueirido (2003) suggest a third and fourth quadrant in their matrix: *interpersonal* and *intrapsychic* intersubjectivity. Interpersonal intersubjectivity (related to traditions of social pragmatism and symbolic interactionism) conceives of self and other co-creating subjectivities through their interactions and jointly constructed meaning-making. Intrapsychic intersubjectivity (seen in Freud, Klein, Fairbairn, and Winnicott) is a conception in which the self has incorporated the absent known-other as part of their inner mental experience.

There are limitations to this conceptual approach to intersubjectivity. Gillespie (2003) contests this framework as a problematic summary of divergent literatures, whereby Mead's work is questionably divided amongst categories, while being allied with the incommensurate work of Levinas (p. 214). As a summary of the literature, then, the matrices are not necessarily helpful in illuminating intersubjectivity. In contrast, the tripartite framework of this project is not attuned to categorizing existing literatures on intersubjectivity or generating unifying frameworks in which to conceptualize them.

An additional critique of Coelho and Figueirido's (2003) framework comes from Moghaddam (2003), who argues against attending to *outcomes* of intersubjectivity (trauma and connection) in favor of a focus on the *process* of

knowing the other or how that knowing might change.<sup>21</sup> The tripartite approach proposed in this project explicitly attends to intersubjectivity as a process rather than an outcome. The animating questions in developing the framework, inspired by juxtaposing Bohleber (2013) with Price (2013), were process-oriented questions that included: what are subjects doing with their minds when they intersubjectively interact; what is happening in spaces of encounter that constitute self and other; and how does the 'contextual precondition' of complex systems of meanings shape the enactment of the encounter? These process-oriented questions gave rise to a framework, different from Coelho and Figueirido's (2003), through which intersubjectivity could be mobilized as a concept to support the autoethnographic investigation of interpersonal argument.

### **Summary: Intersubjectivity**

The proposed framework for conceptualizing intersubjectivity relates self, other and the social through cognition, encounter, and context. In this way, the framework is flexible and contingent; it does not make claims about intersubjectivity theory writ large, nor does it engage deeply with the ontological and epistemological questions of self and other with which scholars of intersubjectivity wrestle. The intent embedded in this framework is to identify conceptual resources of intersubjectivity that are sufficiently robust and supported to investigate the phenomenon of interpersonal argument with an autoethnographical stance.

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<sup>21</sup> Although Moghaddam (2003) advocates attention to process rather than outcome, his further analysis does not illuminate intersubjectivity as a process; instead his attention is directed to the intersubjectivity enacted in groups.

The framework identifies three aspects of intersubjectivity. As operations of consciousness, intersubjectivity is a process by which the self comes to know the other. As spaces of encounter, intersubjectivity is mutually influencing interactive activity. As complex systems of meanings, intersubjectivity is a dynamically generative social context through which spaces of encounter and operations of consciousness are enacted.

The introduction of this chapter identified the conceptual resources—of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change—needed to support an autoethnographical stance of inquiry into interpersonal argument. Having articulated the analytical framework of intersubjectivity, this chapter now turns to an examination of conceptual tools of conflict that illuminate interpersonal argument as an intersubjective process of knowledge production and decision-making.

### **Conflict Theory and Change**

The tripartite analytical framework to intersubjectivity developed above can be applied to discern the intersubjective valence of different approaches to conflict and change. These approaches to interpersonal argument and change do not, for the most part, specifically attend to conflict as an intersubjective process; nevertheless intersubjective aspects relating to the tripartite approach are clearly evident.<sup>22</sup> Where interpersonal argument is understood as fundamentally a question of individual reasoning (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2003; Matusov, 1996) or unmet personal need (Rosenberg, 2003; Burton, 1990), the strategy for change is oriented to influencing others' minds. Where argument is defined as a crisis or

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<sup>22</sup> Siegel (2012) and Matusov (1996) explicitly address the intersubjective dimensions of conflict and are referenced in the theory of change below.

rupture in interpersonal interaction (Bush & Folger, 2005; Siegel, 2012; Stolorow, 1992), the remedy is for attuned responsive interactions facilitative of recognition and repair. If conflict is said to be a contest of discourses involving power and resistance circulating through the complex systems of meanings (Brigg, 2007; Winslade & Monk, 2000), then the production of alternative narratives can change the trajectory of conflict.

These approaches to conflict and change, then, address one or more aspects of interpersonal argument as an intersubjective process. All of the approaches recognize, but place different emphasis on, the importance of context, complexity, meaning, agency, and interactions in changing or maintaining conflict, without explicitly addressing the concept of intersubjectivity itself. While the approaches have merits, they lack the explicit conception, advanced in this thesis, of interpersonal argument as a complex intersubjective process. The understanding of conflict that is most closely attuned to the multifaceted intersubjectivity of argument is expressed and elaborated in the insight approach.

The following section begins to make explicit conceptual connections between intersubjectivity and conflict intervention through a consideration of the theoretical elements of the insight approach that will be developed for the remainder of this thesis. As noted above, it was the insight approach's theoretical elements of consciousness and conflict, read in relation to Bohleber's analysis and supplemented by Keane's concept of spaces of encounter, that supported the selection of the particular version of the tripartite approach used in this thesis.

The insight approach contends that conflict is a result of operations of consciousness situated in complex social contexts in which “institutions”—roles, tasks, and patterns of co-operation—(Price, 2013) shape the interactive space of encounter, while narratives incline those encounters and cognitive operations in certain directions. The insight approach thus mobilizes the notion of conflict as a complex, multidimensional process in such a way that it facilitates the investigation of interpersonal argument as an intersubjective process of knowledge production and decision-making. I elaborate on this claim below.

### **Operations of Consciousness: Knowing, Valuing, and Deciding**

To review the above discussion on the operations of consciousness, the insight approach calls attention to the process of conscious activity, of what minds are doing as they engage in conflict. The approach argues for attention to the operations of consciousness, the process of coming to know and decide (about the conflict), as well as the objects or products of consciousness (what is known and decided about the conflict). In making this argument, the insight approach contends that there are complex but discernible operations of consciousness at work. These operations are identified as *knowing* (composed of experiencing, understanding, and verifying); *valuing* (which is the cognitive affective process of discerning significance); and *deciding* (consisting of deliberating, evaluating, and deciding) (Price, 2013).

Although these are operations of consciousness, they are not necessarily self-conscious—knowing, valuing, and deciding often take place pre-reflexively. Decision-making can be ‘carried’ by social norms or previous experience in

making many kinds of choiceless choices: from the unaware choices of driving a car to the habitual choices of shopping for groceries to the socially-shaped decisions of what song to sing at a birthday party when the cake comes out.

Similarly, valuing—the process of discerning significance—can be carried by social narratives that assign worth, blame, esteem, or distaste, and direct “inclinations along the path suggested by the narratives” (Melchin & Picard, 2008, p. 72). The personal and social valuing of dirty dishes, high grades, or hot days can be contextually carried by social narratives and complex systems of meanings in which these occurrences take place. These carriers also apply to knowing, whereby taken-for-granted understandings direct the flow of consciousness to conclude the indisputability of certain facts—such as the shape of the Earth or the cause of disease—until that knowledge is interrogated and changed. Although the operations of consciousness can be pre-reflexive, they can also be reflexive, so that it is possible to self-consciously make decisions, think through problems, innovate new solutions, as well as become aware of the complex carriers that shape the conscious inclinations along certain directions (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013; Keane, 2016).

In addition to being conscious and pre-reflexive, the operations are also functionally related, insofar as the act of deciding is predicated upon knowing and valuing. In other words, all decisions require a sense of both ‘what it is’ (knowing related to the decision) and ‘of what significance it is’ (valuing related to the decision). Melchin and Picard (2008), as well as Price and Bartoli (2012), contend that decisions—big and small—involve the same identifiable operations

of consciousness. Making a decision is preconditioned on understanding (what is) and is animated by a registering of significance (what matters)—whether the decision is to order an item off a menu or to rescue an enemy. In this way, the operations of consciousness are said to be functionally related; they perform in relation to one other.

**Conflict Behavior: A Decision to Defend Based on the Valuing of Threat**

In identifying functionally related operations of consciousness, the insight approach contends that conflict, like all decisions, is predicated on valuing and understanding. Valuing—the process of discerning significance—is integral to interpersonal argument, insofar as it is the discernment of *threat* that is the key driver of conflict. The discernment and response to threat is what distinguishes a friendly disagreement from a heated dispute; what differentiates teasing banter from a contemptuous clash. Threat can be discerned as an affront to one’s sense of self, a sense of risk to practical matters such as time, money, health, or other concerns; or a violation of esteemed social norms (Price, forthcoming). Threat is often manifested as a sense of a gap between what is hoped for and rejected: it can be discerned as a difference between a preferred and undesirable practical future; a disjuncture between an esteemed and aversive social behavior; a gap between an affirmed or unwelcome sense of self (Price, forthcoming). Threat is often registered as affect, so that the unwelcome gap is registered through feelings of aversion, fear, shame, or outrage, while the affirmed state is registered through feelings of pleasure, contentment, or pride (Melchin & Picard, 2008).

Another feature of threat is that it tends to contract interpretive possibilities and constrict available options. Price and Bartoli (2012) explain: “When we feel threatened, it is very difficult to make peace because our apprehension of threat sharply narrows the framework that we use for interpreting our experience and choosing our response” (p.167). An assessment of threat can cause the mind to move spontaneously to responsive defensive options, including defense. The constrictive effect of threat means that consciousness is more likely to be carried in choiceless, hasty decisions rather than deliberate or reflexive ones.

In addition to identifying that interpersonal conflict is dynamized by a discernment of threat, the insight approach identifies the decision to defend as another defining feature of conflict behavior. These decisions to defend can be fight, flight, freeze, or fawn (Price & Price, 2015).<sup>23</sup> Melchin and Picard (2008) point out that when one party makes a decision to defend, it can be perceived as an attack by the other party, and these spaces of encounters—enacting decisions oriented to defending against threat—are what characterize conflict.

Price (2013) uses the case study of conflict in a school between a vice principal and several students to illustrate this point of the intersubjective nature of conflict. In this conflict, several students have absented themselves without permission from a class, and stand in recalcitrant silence as the vice principal confronts them in the school office. Price argues that a crucial part of understanding this conflict is to consider that each of the individuals is making

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<sup>23</sup> The defensive conflict behaviors can consist of combative confrontation, rageful silence, frantic retreat, or camouflaging servility (see Price & Price, 2015).

decisions in this conflictual encounter based on what they understand of the situation and what matters to them about it.

The knowing, valuing, and deciding in this space of encounter takes place within a social context that is shaped by the “roles, tasks, responsibilities and patterns of cooperation that constitute” (Price, 2013, p. 120) this particular institution and the narratives that suffuse it. The conflict between the vice principal and students is enacted through the roles they occupy in the school as well as the individual decisions they made within those roles. The complex institutional context shapes the way in which individual minds make sense of themselves and others, just as these contexts and systems of meanings establish a range of options upon which individual minds may decide to engage in conflict behavior. Price therefore asserts an approach to conflict that accounts for intersubjective processes of knowing and deciding in relation to the other within complex systems of social meanings.

These, then, are conceptual tools about conflict that are taken up in this work: that interpersonal argument is an intersubjective process involving individual cognition, spaces of encounter, and complex systems of meanings. Conflict behaviours are generated from the (sometimes choiceless) decision to defend that emerges from the valuing or apprehension of threat. Threat can be signalled through aversive effects like worry, anger, or discouragement, while defensive decisions can be enacted in the conflict behaviours of fighting, fleeing, fawning, or freezing. These behaviours, generated in consciousness, are enacted

in spaces of encounters within contexts of complex meanings that shape and orient the interpersonal interactions as well as the self's cognitive inclinations.

### **Conceptualizations of Change**

The introduction to this chapter recognized the need for conceptual tools related to intersubjectivity, conflict, and change that could support an investigation into interpersonal argument. The sections above set out the concepts that account for the complexity of intersubjectivity and provide an analysis of interpersonal argument as a multidimensional intersubjective process. This section addresses the aspect of how the dissipation of interpersonal argument might be analyzed as a process of change in the intersubjective dimensions of conflict. This account of the process of change is developed using Keane's work on everyday ethics in conjunction with the insight approach's explanation of change in conflict.

As Keane (2016) argues, ordinary conversations are potential sites of ethical deliberation in which evaluative accounts about self and other are made and contested. Thus spaces of encounter are sites in which arguments can arise through accusation and blame, justification and rebuttal. They are also sites in which argument can subside by the instigation of reflexivity, which induces new affordances to be contingently recombined (Keane, 2014), thereby changing the argument and its trajectory. Reflexivity can be instigated by reducing threat's constrictive effect on consciousness so that operations of consciousness are activated more expansively, thereby enabling new insights to be generated, alternative significance to be discerned, or different courses of action to be

preferred (Melchin & Picard, 2008; Price, 2013). Account-giving is not the only site in which arguments arise and dissipate, of course. Conflict behaviors can be manifested non-verbally by silence, violence, or flight. In these cases, the salient element of change continues to be the diminishment of threat and attention to altering the intersubjective aspects of conflict—cognition, encounter and context—so that new affordances are made and new possibilities can emerge. These elements of the process of change recognize spaces of encounter as sites of ethical deliberation, where argument can arise (in conflictual interactions involving threat and defend) and subside (through a diminishment of threat so that new affordances can be reflexively instigated). The everyday ethics of conflict, then, is a key aspect of the instigation and dissipation of interpersonal argument.

Keane (2015) and other anthropologists of ethics such as Lambek (2015) and Laidlaw (2013) make the observation, verified across cultures, that human minds evaluate, and that this evaluative action is fundamentally oriented to discerning the 'good' or 'bad,' however they are culturally defined. Keane (2015) contends that "judgments saturate interactions" (p. 111), particularly interactions that involve decision-making or discussions about others' decision-making. Although Keane does not attend to operations of consciousness, he is aligned with the insight approach's recognition that there is a functional relationship between valuing and deciding, so that assessments of the 'good' or 'bad,' the desired and rejected, however conceived, are integral to the cognitive act of decision-making.

Keane (2014a) identifies the importance of examining interactions for an understanding of ethics, arguing that ethics does not take place solely in individual, reasoning minds, or in cultural injunctions about moral behavior. Instead, “cognition and affect are manifested tacitly and explicitly in everyday interactions” (p. 7). The importance of interactions, for Keane, is that they are the spaces of encounter within which people find themselves enacting behaviors as well as giving and eliciting accounts that can involve accusing, explaining, blaming, or praising. These behaviors and accounts are ethical, insofar as they invoke ethical notions of the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in condemning or praising one’s own or others’ intentions, decisions, and behaviors. These ethical notions are drawn from and contribute to a public “reservoir of concepts” or affordances (Keane, 2014a, p. 12), in which ethical notions are defined and debated, such as whether an action is selfish or caring; responsible or reprehensible; affirmed or rejected. Keane highlights the distinct historical temporalities that shape the discernment of significance or valuing. In doing so he underscores that, while the discernment of something being good or bad can change, the act of valuing, of discerning ethical ‘goodness and badness,’ is a feature of human consciousness itself (Keane, 2014b, p. 452, 454).<sup>24</sup>

The argument is that it is the process of account-giving in which valuing is discerned and expressed, to condemn or justify a behavior; to criticize or praise an idea. In the insight approach, the space of encounter can be conceived as the site in which interpersonal argument is enacted, the space in which the self

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<sup>24</sup> Laidlaw notes that the foundational stance of an anthropology of ethics “is not an evaluative claim that people are good; it is a descriptive claim that they are evaluative” (Laidlaw, 2013, p. 2).

knows the other as posing some personal, practical, or social threat that inclines that self to responsively defend through enacting a conflict behavior. The argument can consist of combative confrontation, rageful silence, frantic retreat, or obsequiously servility; it is in the encounter that the operations of consciousness can be pre-reflexively carried or reflexively performed.

Account-giving is also the place where argument can change. Keane (2015) notes that justifications and arguments can instigate ethical reflexivity, insofar as making claims through account-giving can enable the discovery of aspects that had not been noticed before, or been considered relevant, thereby making new conclusions possible (p. 125). The opportunity to re-evaluate, through account-giving and other means, may reinforce the decision to engage in conflict as 'good,' or provide new possibilities to discern another 'good' and act towards its realization.

Keane's (2015; 2016) accounts of everyday ethics are an integral part of the proposed theory of change. Everyday interactions are sites of ethical deliberation, in which the self knows and evaluates another, and elicits a response by the evaluating other. Account-giving and other behaviors are interactive processes through which attacks and defenses can be enacted. Account-giving is also an interactive process in which interpersonal argument can dissipate, insofar as it offers the opportunity for new affordances to be made that changes the knowing, valuing, and deciding that are enacted in the space of encounter. Keane's account takes us this far in a theory of change, and invites a

consideration of how reflexivity can be instigated to shift the conflict from escalation to dissipation.

The insight approach takes the theory of change further in its attention to the intersubjective dimensions of interpersonal argument. In the first aspect, interpersonal argument can dissipate when the constrictive effect of threat is reduced so that the operations of consciousness are more expansively or reflexively enabled. In other words, in conditions of threat, consciousness can be carried by an unreflexive choicelessness to enact conflict behaviors. Reducing the restrictive impact of threat enables more expansive or reflexive cognitive possibilities, thereby widening the range of interpretive alternatives or expanding the consideration of options.

More expansive cognitive possibilities can also be instigated through reflexive attention on the operations of consciousness. This attention can consist of curious questions directed toward knowing; responsive wondering about valuing; or interested inquiries about deciding. The effect of this reflexive attention is for knowing, valuing, and deciding to be responsively activated to enable these operations to discern fresh insights or discover other options that can dissipate conflict and create the conditions for new possibilities to emerge (Melchin & Picard, 2008; Picard, 2016; Price, 2013). Reflective attention can also support the diminishment of threat, as these fresh insights or discovery of other

options can enable the recognition that the threat was not as inevitable or compelling as it once seemed.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to accounting for the dissipation of conflict as a process of more expansive or reflexive cognition, the insight approach contends that conflict can be dissipated by changing the space of encounter in which conflict is enacted. Spaces of encounter can be enactments of roles, tasks, and patterns of co-operation that can generate interpersonal argument as well as dissipate it. The roles, tasks, and patterns of co-operation shape what can be known, valued, and decided in generating or dissipating threat. Similarly, the complex social meanings—the narratives, practices, linguistic habits, and more—in which cognition and spaces of encounter are enacted have a role to play in the generation and dissipation of conflict as an intersubjective process; if this dimension of conflict is altered, then the argument can dissipate.

Using Price's (2013) example of the school conflict between the recalcitrant, class-skipping students and the authoritarian vice principal, the argument is enacted in a space of encounter and social meanings about what is 'good' to think and do. The complex meanings enacted through the institutional context shapes the ways in which individual minds make sense of themselves and others, just as these contexts establish a range of options upon which individual minds may decide to engage. In other words, cognition, encounter, and context shape the way that threats (for students and the vice principal) are discerned and defended against. Recalling that threat can be discerned as a

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<sup>25</sup> The insight approach has developed strategies through which reflexive attention to the operations of consciousness can support different understanding, altered meanings, or additional possibilities. See Picard (2016) for a variety of strategies to support more expansive possibilities.

personal, practical or social gap between the desired and rejected (Price, 2013; Price, forthcoming), one can surmise that the vice principal might discern a threat to her authority by the behavior of the students; just as the students might discern a threat to their sense of selves or their practical future by the vice principal's severe demeanor. The students' defensive decision to remain silent in the face of these threats is shaped by their constricted discernment of available options afforded in the space of encounter in the context of complex social meanings.

Using an intersubjective theory of change that is developed in this thesis, the dissipation of this conflict might be instigated in several ways through cognition, encounter, and contextual meanings. If the space of encounter changed (so that peer counsellors or the basketball coach were called in to address attendance infractions, for example), then new possibilities might emerge to dissipate the argument between the students and vice principal. If the constrictive effect of threat was diminished or if reflexivity could be instigated, then more expansive interpretations and options could be discerned and acted upon to dissipate the conflict. If the school's narratives and practices happened to include religious discourse, an appeal to the healing forgiveness of God might be mobilized by either side to change the operative narratives and dissipate the argument.

### **Conclusion**

To summarize the analytical position developed in this chapter, interpersonal argument can be seen as an intersubjective process that has three dynamically related aspects. In its first aspect, intersubjectivity is seen as an act

of individual consciousness: a dynamic movement of cognition by which the self grasps the intelligibility of the consciousness of another. In this aspect, a self knows, values, and decides. In conflict, the self registers threat and decides to defend; it also is the aspect of intersubjectivity in which a reflexive self can reevaluate, discover other options, or make different decisions that can be validated or changed. When dynamized by expansive curiosity rather than constrictive threat, the operations of knowing, valuing, and deciding can be responsively activated to generate new possibilities.

In its second aspect, intersubjectivity is understood as a *space of encounter* of mutual and reciprocating influence that is dynamically created among actors. Interpersonal argument can be generated in spaces of encounter through enacting conflict behavior or account-giving of accusation and blame. Spaces of encounter can also be sites where argument is dissipated through account-giving in which new affordances are discovered or alternative behaviors are enacted.

In a third aspect, intersubjectivity is a *complex systems of meanings* generated from complex social and cultural patterns. These linguistic habits, practices, narratives, and institutions through which power and significance are circulated are taken up as affordances in the individual consciousness through the instantiation of everyday interactions. These affordances support the generation of conflict and provide the resources for conflict to change through re-evaluation of significance or discovery of other options.

The conceptualization of change advanced in this thesis embeds this understanding of intersubjectivity in the context of conflict in order to propose that interpersonal argument can dissipate by changes to operations of consciousness, spaces of encounter, and complex systems of meanings. Instigating reflexivity can diminish the constrictive effects of threat, just as the diminished sense of threat can enable more reflexive and expansive operations of consciousness. Spaces of encounter can be sites in which argument is escalated through account-giving or conflict behaviors; they are also sites in which argument can be dissipated through the recombination of ethical affordances taken from the complex systems of meanings in which the encounters are situated.

These frameworks and concepts about intersubjectivity, conflict, and change form the necessary foundation for an autoethnographical investigation of interpersonal argument as a process of knowledge production and decision-making. The following chapter introduces the four cases that are the focus of the autoethnographic inquiry, and articulates the specific methodological choices and practices of this investigation.

#### **Chapter 4: A Methodological Prologue to the Cases**

After identifying the theoretical and methodological foundations of this investigation, and the importance of evidentiary narratives for establishing the quality of the research, this thesis requires a more expansive account of the actual method and the choices that inform it. This chapter describes the research approach in more detail, first by providing a brief summary of the animating dynamic of the cases, then by articulating how the cases were selected. It further accounts for the research activity of writing as a process of inquiry that involves the selection of material and the analysis performed in the layered accounts. These layered accounts include first-person analytical vignettes, reflexive commentaries, and debriefing inquiries that incorporate feedback from interlocutors. The challenge of representation, and coming to appropriate closure, are also addressed as points of accountability for the quality of this investigation. The textual device of “quality notes” is then introduced as a framework through which the quality of this autoethnographical research can be investigated and asserted.

This prologue introduces the first-person perspective into the text, so that the researcher shifts from an exclusively third-person stance to a more evident first-person point of view. This choice is deliberately made, as I begin to foreground the researching self as one who is both a subject and object of research, a subjectivity who makes decisions and reflexively accounts for them.

The epistemic community is also introduced more specifically and personally in this chapter. Until this point, the term epistemic community has

been used to denote a more abstract group of scholars accessed through various literatures. In this methodological prologue and the cases that follow, the epistemic community becomes more embodied as specific scholars and knowledge-carriers, particularly the dissertation committee who supervise my research as well as the students and colleagues with whom I connect as part of my local and specific epistemic community. As part of the process of research, this epistemic community helped to elicit and verify insights; participated in discerning points of analytical significance, and provided reflection-inducing advice on key decisions. The intersubjective process of research becomes a notable feature in the reflexive commentaries that accompany each case.

### **Summary of the Cases**

The cases are distinct and conceptually connected accounts of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change. These summaries, while useful in providing a kind of orientation to the cases, are oversimplifications of the multireflexive layered texts that advance the research in the chapters that follow. The first case serves as an initial exploration and an introduction to the application of the conceptual tools and methodological form. The “Intransigent Conflict” is a case about an argument between my life partner and I over her use of cleaning products that I consider harmful. Our interpersonal dispute spontaneously dissolves through our friend’s one-line observation that prompts in me a fresh discernment of significance.

The second case, “Outrage,” involves a space of encounter with a confidante, in which I seek to change my mind about an impending conflict over

the possibility of my daughter being cut from a competitive hockey team. The dissipation of polarized conflict occurs through my insight into an affect that dynamizes my outrage, so that new possibilities become preferable to the conflictual options I previously considered.

The third case, “Listening to Another Mind,” takes place in a space of encounter with a friend who is in an argument with a colleague. In a process of mutual account-giving between him and myself, he is able to know his colleague differently. In doing so, he moves from annoyed ruminations about the argument to wondering how he can speak to her in a way that addresses both of their concerns.

“Tension in the Group,” the fourth case, is one in which I am the facilitator of a group meeting oriented to making a decision. In the course of the meeting, a specific relational conflict erupts in a way that threatens to derail the process. Many minds—and one in particular—are changed sufficiently for the conflict to dissipate, the process to continue, and for new possibilities to emerge much later.

### **Criteria for Case Selection**

How were the cases selected? There was no shortage of options to consider: a brewing family dispute about a symbolic object, involving an aging relative and his extended family; workplace disputes with recalcitrant colleagues; a property owner stirring up conflict with neighbors through disputatious emails; a neighborhood friend who neglected to return a needed object; or an enraged confrontation between my daughter and her mother, to name a few. Deliberating and evaluating the numerous possibilities became part of the process of

selection. Different members of epistemic communities were consulted, while ten separate encounters were drafted and many were discarded. Through this process, the criteria for determining a case as 'good' gradually emerged.<sup>26</sup>

### **Criteria of 'Change' and 'Distinct'**

A primary criterion for selection was that a case needed to illuminate some distinct aspect of a dissipation of interpersonal argument. To explore these aspects, I sought cases that could reflect different roles for the researching self to take: as speaker, listener, and intervenor; as being listened to and listening to others. The dissipation of argument needed to be distinct insofar as it needed to be sufficiently clear that the change could be identified and traced. As noted in "Tension in the Group," identifying 'whose mind changed' in the dissipation of an argument was occasionally difficult.

The cases needed to be distinct, not only in the clarity of the change or the roles of the researching self, but also in the different characteristics of conflict and change that were illuminated. Thus in addition to illustrating a dissipation of argument, it was important that cases could reveal different kinds of change, as well as contexts through which the change was effected. The first case exemplifies a spontaneous change of mind that was instigated through an altered space of encounter by the inclusion of a friend, whose casual remark evoked a

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<sup>26</sup> Among the many situations considered as potential case studies, some involved recordings, while other possible scenarios were spontaneous, unrecorded encounters. The case studies that emerged as the 'best,' according to the criteria outlined below were mostly spontaneous encounters. Only one recorded interview, "Outrage," sufficiently met the criteria to merit being included. In that case, I work explicitly with recollection and recording as issues of quality in data collection, presentation, and analysis.

reevaluation of my partner's behavior, which dissolved the argument. The second case was selected because the dissipation of the conflict was instigated through a deliberate and difficult effort to change, enacted through an account-giving space of encounter. By eliciting various accounts about the dispute and its meaning, my interlocutor helped to facilitate an altered discernment of its significance, thereby dissipating my impulse toward conflict.

The encounter described in the third case was chosen because of its heightened focus on the researching self's role as a 'listener' during a conversation with another friend involved in an emergent conflict. The dissipation of his argument took place through a process of our interactive account-giving, so that existing affordances were recombined in such a way that he came to know his colleague differently, thus altering his conflictual stance to a more collaborative one.

The final case illustrates a complex, multi-subjective space of encounter, in which an interpersonal conflict arose during the course of a group meeting in which I was the facilitator. Through a process of account-giving and expansive threat-reducing recognition, the conflict subsided so the conversation could continue. These distinct aspects of conflict and change, then, became significant dimensions of how the cases were chosen for investigation.

### **Criteria of 'Recountable' and 'Interesting'**

Another criterion for choosing a case is that it needed to be 'recountable.' In other words, the story needed to be sufficiently simple to tell in a few pages, and it also needed to involve parties whose stories were able to be told. Stories

of conflict are difficult to recount, as they often contain various layers of context, involving institutions or individuals whose stories a researcher cannot disclose, or whose ‘backstory’ would be too complex to render in the length of vignette suitable for a chapter in this dissertation.<sup>27</sup>

The case needed to elicit interest from others, and to remain significant over time. As an instructor in conflict resolution, I refer to these cases occasionally to illustrate a challenge or make a point. These cases invariably generate curiosity, elicit lively discussion, or prompt reciprocating illuminating narratives. In this way, the cases have intersubjective resonance in that they carry diverse minds in similar, but not identical ways. In other words, a case merited selection because, although it could be interpreted through my particular theoretical analysis, the story elicits a multiplicity of meanings. It is that quality of complexity that was a further criterion for selection: that I could apply my theoretical tools, but my analysis was not the only one possible—there was a proliferation of meaning and ultimate indeterminacy.

These, then, were the criteria through which a case was selected: significance and complexity; illustrative of distinct aspects of the dissipation of interpersonal argument in a variety of spaces of encounter; manageable to recount; and—neglected until now—entertaining to tell, and to read. I have come to love these stories, and enjoy reading them, polishing them, and wondering about them.

### **Accounting for the Selection of Material and Presentation of Analysis**

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<sup>27</sup> As part of the application to the research ethics board, I accounted for the necessity of disclosing the identity of my partner and my daughter, while the individuals in the other cases have had their identifying information changed.

Having justified the cases, by explaining the criteria by which they were chosen, this section now turns to subsequent points of quality in the research process. The selection of materials and presentation of analysis within the cases highlight writing as an integral part of the process of inquiry (Richardson, 2000).

Deciding what to include in each of the cases was shaped by the foundational conceptual tools—of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change. The foundational concepts helped to identify the points of salience through which the research could be advanced. For example, concepts about conflict (and threat) intensified the researching self’s investigative attention to the strength of an aversive effect or the fear of an unwelcome future. Similarly, the attunement to the dynamics of a conversation was shaped by the theoretical importance of account-giving in spaces of encounter. The selection of material was thus deeply related to the conceptual tools that informed this study. As part of the reflexive commentary, selection of material is identified as a key point of accountability and is addressed accordingly.

The ‘how’ of writing is another point of accounting for quality in this inquiry. As described in Chapter 2, the layered account is a research structure through which an aesthetic analysis and a reflexive commentary can dynamically interact. Even within the genre of a layered account, however, the aesthetic and reflexive choices are numerous. I experimented with rendering the encounter in different ways—as a dramatic script, as a third-person description, in present or past tense. The cases of “Outrage” and “Listening to Another Mind” explicitly reveal the iterative process of writing, where cases are presented and overtly modified

to reflect the cumulative effect of insight.

As one example, in “Listening to Another Mind” I recognize that an early version of the case had the serious flaw of disregarding my interiority. Rather than erasing the early narrative by rewriting it entirely, I wrote an additional narrative that foregrounded my interiority. By maintaining the two related but distinct narratives, the iterative activities of writing and knowledge production are made explicit, thereby adding greater depth and nuance to the research process itself.

### **The Investigation’s Layered Accounts**

Creating the layered account began with selecting significant aspects of a chosen case and writing a dramatically analytical first person account. In addition to the analysis that is woven into the narrative of the vignette, the account is layered with a reflective commentary on the vignette itself. The reflective commentary that follows each vignette explicitly addresses the conceptual tools of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change to present a more theoretical account of the case. In generating an analysis of the case, in taking a third-person reflective stance of inquiry into the vignette and consciously applying the theoretical tools, the researching self is able to investigate her own subjectivity. In these layered accounts, the researching self is made explicit as both a subject and object of inquiry.

As an investigation into the subjectivity of the researching self, the vignettes and analysis are partial, situated, and contingent. Chapter 2’s extensive discussion of autoethnography recognizes and validates the explicit recognition

of situated accounts such as these. The process of interpretation is recognized as multiple, contingent, and contextual, without being invalid or unworthy.

**Working with feedback, and representation.** While recognizing the partiality of the narration and analysis, the cases also incorporate the (partial) perspectives of various interlocutors, through a debriefing inquiry that forms an additional layer of the account.<sup>28</sup> Although not aimed at creating ‘objectivity,’ the inclusion of others’ points of view depicts the multi-perspectival complexity that animates this inquiry.<sup>29</sup>

The reflexive commentary in these texts addresses the complexity and challenge of including others’ perspectives and working with feedback. For example, in the case of the working group meeting, there is a challenge of selecting an appropriate interlocutor from a complex process involving many individuals; justifying the selection of that individual becomes part of the evidentiary accounting in the commentary on the case. In addition, the process of eliciting and responding to feedback is made explicit in each case, particularly in the debriefing inquiries. These inquiries are an additional dimension of sense-making, in which the interlocutors and I reflect on the researching self’s representation and analysis of the space of encounter, as well as on the

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<sup>28</sup> The debriefing inquiries were loosely structured, recorded conversations that involved interlocutors who had been present to the argument and its dissipation. The process and presentation of the debriefing inquiry evolved through the course of the research. In general, the interlocutors were provided with the vignette and reflective commentary in advance; the conversations addressed their response to the texts and elicited their reflections on what took place. I account for that evolution as part of the process of knowledge-production, particularly in the first case, of the “Intransigent Conflict.”

<sup>29</sup> I represent the interlocutors’ feedback in lightly dramatized vignettes that incorporate reflective analysis. As a point of accountability, I sent nearly-final drafts of chapters to my interlocutors and incorporated some of their minimal feedback into the relevant texts.

recollections of their own interiority in that space. In several instances, it is recognized that the debriefing inquiries' intersubjective spaces of non-conflictual encounter provides a more expansive context where learning can take place, or new affordances made, within the complex systems of meanings in which the inquiries are situated.

Closely aligned to working with feedback is the issue of representation. One challenge of feedback and representation emerges most clearly through the debriefing interview in the case of "Listening to Another Mind," when my interlocutor tells me that the account does not fully represent his experience of the conflict. His feedback about representation appears to present a challenge to the quality of the research. As a part of the reflexive commentary, I address this disjuncture by working through the salient aspects of the case and accounting for their selection and presentation.

The representation of self is also addressed and accounted for in these vignettes and the reflexive commentaries. The self is presented as complex, learning, indeterminate, purposeful and reactive. The reflective commentary highlights moments in which the presentation of self is interrogated and exposed, so that the subjectivity of the producer of knowledge is again recognized as contingent without being invalid. This recognition provides additional analytical depth to the research process, by affirming the validity of its insights despite the complexity of the researching self and the phenomena being investigated.

In sum, the multiple reflexive layers of the autoethnographical account are composed of: a dramatically analytical vignette; a reflective, more conceptual

commentary; and intersubjectively generated reflective responses from interlocutors in the debriefing inquiries. As a whole, these cases are the process and product of research through which the dissipation of interpersonal argument is investigated.

### **Appropriate Closure and Identifying Implications of the Research**

Coming to appropriate closure is another significant aspect of quality in research. It requires the researching self to refrain from overworking a text to the point that the insights are repetitive, the tone becomes too certain, or the recognized complexity overwhelms the analysis. Coming to appropriate closure also means that the researching self does not prematurely close off lines of inquiry in settling for an analysis that fails to recognize important dimensions of the cases' conceptual potential. Conversely, appropriate closure necessitates setting aside related pathways of inquiry that would take the research too far outside the scope of investigation. These elements are addressed in the reflective commentaries of each case.

In the case of "Outrage" for example, I recognize that an area of fascinating conceptual inquiry would be to explore the effect of shame on dynamizing interpersonal conflict. I make the judgment that such an inquiry would unmanageably increase the scope of the research and decide to set aside that inquiry for another time. Another case, "Listening to Another Mind," recognizes several points of incompleteness in previous iterations of the account, thereby prompting reparative efforts of re-writing the text or initiating a second debriefing interview.

Just as appropriate closure is a significant aspect of quality in research, so too is the recognition of the research's implications on other areas of inquiry. This aspect of quality involves recognizing connections between the analysis in the texts and broader conversations associated with it. I recognize in different cases, particularly "Tension in the Group" and "Listening to Other Minds," that the implications of the vignettes and analysis extend beyond their specific texts. These investigations into interpersonal argument touch other knowledge domains, such as leadership and organizational development; they also relate to topics of decision-making, social science research, and conflict studies beyond interpersonal argument. Recognizing the sociality of the texts, and their implications, attunes them to wider systems of meaning, thereby adding more analytical breadth to the research. This aspect of quality in research is addressed in the reflective commentaries, and is advanced much further in the conclusion of the thesis.

### **Quality Notes**

A key feature of the account's conceptual commentaries is the inclusion of "quality notes," a textual device borrowed from Marshall's (2004) first-person research. She presents these quality notes in italics as reflexive commentaries in the text to highlight and account for challenges in the research process. Through her "quality notes," Marshall succinctly defines and accounts for the core aspects of quality in first-person research. I borrow this device, as well as her identified categories of quality, to develop a meta-commentary in the text to assess and assert the quality of the research being performed.

Marshall's (2004) identification of characteristics of 'quality' in first-person research is congruent with Altheide and Johnson's (2011) approach of 'evidentiary narratives,' as well as Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's (2014) discussion of interpretive research. The advantage of Marshall's (2004) approach is that it is succinct and easily adapted, as she effectively exemplifies its application in her text. That is, she comments on particular passages of her analytical narrative by inserting an italicized reflection. I borrow several categories of quality that Marshall (2004) identifies in the quality notes, particularly: the selection and presentation of material, or "*writing accounts*" (p. 316); the process of interpretation—"sense-making" (pp. 313-314); "*theorizing*" (p. 317), with its application and limits; "*working with feedback*" (p. 320); *representation* (p. 321); coming to appropriate closure—"saturating inquiry" (p. 318); and the implications of the investigation, or "*research cycling*" (p. 322).

The quality notes form an integral part of this autoethnography. In identifying succinct categories of quality, the notes provide a criteriological framework through which the research responsively develops. Although it is useful to categorize research activities to account for the many facets of the process, these activities are deeply interrelated. I use the categories without being overinvested in their precision or authority (Marshall, 2004). Through their positioning within the text, the notes permit the researching self to comment on the analysis from an additional third-person perspective. These commentaries provide the means to reflexively perform additional analysis, while identifying the categories of research activities that require accounts, interrogations, or

justifications. The notes also signal the iterative process of research, so that they become a cumulative part of the method's development through the cases as I experiment with the form.<sup>30</sup> A summative analysis of the methodological arc of the research, that includes the quality notes, is presented in the epilogue that follows each case.

## Conclusion

This prologue provides a more expansive description of the research approach by summarizing the cases and justifying their selection. Further descriptive and analytical details about the layered account are reviewed, as significant aspects of accounting for quality in research are identified and explored. The textual device of 'quality notes' is introduced as a means to heighten reflexive attention on the research as a process of knowledge production, as well as on the researcher as a producer of that knowledge. While recognizing context and contingency, the layered accounts make claims about interpersonal argument and its dissipation whose implications relate and respond to other domains of knowledge. In this way, the investigation's autoethnographical method is affirmed as valid generation of sociological knowledge, because of (rather than in spite of) its recognition of partiality, process, and complexity.

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<sup>30</sup> For example, previous drafts included considerable notes about *sense-making*, which were gradually woven into the commentary, as part of the process of discerning intelligibility. Earlier drafts also included '*criteria for selecting cases*' in quality notes relating to each specific case. After some time I recognized that these criteria were becoming repetitious from chapter to chapter. This insight shaped my decision to create a prologue to introduce the general features of the cases. Just as the cases progressively build upon conceptual tools of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change, the cases progressively build upon a variety of methodological insights related to the research process itself.

With the conclusion of this explanation of the method in greater detail, the stage is now set for a series of accounts about the compelling dramas of everyday interpersonal arguments, their emergence and dissipation, their complex ordinariness, and their vital significance.

## Chapter 5: Intransigent Conflict

This is a text about a conflict between my life partner and me, in which a polarized argument is spontaneously and enduringly changed through the unexpected and brief intervention of a helpful friend. As the first of my four case studies, it is an introduction to my reflexive conceptual methodology.

**Methodologically**, I begin working with the layering of accounts: I write a dramatic, analytical vignette about an argument that erupted over my partner's decision to use the cleaning products I disvalue and how the argument changed through my fresh appraisal of the meaning of her actions; I subsequently write a reflexive commentary through which I deploy conceptual tools to generate a deeper understanding of what took place.

**Conceptually**, I explore the tripartite approach to intersubjectivity, distinguishing operations of consciousness from spaces of encounter from complex systems of meaning. I differentiate operations of consciousness to distinguish 'knowing' from 'valuing' and their impact on conflict behavior. I investigate the concept of 'threat' in conflict behavior, noticing it as a 'gap' between what is affirmed and rejected. I account for the quality of this research through my quality notes; in this first case the quality notes attend more specifically to the *writing of accounts* (what and how to present) as well as *sense-making* (the process of interpretation) inherent in writing as a process of inquiry. I also introduce the practice of *working with feedback* in my production of the text, and discover that my partner's interpretation of the event was different from mine.

## The Vignette

My partner Georgine and I have struggled for years about cleaning products. She prefers germ-fighting cleaners with strong chemicals. I prefer (and I prefer that she uses) products that are more environmentally friendly. She values dish soap that is bubbly and cuts through any grease. She likes cleaners that visibly demonstrate their eradication of mold, with a strong scent that announces that clean has triumphed over dirt. I can accept what seems to be inferior performance for (what the company tells me about) environmental impact. We have fought this battle for many years and on many fronts: laundry soap, household cleaners, dish soap, toilet paper.

It is hard to talk to our friends about it, because they most often go straight to deliberating options, depending on where they have settled in their own evaluation of good products: some recommend environmental products they have found useful; others suggest ways to mitigate the smell and health impact of strong cleaners that fight harmful bacteria; some contest Georgine's appraisal of the inferior performance of eco-friendly brands; and others commiserate over the lack of bubbles in eco-friendly dish soap.

In these conversations, I have come to realize that the well-meaning discussions about what product to buy actually are not helpful. There is something else going on in our argument, something about the meaning of the products and our relationship to them, something about our relationship with each other that gets worked out in the bickering over cleaning products. Part of me is astonished. How is it possible that we have been bickering about this for a

decade? We seem to reach an agreement and then something happens. For example, we agreed that Georgine would only use strong cleaners on dirt or mold that would pose a threat to our health—a greater threat than the toxic chemicals applied. Otherwise she would use vinegar.

### **The Argument**

One Saturday, I come around the corner to discover Georgine industriously applying a blue chemical to the mirror. I had felt an uneasy acceptance of our agreement, but now here she is, using a strong cleaner on a smudged mirror! My annoyance erupts. “Why aren’t you using vinegar?” I reproach her in an accusing tone.

“What do you mean?” she retorts. “If you want to use vinegar, go ahead. But I’m the only one who does any cleaning around here!”

“I do plenty of cleaning,” I rejoin, “and when *you* clean, use the stupid vinegar, like you said!” I look at her. Annoyance is not really the word for how I feel. I am tight in my chest and throat, a churning feeling rising inside. She is missing my point—about the cleaner and how I thought it would be used—and she is accusing me of slothfulness, laziness, and ingratitude all at the same time. I am defending in a very attacking sort of way.

The phone rings. I grab it, relieved at the intervention.

“Hi. It’s Rebecca.” Our long time friend, who knows and loves us both.

“Hello Rebecca!” I say, immediately followed by a plaintive, “Why does Georgine use toxic chemicals to clean our house?”

There is a pause as she absorbs my abrupt launch into complaint. “Well...I’m kind of with you on that one,” she begins. I can hear the smile and measured response in her voice—the way she says “kind of” means to me that she is emotionally holding a place for Georgine, while offering me some recognition.

Georgine has heard my outburst and gets on the other line to add her bit. “Rebecca, why am I the only who cleans around here?” I feel ridiculous now, like two kids tattling to a mother.

But I cannot help it. I talk through the phone to Georgine. “Yes you do a lot of cleaning, but not all of it!” I say. “And Rebecca, I don’t get this! Georgine is a toxicologist! She’s studied that stuff!”

I can hear Rebecca smile, pause, breathe. “Yup,” she says, and her tone is accepting, almost resigned. “It’s that family of origin shit, you know,” she says to me.

Georgine quickly responds. “Yeah!” she says pointedly, as if she and Rebecca have scored a point. Against me. “I got in big trouble if things weren’t spotless.” ‘Big trouble’ in Georgine’s family of origin mostly meant someone got hit.

Surprisingly, my frustration dissolves, even though Georgine is trying to score some kind of point. I knew this information before. But there is something in the way this conversation flows that makes my frustration dissolve.

## **The Change**

Before the call with Rebecca, my narrative went something like this: “Georgine is a toxicologist, dammit, and her family of origin stuff keeps taking over around cleaning and she hasn’t been able to change after all this time.” There was an aggrieved condemnation in my narrative; that she should be different and she was problematically weak for not being able to change.

After the call with Rebecca, my narrative is almost the same, but instead of grievance I feel tolerance. “Although she’s a toxicologist, her family of origin stuff keeps taking over around cleaning and she can’t help it.”

I have no new information, but my consciousness is carried by a different narrative. Instead of being carried by a moralizing judgment of her as deficient, I find myself extending kindness to her. I still think the cleaning products that she uses are toxic, but I feel less aggrieved when she uses them. Although I ‘knew’ that she is not using them ‘at me,’ but rather is using them to feel she is vanquishing dangerous dirt, I now know this in a different way. I was not lacking information, but something else has changed.

Georgine’s deciding, for the time being, remains the same—she continues to use the toxic chemicals, but my impulse to fight with her about it has diminished significantly. Recently she decided that the new eco-friendly dish soap that I had purchased was inadequate to cut grease and we have again reverted to our grease-fighting dish soap until a mutually acceptable one can be found.

## Reflexive Commentary

What happened in the encounter? Where does the response to that question reside? If I were to describe the story in objectivist terms, of what can be known as fact, verifiable by the senses, the conflict began when I turned a corner to see my partner using a non-vinegar cleaning product; we exchanged a few sentences; my friend spoke with both of us; the conflict was changed to more collaborative interactions. Those are the facts, the known, the provable data of sense (of what can be seen, heard, touched).

It is in the realm of meaning, the data of interiority, the examination of consciousness, that the clues for changing this conflict can be found; not through the senses. In this scenario, my mind changed from a constricted outraged reactivity (that led to polarized argument) to more expansive tolerance of the differences between us (that has generated more harmony in the complex fabric of our twenty years together). It is by paying attention to what happened in my consciousness that I can trace the way the conflict began and transformed.

*Quality Note: writing accounts – selection and presentation of material. Having made the point that meaning, and interpretation of meaning in this vignette, resides in the realm of consciousness, how do I account for the complexity of a moment of consciousness? How do I account for an incident that lasted, in a series of split-seconds, for less than a minute? Like recounting a dream that happens in a moment of ‘real-time,’ accounting for a moment of reacting, or dialogue, can sometimes take pages.*

*This account is written over days and weeks of recollection and reflection. I recognize that the selection and presentation of material is complex: what I recollect, and what I decide to foreground, is shaped by many factors: my role as a PhD student, the conceptual tools through which my understanding is generated, and the tone and style I seek to achieve. My recollection and crafting of the vignette and analysis, then, are shaped by complex systems of intersubjective meaning. I acknowledge that there is a lot going on beyond my awareness that gets missed. Recognizing this complexity, I am not seeking positivist accuracy, but a qualitative rendering that creates a partial, quality account. Ultimately, the reader uses the empirical data of their own consciousness (shaped by the epistemic communities in which they are situated) to contingently and critically assess the worth or value of this text.*

In my encounter with Georgine, I noticed and registered the significance of her use of cleaning products; these operations of noticing and registering the significance are operations of my consciousness. At the same time, my mind was carried, without a sense of volition, in registering the significance of the event through a felt response of annoyance. The annoyance was in my body and my mind: somatic, affective, and cognitive.

### **My Annoyance Indicates Significance**

The annoyance was how I registered the significance of the sight of her cleaning. The annoyance arose on its own, in response to the scenario in front of me, tightening my chest, speeding my heart, flushing my cheeks. These were the affective and somatic parts of the response. It was also cognitive. Reflecting

more, on what the annoyance signaled (using clues of what spilled out of me as I complained to Rebecca), I can now discern that the annoyance registered a *violation* of some socially normative roles (of complex social meaning). That is, the violation of those normative roles registered in me as felt sense of annoyance.

Putting it another way, the meaning of violated social norms related to her role as a partner (who normatively 'should' honor my preferences and uphold vague agreements rather than pursue her own preferences willy-nilly); I also seem to have been annoyed by the violation of (my sense of) her role as a toxicologist (who, armed with knowledge about toxicity, should make unconstricted decisions about cleaning with products that do not damage human health or the environment, according to me). Another way of articulating the observation that a norm had been violated is to describe it as a *gap* between how a good partner should behave (accounting for my preferences) and her chemical-spraying behavior; or a gap between how a good toxicologist should behave (refrain from applying toxic chemicals) and what she had just done. My felt response of annoyance signaled this gap, or violation of the social norms of those roles of partner and toxicologist, norms that are both social and idiosyncratic in my apprehension of them.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the gap, the violation of social norms or my expectations, the annoyance signaled something more. Personally, I registered a diminished sense of myself—I felt unimportant, helpless to change her mind. There was a gap

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<sup>31</sup> Price (forthcoming) articulates this notion of threat as a discernment of a gap between what is desired and rejected.

between an expanded sense of my self as significant and my contracted unwelcome sense of self as unimportant. Practically, I had some concerns about the impact of the cleaners on our family's health, as well as the ecosystem that would be receiving the chemicals as they were washed down the drain. These concerns are registered through the operation of consciousness that Price (2013) calls valuing.

Registering these gaps, these unwelcome undesirable threats, my mind generated the choiceless choice of defending, fighting, using contempt as my weapon of defense. There was no space between the split-seconds of registering intense annoyance and the accusing tone that spilled out of my mouth. I was not able to consider options or measured responses—I rashly demanded her to conform to my wishes (and my memory of our agreement).

### **Her Response**

Georgine's response was a defensive attack: "I do all the cleaning around here." Her thinking is often opaque to me, but I know she has a mind and it was working, too. In a more equanimous state, I might have wondered more what her mind was doing. Despite my training in de-escalating conflict, wondering was not accessible to me then. My righteous certainty was running the show.

Now, as I reflect in this writing, her words and tone point to a similar affective response of outrage related to *my* violation of roles: the person who does the cleaning should get to choose the cleaning product, and the person who does the cleaning is deserving of *appreciation*, not criticism, and so the non-cleaning person who criticizes the industrious cleaner is violating several social

norms, and those violations give rise to annoyance. And more than annoying, the violation of social norms is a *threat* that must be defended against. So she acted to defend herself against my criticism, the threat of disrupted social norms (and perhaps her own diminished sense of self that my accusing tone engendered) by criticizing me back—a criticism targeted at my failure to live up to the normative role that partners should pull their weight in the chore of cleaning, and the yawning gap between that norm and my pitiable performance of it. My (escalated protective) response was to defend my record as a cleaner, and to make an authoritative demand on her.

### **Threats**

In sum, the threats that were evoked by our interaction were personal, practical and social. For me, I discerned many threats: a contracted personal sense of self as insignificant; practical threats about family and ecological health; and social threats relating to the normative shortfall between a desired enactment of roles and her actual ones. For her, I speculate that the threats were registered as a gap between a desired and actual enactment of my role as partner; practical concerns of the ever-present danger of mold; and the personal threat of a contracted self that my shaming tone had targeted. Gaps are not necessarily threats, in that sometimes these shortfalls can be registered with neutral affect or even affectionate resignation. But in this dispute, the gap was unwelcome, dire, emerging from and generating contracted operations of consciousness and degenerative patterns of interaction.

Context is important because on a different day, a different hour, I may have registered a less intense response of annoyance, or had a more collaborative communicative tone available to me. Intersubjectivity is complex. In the rapid flow of mind encountering others in complex social contexts, we do not swim in the same river twice. The encounters are different, the consciousness is more or less expansive, and the complex meanings are not necessarily stable.

### **Intersubjectivity**

Intersubjectivity, as I conceive it in my tri-fold analysis, means that individual subjectivities are shaped but not necessarily determined by the spaces of encounter and complex systems of meaning in which they are located. Although these concepts of intersubjectivity are related, they can also be differentiated in an analysis of this vignette.

**Complex systems of meanings.** Considering intersubjectivity as complex systems of meanings, this conflict includes the meaning of partnership, housekeeping, health and safety, and the environmental impacts of cleaners. These are broad social, cultural, institutional patterns and meanings that exceeded our specific enactment of our roles as partners, housekeepers, and consumers. We enacted our specific knowing and doing within these systems that shape the *horizons* of the knowing and doing that is possible. In other words, these horizons of meaning shape the availability and foreclosure of certain interpretations and decisions.

For example, had our conflict taken place within the institutional structure of a daycare, in which we were both employees, our conflict would have been

shaped by the institutional meanings enacted in that setting. In terms of the family system in which we enacted our roles as partners, women, consumers, and cleaners, there are profound levels of meaning about how partners should enact consideration, consumers should enact responsible consumption, and how housekeepers enact cleaning. Had my partner been a man, he might not be cleaning, or I might have attributed his environmental insensitivity to a gender-related inadequacy.

In our specific family dispute, our divergent valuing was connected to our different family upbringings as well as our previous experience of what 'good' cleaners do and say, as well as innumerable other factors that shaped the specific conflictual interactions we experienced that day. This is how intersubjectivity-as-complex-systems of meaning supports an analysis of this specific conflict, by orienting the analysis to the complexity of social meanings.

**Intersubjectivity as a space of encounter.** Considering intersubjectivity as a space of encounter, my partner and I found ourselves engaged in a pattern of mutual, reciprocally influencing, and increasingly unpleasant interactions. The product of the activity was not reducible only to us as participants, but it was not separate from them, either. The pattern of the interactions also shaped the knowing and doing that was possible in this conflict. Our previous interactions—about cleaners, housekeeping, and shared decision-making—had contributed to shaping the pattern of interaction that carried that specific conflict along.

There is an importance to the concept of *role* in mediating individuality and sociality, in shaping the space of encounter to which individual minds attend. In

my reflection on the conflict with Georgine, our roles situated us in relation to each other and shaped our individual knowing, valuing, and deciding. Our roles as partners shaped our space of encounter in our expectations of each other, the way we spoke; just as her role as toxicologist impacted the significance, to my mind, of her use of toxic cleaning products. The role of my friend Rebecca was also significant, insofar as the role shaped the horizon of what was possible for her to say, for our willingness to enlist her, and for her willingness to engage. Intersubjectivity as a space of mutual encounter, shaped by roles, is also a helpful analytic tool in this analysis.

**Intersubjectivity as operations of consciousness.** Considering intersubjectivity in the third dimension, as operations of consciousness or interactive activity of minds, I came to know Georgine's mind as expressed through her actions and her words. The intelligibility I grasped was that she had decided to use non-vinegar cleaners, despite my expressed preference for other choices. Her decision was significant, threatening, insofar as it appeared to be devaluing of what mattered to me. I spontaneously made an almost-choicelless choice to defend through criticism, which elicited a defensive response from her. My consciousness registered somatic, affective, cognitive responses to the sight of her cleaning, giving rise to split-second defensive decisions to engage in the conflict behavior of an accusatory fight.

Registering significance and deciding to defend are operations of consciousness whereby the other is known intersubjectively. I 'knew' her to be someone who ignores her partner's preferences, just as she 'knew' me to be a

non-cleaning person who criticizes hard-working cleaners. More deeply, I 'knew' her mind as ignoring, and she 'knew' my mind as condemning.

Although these operations of consciousness, producing what is 'known,' are shaped by our encounters and the broader social meanings and narratives through which those roles are enacted, they are not determinative. At any point, one of us could have made the decision to refrain from defending, or one of us could have become curious about the all-too-familiar pattern of nattering that was carrying our consciousnesses along in a way that felt choiceless and compelling.

### **Constricted Certainty and Incomplete Knowledge**

In considering intersubjectivity as an activity of consciousness, I can (now) see that my 'knowing' her intention-to-disparage was a product of my own constricted certainty. I could have known (her mind) differently, because clearly there was a lot more to know. But in that moment I was disabled by faulty knowing. It is not that I was *wrong*; she was, in fact, disregarding my preference. What was faulty about my knowing was that it was constricted and incomplete. In that specific conflict, I was not able to access my knowing about her good nature and general disposition to accommodate my preferences. Instead, my knowledge of her was reduced to a caricature of her as not-caring, which in the context of a twenty year relationship, is faulty knowing indeed. I needed an expanded horizon of knowing to be able to know more—about her consciousness, as well as my own—than was available at the time. In this way, I recognize that although they are profoundly integrated, it is possible to differentiate operations of

consciousness from the spaces of encounter and the social meanings that carry them.

In sum, we had embarked on a conflict in which our minds were registering significance and making decisions within a space of encounter shaped by complex fields of meaning. More specifically, the conflict arose from my discernment of threat that was personal (shrunken importance), practical (health concerns), and social (that is not how good partners/toxicologists should act); my decision to defend was to engage in fighting conflict behavior, which generated threat in her and elicited a defended decision to fight back. A salient point in this analysis is the contracted quality of the knowing, the reactivity of the valuing, and the rashness of the deciding.

### **What Changed?**

When Georgine spontaneously joined my conversation with Rebecca on our second phone, it gave us the opportunity for a three-way conversation, changing our intersubjective space of encounter. Rebecca's intervention enabled us to change the pattern of interaction: we had a different configuration in the way our minds were oriented to understand, value, and decide.

My immediate complaint to Rebecca was met with her equanimous response; she 'kind of' agreed with me, but not fully. I could sense that her tone acknowledged my grievance so that I did not need to convince her or defend myself against her judgment. She was able to acknowledge the significance to me without inhabiting it herself, because she did not bolster or reinforce my annoyed reactivity. Another way to say this is that she registered the significance

to me without taking it to be fact; she was able to differentiate facts (knowing) from significance (valuing).

Although Georgine's complaint engendered a bickering response from me, Rebecca's intervention sparked the transformation: "It's her family of origin shit, you know," followed by Georgine's "Yeah!" Rebecca's response to my complaint was significant in both the content of what she said and the affect of how she said it. Somehow her response 'fit' with Georgine enough that Georgine could agree with her and feel aligned with her, sparking an insight in Georgine, perhaps. Rebecca was able to understand (know) and register Georgine's unspoken concerns as significant (value). In that intersubjective mutual space of our three way encounter, Rebecca's knowing/valuing carried mine, insofar as her intervention instigated a change of my mind that dissipated the polarized dispute.

*Quality Note: writing accounts-generating insight. For several months I have referred to this case, and told it anecdotally as a way to illustrate how significance or meaning can change spontaneously. I have always described my change in mind as originating from Rebecca's comment that "it's her family of origin shit, you know." It is only after writing that paragraph above that I realized that Georgine's presence on the phone, her accompanying "Yeah," was an important contributor to the change as well, which I will explore in greater depth below. In recognizing the insight that my writing has produced, I have a deeper appreciation for writing itself as a form of research or inquiry. Writing requires an articulation of understanding that necessitates an ongoing process of verification: is what I say accurate enough? Is it critical enough?*

Noticing that my mind was changed by her intervention leads to the spontaneous question:

**What may have contributed to the change?**

Rebecca's comment about Georgine's "family of origin shit" was vague, but it registered in a way that I could glimpse that Georgine's past was carrying her present decision-making. Georgine's agreement with Rebecca's statement ("Yeah!"), followed by the detail, "there was big trouble" was said lightly, almost cheerfully. But it opened in me a sense of Georgine as an industrious cleaner, scrubbing busily with her cleaners to maintain order, harmony, and safety in the house, so that instead of annoyance a well of compassion opened in me. I revalued that her decision-making was not pointed disregard but was instead protective industriousness. That is what Rebecca's 'family of origin shit' signified to me.

*Quality Note: sense making. Writing this segment has amplified my sense of compassion even more deeply. Transforming feelings and reactions into words is an effective process of sense-making: the significance becomes clearer as I articulate a point of view, verify it internally with myself, notice an altered awareness, modify my articulation towards greater precision, and repeat. Having acknowledged that greater clarity becomes possible through writing, I am cautious about making the story too clear, too tidy; aware that the complexity of intersubjectivity is not tidy, not reducible to a single narrative or interpretive frame.*

## Re-valuing

On our own, Georgine and I knew each other as threats-against-which-to-defend. Rebecca, because she was not constricted or threatened in the same way, knew us both as complex subjectivities who care passionately about each other, as well as our own points of view. Rebecca was able to affirm that I was right without making Georgine wrong. She was able to affirm Georgine in a way that Georgine could affirm. In that space of encounter, Rebecca's mind was able to differentiate two states: our contracted knowing of each other in conflict and what we know of each other in our more expanded states of connection. Neither Georgine nor I were curious or mindful, and Rebecca helped us to be more so. From the incomplete, contracted valuing of Georgine-as-one-who-disregards, my mind changed to value her as one-who-cares-and-is preoccupied-with-something-else. The intersubjective space of three-way encounter precipitated an intersubjective re-valuing of her in which an alternative intersubjective meaning was made.

The effect of this re-valuing had an impact on my behavior and our conflict. The critical tone dropped, we disengaged from the defensive/attack conversation, and we have not had the same conversation since. The lengthy pattern of bickering has been changed.

*Quality Note: sense-making. During my research process, sometimes I would tell this story to students or friends, to illustrate how an argument can spontaneously change through re-valuing. One of the ways I discern that the story is of high quality is that it often elicits responsive sense-making stories from*

*my listeners, like the teaching-story that my friend recounted to me in response to my tale: "Imagine you are standing in a very crowded elevator, with little room to move even an elbow," he says to me. "You feel a poke at your back, and another one. And a few seconds later, another one. You're feeling super annoyed with the inconsiderate guy behind you, until the elevator clears enough for you to turn around to see that the person poking you was an elderly blind woman with a cane. Does your feeling change?"*

*"Yes!" I say. "Compassion rather than annoyance. Or if my back was still stinging, it would probably be annoyance plus compassion!" Which then sparks a new curiosity in me. "But what is compassion?" I wonder.*

*He mentions a few definitions, 'feeling with' being one of them. My attention is directed inward, sorting through my own sense of compassion.*

*"For me," I say, "compassion is expansive. I was really constricted in that argument, focused on what that mean-Georgine-thing-person was doing to moi. She had become a caricature, and I had forgotten all the other things I know about Georgine—that she is good and kind, and mostly aware of my preferences, even when she doesn't follow them. In that three-way conversation, I became more mindful of her complexity, aware that she might be making a choiceless choice that was a response to her past rather than a response to me. Talking about this case with one friend elicits musings on compassion that I had not previously generated on my own, revealing that the possible sense-making interpretations of this story can be diverse and co-creative.*

## **Re-valuing as a Reorienting of Relative Significance**

What is also interesting about this encounter is that I *knew* all the relevant pieces of information about Georgine's family of origin and its relationship to her cleaning choices. Georgine had told me that she preferred her cleaners because her mother was 'neurotic' about cleaning and the consequences were serious for things not being clean. Our three-way conversation radically reoriented the relative significance of those 'facts.' Although I knew those things, I realized (after the conversion in the conversation) that I had felt that Georgine (in her roles as partner and toxicologist) *should* have been able to transcend her past (and realize my point of view).

## **From Contraction to More Expansion**

My own (contracted) valuing interpreted her as unethical or 'bad' in her decision-making, which was annoying—that gap between my sense of what she should be doing and what she was actually doing. After the conversion (of my sense-making mind), I was touched, rather than annoyed, by her apparent contraction in this area. And perhaps my own. My contracted operation of (threatened) knowing and valuing was incurious and hasty. My expanded operation of (more compassionate) knowing and valuing was more curious and critical.

*Quality Note: theorizing. One of the dangers of writing a paper like this is attributing too much linearity in cause and effect. Intersubjectivity, as I conceive of it, embraces the concepts of complexity and interdependence. This may mean that something of which I am not aware may have shaped the outcome*

*significantly. I want to be careful of overclaiming agency—Rebecca’s, Georgine’s, or mine—or attributing cause and effect with a misleading certainty. Although I can say with confidence that I felt less contracted in my interactions over the cleaning products, I can only cautiously attribute what generated the more expansive state.*

Throughout this discussion, I have attended to the way my mind changed in evaluating Georgine’s behavior as rash, and assessing my personhood—and hers—to be diminished as a result. That assessment, as I describe above, has changed. My mind has *not* changed in my (dis)valuing of bleachy cleaners. I continue to disvalue them for their harm to the environment and human health. A change in our argument, in this case, is not about my compromising on principles or values of what makes a good cleaning product, based on my discernment of public good. Although I revalued Georgine’s intentions, I continue to hold the environmental products in high esteem.

However, a secondary and perhaps even more significant insight in this case (facilitated by the helpful insight of a committee member during a discussion of this text) is that although I esteem environmental products, my contracted criticism or shaming of Georgine did not change her mind to align with my valuing; quite the opposite. Instead of changing her mind, my criticism generated in her more contracted knowing, valuing, and deciding. In this case, our simultaneously contracted operations of consciousness did not produce an expanded result—it produced bickering. More expansion with Rebecca produced more expansive possibilities.

*Quality Note: working with feedback. I completed this vignette and a first draft of my analysis, recognizing that I was presenting my own perspective on a three-person encounter. How could I incorporate Georgine and Rebecca's perspective into the text? What is meaningful to me by including their perspective in this account? I had a sense that it was important, but was not yet able to articulate what made it so.*

### **The Debriefing Inquiry**

Georgine, Rebecca, and I sit together next to the activated recording device with the intention of talking about the vignette and their responses to it. This intentional conversation is different than the spontaneous encounter that had sparked the creation of the vignette. Because of its intentionality, I find myself nervous in complex ways: unsure of their reaction to my writing; vulnerable for having asked this 'favor' of them; uncertain how my exploratory method of soliciting feedback will be useful to my overall project; and unsure how I might manage to incorporate their feedback into the text.

In this encounter, we are in a non-conflict, amicably chatting. Interestingly, in this non-conflictual space of encounter, the intersubjective processes are still enacted. I am using my mind to know, value, and decide in a context of complex meanings in a mutually reciprocating space of encounter. In this peaceful encounter, too, my mind is in pursuit of change, insofar as I was seeking to learn.

### **Quality of Accounts**

In soliciting feedback from Georgine and Rebecca, my interlocutors, I realize that a primary concern of mine is the quality of the account. So my first

question in our dialogue is addressed to their felt responses to the text. After hearing their appreciative comments (which allayed my vulnerability about my writing being exposed), I recognize that I want to verify the extent to which they recognize the account as 'accurate.' They consider it accurate, although neither of them had registered the event as significant to the extent that I had, so their memories of the encounter were dim, until they read the text.

Georgine considers the vignette to be funny and well written, although the analysis was rather "dry" (my apologies to other readers who may share the same sentiments!). Rebecca's response is to feel gratified that she had facilitated a change in the dynamic between Georgine and me. Since Rebecca is currently in the midst of difficult situations at work, where she is not feeling efficacious or wise, the vignette reflected a part of her of which she is happy to be reminded. Rebecca says she feels affirmed for having been a 'safe person' with whom we could speak.

### **Others' Interiorities**

In responding to their felt responses to the text, I find myself becoming curious about their interiorities of the encounter. What was going on in Georgine's mind when Rebecca said, "it's her family of origin shit?" I realize that this curiosity about Georgine's interiority is only activated when I am sitting with both of them in this amicable post-vignette encounter. The (obvious, in retrospect) question had not occurred to me before then, even after writing all that analysis!

In prefacing my question to them both, I say that it strikes me as significant that Rebecca's comment—about Georgine's family of origin—did not seem to have shamed Georgine, as it might have, insofar as it might have elicited a potential vulnerability. Instead of responding defensively, Georgine had said "Yeah!" in a triumphant tone, as if scoring a point of some kind. What was going on for her?

Georgine responds by recalling that when Rebecca referred to her 'family of origin shit,' it felt to her that Rebecca had recognized that there was more to Georgine than I had acknowledged—that Georgine was more than a 'bad toxicologist,' and that my characterization of her as such was limited. Rebecca's recognition of Georgine's family of origin was only one part of a possible expansive view that could include other aspects of herself. So it was not so much the compassionate recognition of a difficult past that Georgine was affirming. It was a recognition that her partner, I, had gotten her somewhat wrong, and was being corrected. This explained the triumphant tone that I had registered but not found intelligible. Interestingly, through Rebecca's comment, my consciousness was oriented to compassionate recognition, even as Georgine was attending to something else. We did not need to have the same understanding for the argument to change.

Our conversation turns to Rebecca's interiority. She recalls being aware of her concern that she was 'being put on the spot to say the right thing' since Georgine and I had both made appeals to her adjudication of the dispute. Even as she recognized that she was being called into an awkward role, she also felt

appreciated as a person with whom we felt safe enough to let our less-than-perfect selves be expressed. After reading the vignette and analysis, Rebecca recognizes that she could sense that each of us was right, and neither person had to be wrong. She affirms that in a more expansive state, I became open to re-valuing, which enabled my mind to change and the conflict to transform.

*Quality Note: working with feedback. In our collaborative reflection on the encounter, Georgine and Rebecca verified that my understanding was accurate; that I had represented the encounter in a way that matched their understanding of it. That was important to me, illuminating something of the intersubjectivity of shared understanding in a mutual space of encounter. I also learned about their interiority, which was not accessible at the time. Their interiority, like mine, was not independently generated; it was expressed in relation to the text, generated reflexively within our amicable space of encounter, shaped by the complex meanings available to us. It was another example of how individual knowing and valuing is deeply connected to other aspects of intersubjectivity (as space of mutual encounter and complex systems of meaning), even as they can be distinguished, like the way a face's cheeks, nose, and lips are distinct and constitutive.*

*This 'interview' with them was my first research encounter of its kind. After having written about it, I am clearer on my lines of inquiry for the debriefing interview for my next vignette. I want to ask more questions about the other person's interiority: what that person understood to have happened, what was*

*significant about it, what are the implications for action. I want to ask what happened from their perspective and how does it connect to mine?*

*As for this vignette, I chose to represent their feedback through a summative narrative, rather than a report through quotations, and will invite their feedback on its sufficiency. I chose a summative narrative for its brevity, mainly, in the interests of concluding this chapter to move on to the next.*

*Quality Note: saturating inquiry. How do I know when an inquiry is 'done'? There is an inner sense that many relevant insights have been narrated and that few questions are left to dynamize my consciousness. More precisely, the questions that remain are not as vibrant as the previous ones. I am less animated in my curiosity about this case, more settled in an understanding that is sufficient—judging the account to be critical and conscientious enough, for the time being. As part of my assessment of quality, I verify my judgment of sufficiency with my epistemic community, my dissertation committee: their minds, too, are not animated by judgments or questions related to an insufficiency in this text. I prepare for the encounter of the next chapter.*

## Chapter 6: Outrage

This is a text about a brewing conflict between me and decision-makers in a hockey association, related to my daughter's tryout for a competitive girls' hockey team. Because I am troubled by my outrage and want to avert the conflict I seem intent on creating, I seek an intersubjective space of encounter with a skilled friend in an effort to discover new possibilities than the conflictual ones I am currently considering.

**Methodologically**, I maintain a focus on writing accounts (selection and presentation of material), including a reflection on recollection and recordings as different research processes of collecting data. I identify the importance of *saturating inquiry* in closing off certain lines of inquiry that take me too far beyond the scope of the current research. I continue to reflect on and develop my process of *working with feedback*, from my dissertation committee as well as my interlocutor.

**Conceptually**, I build on the insights of the previous case to consider in more depth the intersubjective aspects of operations of consciousness, spaces of encounter, and complex systems of meanings. I discern and differentiate operations of consciousness—knowing, valuing, and deciding—more clearly. I explore the role of questions in generating 'ethical accounts' in intersubjective spaces of encounter, exploring how particular questions provide conflict-changing opportunities for new affordances from complex systems of meanings to be contingently recombined (or not). I also explore 'knowing the other's mind' that is

part of intersubjectivity, and reflect on the emergence of love as an expansive affect that can open new possibilities.

### **The Vignette**

I arrive at Sophia's house and get settled in one of her chairs while she serves tea. My inward attention tracks a jumble of my feelings and thoughts, as we make pleasant conversation about her family's upcoming vacation. Sophia has agreed to be my co-inquirer, helping me to explore a situation that has surprised me in its impact. My eleven-year old daughter Sage is trying out for a competitive hockey team. Last year she was cut from a similar hockey team, an event that for me generated significant conflict and ruptured relationships.

### **The Argument**

This year I am getting the signal (from my interpretations of the coaches' behavior) that she will likely be cut again. I am aware of my inner tumult, and the conflict behavior I am considering if she were to be cut. I am contemplating mobilizing support from other parents to dispute the unfair process and outcome, or of withdrawing from this girls' hockey association and transferring to another one. I do not like that I am considering these options, either, as I want to be as serene as my accepting friend whose daughter was also cut last year, and yet I find myself fully immersed in my hostility. I am aware that the inner tumult and the potential for conflict could provide an illuminating site of inquiry for my research. I find myself deeply angry with the coaches, certain they have been two-faced, unfair, and uncaring.

"Finding myself deeply angry" is accurate in one sense, but not another.

In the sense of 'finding myself,' it is accurate in that I have little agency over the feelings and thoughts that preoccupy me. At different times of the day, eating breakfast, parking my car, I notice my angry narrative about last year's cut in anticipation of this year: "And they actually had the *nerve* to write that she would *benefit* from another year in house league. They *know* that house league lacks the intensity and frequency of practice, so it's not a *benefit*. Who came *up* with that two-faced crap? Do they expect me, or Sage, to buy it?" Another narrative: "Oh no, oh no. What will happen to Sage? She'll be left behind her friends. And hockey has been so important to her confidence. What will this do to her? How will she manage? Oh no, oh no." So although it is true that I am finding myself feeling and thinking, it is incomplete to say I am finding myself (only) deeply angry. The anger is accurate, but incomplete, as there are many narratives like the ones above: the snorting contempt, the sinking dread, and so on. My feelings are complex, to say the least, and varied in how they show up.

Sometimes I am aware of dread; it is in my chest, and I wonder what the dread is about. Then I remember that the hockey tryouts are underway. So the feeling is present, but the narrative is not. Other times one of the narratives pops into my mind: "...they had the *nerve* to write that she would *benefit*." In this way, the feeling is entwined in the narrative, like music to the text, and unfortunately like a song that keeps reappearing in my mind. I am feeling unsettled about the frequency and relentlessness of my feelings, these narratives. I want them to go away. I do not want to be bothered by hockey tryouts; I do not want to be bothered, period.

*Quality Note: writing accounts—crafting a compelling narrative. As I note in Case 1, selecting and presenting material is difficult, contingent, and partial. In this note, I recognize the challenge of articulating the messy intensity of particular felt moments. Through my crafting of the text, I want to create a cognitive, affective space in which the reader can (intersubjectively) engage with—encounter—this vignette, my subjectivity, through descriptions of messy affect, recurring ruminations, as well as moments of greater cognitive clarity. Attending to the quality of writing as an art, as part of the research process, means that it can sometimes take a lot of crafting to depict spontaneity and articulate insight.*

### **My Hope and My Worries**

My hope for this conversation with Sophia is that I, we, can find a way for my mind to change. I know I do not want to be feeling and thinking like this. I am afraid of seeing myself as a mythically crazed hockey parent who ‘damns the torpedos’ to bully or manipulate others to advance their child as a superstar athlete.

I am also worried that I might damage relationships with other parents, which is a concern to me whether I pursue, or avoid, conflict over these tryouts. Last year, after Sage was cut, I did not maintain many of my own hockey-related friendships that had been built the year before. I would see parents whose girls had been chosen for the team, and I found myself avoiding them, or saying hello in an overly friendly way as a way to mask the feelings of wanting to run away. So I do not want that to happen again, either. I want to find a different way of dealing with the situation between fighting and faking (or fawning). My hope for

this conversation with Sophia is to avoid those unwelcome futures and to find a way to change my mind, change my behavior, and change something towards equanimity.

As I settle into the conversation with Sophia, she starts the recording device, as we agreed. We talk about a few things before we begin to talk about the hockey tryouts. I describe, with some details about the event, that I was distressed that the cut happened last year and worry that it is likely to reoccur this year.

*Quality Note: writing accounts—recollection and recordings. The previous vignette “An Intransigent Conflict,” is written entirely from recollection, where no recording was possible. This encounter with Sophia is a digitally recorded and transcribed conversation that lasted over an hour, covering several topics that included the hockey tryouts. As an experiment in autoethnographic reflexivity, I had written a draft of this account from recollection two months later, before my first listening of the recorded conversation. I had a recollected sense of the significance of the conversation to me, a feeling about the ‘narrative arc,’ and an awareness of the turning points, among other things. In comparing my recollected written account with the recording, I recognized that the recording was limited in its capacity to convey the significance of the encounter through my interiority, so that my recollection was of much greater value for the purposes of this vignette. The recording was useful in that my recollected account was overly simplified, not entirely faithful to the choice of words, the imprecision of responses, the lengthy or circuitous responses, and the doubling-back. As part of*

*the quality of the research process, I decided to rewrite the vignette to align the recollected account more closely with the recorded interview, so that the quotations in this vignette are all taken from the recording. This is an experiment with the autoethnographical form, in which I foreground the interiority of a narrative arc while including traces of recorded interview.*

Sophia's professional work and training have developed her listening and communication skills: she is a skilled listener. She listens carefully to what I say about last year's cut, restating some key points, and responds with a question framed as a sentence: "...and Sage learned something?" In this moment I can feel that her response does not quite 'fit,' although it is not irrelevant. I notice that her question does not elicit a responsive energy in me; I do not seem to be interested in Sage's learning in this moment; it is not quite the point.

I respond at length, then say that my fear is that Sage might internalize the cut as "It doesn't matter what I do, I still won't make it on the team," and how my partner and I have started to explore soccer as a venue for Sage to experience connection and competence. Sophia listens, and responds by asking another question, "And where is the conflict really lying for you?" I can feel a responsive curiosity in my own mind: what *is* the conflict about?

It takes me a long, circuitous time to respond that "These men are making decisions that prevent her from that expression (of competence and connection)." Sophia asks me to expand on that. I tell another lengthy story about the cuts from the previous year, and, realizing that I am not responding to her question, I ask myself the question aloud again, "Where is the conflict for me?" I try again with

the theme of “she’s being prevented...” but my response does not feel quite right, does not match my feelings. The words are too distant, they are not *gritty* enough to express the bursts of upset, and the worry I have been feeling.

I attend more deeply, trying to articulate something of the feeling that has arisen in response to her question about the conflict. The conflict, I sense, is about “*shame*...and I don’t know what the shame is about,” I say in a wondering tone.

We spend some time talking about shame, where it might be arising from, about my shame and my daughter’s shame, so that I reflect more deeply, on the feeling about my daughter not getting picked; my shame about not getting over it quickly; and about my daughter being left behind. Sophia affirms that this matters to me, very deeply. She recalls from my earlier response that the shame also seems to be related to my inability to “protect.” She then asks, “What is it that you are protecting her from?”

It is a wonderful question, because it was one that was not within the horizon of the possible for me to ask myself; it was beyond that horizon in that it was not a question that had occurred to me. And paradoxically, I do not know the answer to that, and yet I do; I have a sense that the response will emerge with sufficient attention and curiosity. In Sophia’s company, I struggle to answer from what I am protecting my daughter: “Loss...” I say, and the realization dawns that “I’m also protecting *myself* from the unbearable experience of helplessness, of witnessing her suffering and not being able to do something about that.” I pause as the feeling and words match, connect me to myself in a different way, and

connect me to Sophia, too.

I do not know where that shame comes from, where it gets activated in me. There is no particular image or memory (although there are plenty of possibilities) that makes this shame so intense. I try to convey a sense of the helplessness I feel in this shame by recounting to Sophia a phrase someone told me that I found illuminating. “The ability to transfer shame interpersonally is one of the roots of power,” I say, and continue, “If you can make someone feel bad about themselves, you have power, you can carry their mind to a yucky place.” I pause, absorbing the sense of what I just said.

We talk more, about the tryout process, and my concern about the coaches’ judgment of my daughter. Sophia then asks, “Who are they judging...they’re judging her and are they judging someone else as well?” This is a question that sort of fits and sort of does not fit. I can sense that Sophia is wondering if *I’m* feeling judged. “Sort of, but not really,” I vaguely respond. It seems that my response does not quite ‘fit’ with her sense of an answered question, that I have not really responded, and she asks me the question again.

I try to respond to what I think she is implying. People say that a parent should not judge themselves by their child’s success or failure. In this narrative, a parent should not feel bad if her daughter does not make a hockey team. The daughter’s success or failure should be independent from the parent’s sense of self, is how the narrative goes. But my experience is that this supposed separation between mother and daughter is very complex: how do we separate those roles and verbs of mothering and daughtering; they are deeply inter-

related. My sense of her vulnerability, at being judged for not doing well at something she loves, is excruciating to me.

There is a way that the evaluation of Sage's hockey is connected to an evaluation of me as a parent, a role that is profoundly important to me. In this hockey tryout, "Sage has a part and I have a part," I explain. "They are judging (what Sage and I have) co-created." My mind spontaneously starts thinking of all the hockey history that she and I have created together, ever since she was a tiny player in big gear five seasons ago: all the driving; all the conversations; the pleasure we have shared in this hockey passion of hers, that in my previous life before her did not interest me one bit. A surge of tenderness arises, a powerful expansive love, that is somehow related to the vulnerability, but feels paradoxically strong.

Something has shifted in me. I started my response to Sophia's question, "Are they judging someone else as well?" feeling that the question did not quite fit. In responding to her question, though, I found myself telling her about how deeply connected Sage and I are, that my mothering and her daughtering are integral to this experience, and that evaluations of Sage are connected in a complex way to my parenting.

Most deeply, I have become aware of my vulnerability, about my self-concept as a parent, how contracted I feel in this situation about her/my vulnerability and yet how powerful I feel in the sense of that vulnerability being shared in (aha!) a kind of solidarity. So the question elicited a complex response

that related deeply to my own sense of being evaluated, or judged, just as she had asked. And it also affirmed a deep sense of connection with Sage.

In driving home after we finish the conversation and I take my leave almost an hour later, I notice that I feel differently towards the coaches. I have moved from thinking about making a complaint to the association to wondering how I can respond to my own helplessness and vulnerability.

I do not feel like fighting ‘them’ anymore. My mind has changed.

*Quality Note: writing accounts—ending. What a tidy ending! Although it is true to say that my mind has changed, the actual process was much more untidy. The expansive sense of love was compelling, but it was fleeting; and it was not truly where the story of my conversation with Sophia ended. So I privilege that sense of love in ending the vignette, partly for dramatic effect, but mostly because it did have a role to play in changing my mind that I want to explore. I am grateful that Sophia will be reading this account, as she will help me account for my ending, the vignette as a whole, and the sense-making I am about to explore in the reflexive commentary.*

### **Reflexive Commentary**

Why this case? This vignette is compelling to me and to others with whom I have worked. I, and some colleagues, have used this vignette as a teaching case through the summative statement that, “I can’t believe my daughter was cut from the hockey team!” What makes the statement compelling is that it is an expression of ethics, of valuing, holding within it a multiplicity of possible meanings and reactions.

The statement evokes valuing from listeners who relate to different aspects latent in the phrase: the difficult parental role of watching a ‘beloved other’ expose themselves to a negative evaluation; the unwelcome experience of failing publicly that many of us have endured; the sense of ethical injustice that the criteria for selecting players for the hockey team were not quite fair. So, to my mind, the case is interesting for the many meanings it elicits, the everyday ethics it invokes, and the questions it continues to elicit.

In a discussion with my dissertation committee, as to whether to include this case in the research, one member asked the question about the appropriateness of this case as a case of *conflict*: if there was no conflict partner, no one with whom I was actually fighting, was there really a conflict? It was another wonderful question in that it stimulated more clarity in the way I could articulate the significance of the case. The question also influenced how I narrated the story above, so that I highlighted the ‘fight’ behavior that I had considered (of complaining to the association or mobilizing parents). But there were other behaviors that I was enacting that, although they were not aggressive, were definitely *conflict behaviors* in that they were decisions to defend or protect myself against a felt sense of threat: I had fled (avoided some parents) and fawned (was defensively friendly to others to manage my sense of threat).<sup>32</sup>

Thinking about conflict in its concrete intersubjective manifestation expands an understanding of conflict beyond one of mutually *aggressive* interactions between subjects; it takes me to an exploration of conflict behaviors

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<sup>32</sup> See Price and Price (2015) for longer descriptions of these conflict behaviors as decisions to defend. This affirms the conceptual importance of using the terms ‘interpersonal conflict’ and ‘interpersonal argument’ interchangeably.

that are produced from cognitive responses, decisions to defend, against a felt sense of threat registered in consciousness and enacted in spaces of encounter. Understanding conflict as a result of threat and defended decisions (however choiceless those decisions might be) qualifies this story to be a case of conflict, and an illuminating case of changing my mind within it.

### **An Intention to Change, and an Inability to Do So**

Whereas the change of mind in my first vignette, of the cleaning products, was spontaneous and unanticipated, in this case I deliberately sought help in changing my mind. Because of the repetitive arising of unwelcome thoughts, feelings, and options for retaliation, I realized that I could not change my mind on my own, *even though I wanted to*. I even asked myself ‘curious questions,’ wondering what was bugging me. And I could not answer these questions in a way that seemed to fit, in a way that released some of the bewildered tension I felt when I noticed my reactions. My mind continued to be contracted in its narratives of frustration and repetitious unactualized plans of retaliatory action.

In terms of everyday ethics, I ‘knew’ the coaches as unfair, unjust, and uncaring, based on the evidence of a few conversations between me and each of them (that left me feeling frustrated), as well as the preferential treatment that seemed—in my estimation—to be given to some players. I was aware of my moralizing judgment that conflated my knowing and valuing in such a way that characterized them as bad/unfair/uncaring. Even though I recognized that I was contracted in my judgment, in that I perceived there was probably more to the

story than I could see, I could not expand my knowing of them, the situation, on my own. I had no access to a fuller story, or to their interiority.

My moralizing judgment of their uncaring unfairness generated the sense that a defensive struggle against ‘them’ was necessary, whether it meant an active (attacking) complaint or a pointed withdrawal from the association. I had the hope that changing my mind would be preferable to engaging in conflict. So I sought the help of a trusted friend who, through our own intersubjective encounter, could help me to know differently.

### **Intersubjective Meaning-making**

The active process of intersubjective meaning-making between Sophia and I intrigued me, insofar as it was a deliberate quest undertaken by us both to understand the significance of the situation to me. Two of her questions revealed distinct aspects of cognitive operations, of seeking intelligibility, prefacing the possibility for my mind to change. Sophia’s first question, “And Sage learned something?” evoked a particular quality of response in me, very distinct from her question “Where is the conflict really lying for you?” To articulate the difference between these two questions evokes a short exploration of questions as carriers of intersubjective consciousness of the other, enacted in a mutual space of encounter.

### **The Role of Questions in the First Aspect of Intersubjectivity (Operations of Consciousness)**

One of the ways that Sophia and I were intersubjectively known to each other was through the questions that were asked and the responses that were

generated. Her questions had a way of orienting my responses, for me to be known to her. Her questions shaped the flow of my consciousness by shaping the parameters of what was possible to respond.<sup>33</sup>

The structure of a question is enormously important to the answer that consciousness will produce. For example, the question “what time is it?” sets the criteria that the answer requires a reportage of hours and minutes.

Consciousness identifies the conditions through which intelligibility is to be discerned through the asking of questions. *Insofar as a mind that changes is one that discerns an altered intelligibility*, questions are an important precursor of a changed mind in an intersubjective encounter.

**Questions as verifications of hypotheses.** Sophia’s question “And Sage learned something?” was structured in such a way to require a verification of her hypothesis. I imagined that she asked the question as a possible strategy for facilitating a change in my mind; that is, if I affirmed her hypothesis that Sage’s learning was significant, then perhaps my sense of threat would be less all-encompassing, so that I might re-value the everyday ethics in the tryouts to be a good learning opportunity, thereby changing my mind about the coaches or the necessity of fighting them.

Her invitation to verify her hypothesis regarding the salience of Sage’s learning required in my consciousness an oscillation between the criteria for determining the correctness of her hypothesis and an evaluation of the degree to which those criteria are met (Cronin, 1999, p. 201). Verification is an operation of

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<sup>33</sup> I draw heavily on the insight approach for this analysis, particularly Melchin and Picard’s (2008) account of insight and the role of questions.

consciousness that assesses the sufficiency of evidence, makes a link between the evidence and conclusion, and affirms the rational necessity of positing the conclusion as certain, probable, or merely possible (Cronin, p. 224- 241; Melchin and Picard, 2008, p. 69).

In my case, “And Sage learned something?” sets the criteria that *if* ‘Sage’s learning’ is to be judged as salient, *then* interior evidence relating to the importance of Sage’s learning must be sufficiently present to conclude it is so. Sophia’s question established the scope, and set the terms of verifiability, of the answer. And although it was true that Sage learned something, it was not salient in my valuing of the situation. Sophia’s question about Sage’s learning did not change my mind; did not alter the intelligibility I discerned in the situation.

**Questions as facilitative of new understanding.** Sophia’s subsequent question, “Where is the conflict really lying for you?” generated a different process, and facilitated a change in my mind. Whereas her first question was related to verifying a hypothesis about Sage’s learning (is it so?), the second question oriented me to a different quest: one of intelligibility (what is it?). I had to give Sophia an account of what the conflict was about. In making that account in our space of encounter, I had a sense of an internal re-ordering taking place, and new affordances being activated in my mind. Whereas before I was certain about the coaches’ unfairness, her question, and her tone, prompted me to try to articulate much more complex relations, meanings, causes, ideas, and patterns. What was bothering me? How could I make sense of my feelings and reactions? My response to Sophia’s question began with what I *thought I knew as a*

*judgment of fact*—I was mad that the coaches were preventing her from experiencing competence and connection.

### **Account-giving**

In the space of encounter with Sophia, as she elicited an account from me, I could feel that my contracted response, that the coaches were thwarting Sage's well-being, was not quite enough. I was not only angry; something else was bothering me that required a fuller explanation. There was something additional contracting my consciousness, but I did not know what it was, despite having asked the question of myself. In Sophia's company, with the space to provide an account shaped by our mutual curiosity, I could ask myself the question, "What is it about?" and reflect on a variety of personal, socially available complex meanings.

### **Something New Arises**

In making my account (co-created with Sophia), I became aware of something new in my cognitive experience. The insight that was generated from her question, and my subsequent efforts to make an account, was that I discerned a sense of shame. The word 'shame' emerged as a 'good fit' to convey the intensity and complexity of my response. I was able to connect my current experience with previous situations which I registered as shameful, or shaming. The shift from knowing myself as angry to knowing myself as angry *and ashamed* was a significant change in my mind. Following this insight, the situation took on a different intelligibility to me. The sense that I was mad at the coaches was a part of it, but shame was also a salient emotion in the dynamic.

Registering the shame enabled further relevant questions to emerge: what gave rise to the shame? There were many possible responses, so once again our minds quested together to seek intelligibility in generating an account. I referred to a quotation I had come across relating to the interpersonal transfer of shame as the root of power, so the recognition emerged that something significant about shame and helplessness was at stake.

*Quality Note: saturating inquiry. I would love to talk more about shame, as I find it a fascinating topic. One of the challenges of writing is to continue evaluating what is inside the scope of inquiry and what is outside it. Exploring the topic of shame in a conceptual way would take me too far away from the main thrust of this discussion, so I set the topic aside to pursue my main line of inquiry.*

I elaborated my account more fully. Sophia reflected her understanding of what I said. We started to talk about shame as a signal of threat, that indicated something unwelcome, or dire, from which I was protecting Sage. Sophia's subsequent and pivotal question was again directed at discovering intelligibility, a re-ordering in the significance: "What is it that you are protecting her from?" The question had not occurred to me. In the intersubjective space of our encounter, her curiosity carried mine, her question oriented my attention to seek a reordering of data, a change of mind.

### **Discerning Significance, Identifying Threat**

My mind then became attuned to discovering the intelligibility of inner data: from what was I protecting her? Was I protecting her from a dire hockey-less

future? Not really, as a non-competitive girls' team was a viable alternative. So a practical threat was not salient.

Was I protecting her against the realization that supposedly fair competition can be sometimes be unfair? Although the violation of social norms of fairness was disturbing to me, this reason for protection did not offer a fully satisfactory explanation. It then came to me—the click, the grasp, the insight that I was protecting her from “loss.” I recognized that my efforts were directed to protecting her from a contracted sense of self, of shame. It was through my intersubjective knowing of Sage—my imagined sense of her loss—that I recognized how deeply painful it was to me to imagine her suffering a loss. This quickly generated the next insight that I was also protecting *myself* “from the unbearable experience of helplessness, of witnessing her suffering and not being able to do something about that.” This was a new apprehension, an altered discernment of intelligibility; that the situation evoked a sense of shameful helplessness at not being able to protect her. In my intersubjective space of encounter with Sophia, rendering an account, being attentive, curious, and critically reflexive together, my mind was changing.

After a few more minutes of conversation, of elaborating on that insight of protection, Sophia asked another question that generated transformative insight. It was, “Who are they judging...they’re judging her and are they judging someone else as well?” This was another question that evoked a verifying reflexive insight—a response to her hypothesis. Although my first response indicated that the answer was no, my consciousness nevertheless flowed towards an inquiry

about 'being judged myself.' I surmise that there was something in my response that did not satisfy Sophia's verifying criteria to conclude that a question had been answered, so she asked the question again.

### **Intersubjectivity in its First, Second, and Third aspects: 'Reading' Sophia's Intentions**

In a complex intersubjective turn, I responded to what I thought she was implying; that is, my mind responded to a sense of the trajectory of the intelligibility implicit in her question. I believed that her hypothesis was as follows: if I recognized that I did feel evaluated by the coaches in the tryouts, it could open a recognition that the coaches were not actually evaluating *me* as a hockey player, and the recognition of this distinction could open a cognitive space between evaluation of Sage's performance and my own, thereby freeing me from the contracted sense of shame I was describing. That was another move that could have opened a change in my mind. But it did not, at least not in the way the question was oriented.

I was more resistant than open to the change toward which I surmised Sophia's consciousness was inclined. I responded by contesting a narrative that I (intersubjectively) imagined might be carrying her evaluating, a narrative available in the complex systems of meanings in which our encounter was enacted. The narrative that I resisted was that parents should not judge themselves by their child's success or failure; that a parent should not feel bad if her daughter does not make the hockey team.

I resisted this narrative because I was feeling bad that my daughter was not going to make the hockey team, and I could not help it; moreover, I did not

consider it was wrong or degenerative that I felt bad. In my mind, that evaluation of Sage's hockey *was* connected to my sense of myself as a parent, and through my account-giving I affirmed that connection: that I am deeply connected to Sage through our mothering and daughtering, through our co-created influence on each other.

### **Love**

Sophia's question enabled an insight into further intelligibility of the hockey tryout. My connection to Sage, to my intersubjective knowing something of Sage's vulnerability of trying and possibly failing, was shaping my valuing of the situation. I could recognize that I felt vulnerable, and evaluated, as her mother, as one who loves her and helps her move through the world. This awareness generated in me an expansive sense of love, a sense of a powerful alignment with her. This awareness generated the paradoxical insight that Sage's vulnerability and my vulnerability were so deeply connected that it somehow made both of us less vulnerable. In the presence of that love, that powerful attunement, my mind could expand. I could start to wonder how I could respond to my vulnerability, and hers, more directly, rather than to manage my vulnerability by engaging in face-saving conflict with the coaches. This was a profound reorientation in my knowing and deciding. My mind had changed, and the conflict dissipated.

### **Conflict is not necessarily 'bad'**

The point of this vignette is not that all conflicts should be resolved through an introspective realignment that can alter the decision for conflict. Sometimes I

need to stand up to bullies, and fight for what I believe to be good. In this vignette, it is possible to imagine a very different scenario with a very different outcome. In my intersubjectively expansive quest with Sophia, I might have had the insight that the unfairness of the tryouts were sufficiently disturbing to me that an official complaint was the best course of action. In that case, conflict might have been the best, most authentic response to a situation. What matters is that the process of making the decision to fight is done more mindfully, conscientiously, and freely, rather than contracted as I was.

It seems that through my account-giving in the space of encounter with Sophia, I recognized that my sense of social ethics (the coaches were not acting right) was less salient than my sense of personal ethics related to my diminished sense of self. I also recognized the difference between a diminishing shameful vulnerability that is isolating, and an expansive vulnerability that connects me to others, a vulnerability of solidarity.

*Quality Note: saturating inquiry. I have a settled sense of writing this reflexive commentary, a satisfaction that enough has been said, and a pleasure in having articulated difficult concepts in a nuanced way. I am ready to open my account to feedback.*

*Quality Note: working with feedback. Preparing for my conversation with Sophia, I am aware of a few questions for her. I wonder what she remembers of the encounter, what was significant to her. I wonder what she thinks of the vignette, how she feels about it. I wonder what she thinks of the thoughts I have attributed to her—in the segments where I respond to what I think she is*

*implying. These questions are going to structure our conversation. It took some time to decide whether to send her my analysis at the same time as the vignette. Part of me wanted her feedback on the vignette before introducing the analysis. She will be leaving for a month, so two conversations are not possible. I decide to send the analysis for us to discuss at the same time.*

### **The Debriefing Inquiry**

Settling into the same seats as before, finishing up our small talk, starting the same recording device, Sophia and I orient ourselves to the conversation about my recollection and analysis of our encounter. The first thing she says, before I have even spoken, is how well she feels it is written, especially in comparison to other academic papers she has recently read. I am pleased; it is something that matters to me, to be clear and accessible for non-academic readers. I am particularly pleased because I had worried that the section on the structure of questions might be too technical.

When we talk about this at greater length in the debrief, she mentions that as a theory/practice piece it was interesting, but is not likely to make much difference for someone sitting in the listener's chair. This stimulates my curiosity to wonder how I can make this more accessible from the listener's chair—a topic for the next chapter.

I ask what she recalls of the conversation. Her first response is the topic of shame. She considers that we had underexplored the significance of that shame, for me, although in re-listening to the recording to prepare for our conversation, she recognized that it seemed that we had discussed it to the fullest extent

possible in the context of that conversation. She sensed a resistance in me, which I confirmed.

She says that one of the primary features of the conversation was its complexity, and that she might have narrated the account differently. I ask how she might have narrated it. She pauses, and says that she does not know, and then adds that it does not really matter how she would have narrated it; the focus of the inquiry was on me, and my subjectivity. I agree with this.

*Quality Note: sense-making. In the company of Sophia, in our first conversation, it was possible to have a certain kind of conversation, generating a particular insight, an altered intelligibility. Had I been with someone else, I wonder if another conversation would have emerged. If I had been speaking to my daughter's teacher about my conflict with the coaches, for example, maybe our intersubjective space of encounter would have carried my mind differently. I might have been more curious to discover 'Sage's learning' to which Sophia's mind had been oriented, or might have been more constricted by what I know of his concern about the risk of concussion in hockey. Context matters. A lot.*

In my conversation with Sophia, I wonder if she recognizes the account, if it rang true for her, and she says that it did, although she has not made a page-by-page comparison. This leads to a mutual reflection on the challenge of writing a text like this; Sophia notes that because I am tracing the movement between the interiority of my mind and the exteriority of our dialogue, a page-by-page comparison would be irrelevant.

In my vignette, it was clear that a few sentences between us generated felt responses in my consciousness that the recording would not capture. So although the account is not an exact account, I did not ‘make it up,’ either. Sophia can read the text and affirm that it is ‘accurate.’

### **Changes of Mind are Non-linear**

Sophia appreciates the analysis, finding that the way I articulate and trace the micro-moments of dialogue generated insights for her, a sense of intelligibility she had not recognized before. She also points out the limitations of narrative linearity that my form imposes. I ask her what she means. She says that, as I describe it in the vignette, her question “And Sage learned something?” did not have immediate resonance for me, and in some ways I claim that it did not change my mind. And yet, once the question has been asked, it does not go away. It may have influenced subsequent insights, may have been a question to which my mind generated responses in weeks to come.

### **Complex Systems of Meanings, and Partial Texts**

Sophia points out the surplus of meanings, the unexplored areas in my analysis. One example is the complex intersubjective fields of meaning of my being a (non-hockey playing) female in relation to hockey-cultured men who were making decisions about my daughter. More than that, my hockey-loving daughter has two moms, which puts us in the small but visible (and occasionally vocal) minority of same-sex hockey parents. And my narrative leaves out Georgine’s knowing and valuing that also featured in the ways I knew and valued the coaches’ decisions and intentions.

I agree with Sophia; my narrative is partial. It recognizes the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the encounter, necessarily incomplete, but nonetheless significant in the intelligibility it conveyed. She agrees with my assessment as it relates to the vignette, at the same time as pointing to those dynamics as figuring implicitly in the conflict, and therefore shaping the conversation that she and I had.

### **Sophia's Interiority**

I am curious about what was going on in her mind as she read the vignette and listened to the recording. She says that her predominant recollection was her inner (incurious) assessment that "Marnie shouldn't be thinking like that / why is she thinking like that?" I wonder what she means by this, and she elaborates: she had to "bracket her own response" in order to follow mine. This leads to an interesting exploration about "bracketing her response."

As it turns out, Sophia's son had been cut from a hockey team over a decade ago in similar circumstances. Sophia had actually complained to her son's hockey association, with little effect. But more than being shaped by her previous experience, Sophia considers that her role as a parent shaped her response to me. In her life, she has come to understand that a parent's role is to prepare their child for difficulties in life, to support resiliency, and to allow a child to suffer, learn, and adjust to meet new challenges. Sophia remembers assessing that my reaction to the potential cut might lead to me making decisions that would ultimately both frustrate me and inhibit Sage's development of

resiliency. Sophia was aware of registering her own response, which she chose not to express directly, while she was listening and responding to me.

### **Intersubjectivity as Intention-reading (Part II)**

Sophia's response leads to an exploration of what I had imagined to be Sophia's unarticulated knowing and valuing that predicated her decision to ask the question, "And Sage learned something?" I wonder if Sophia decided to ask that question because she had made the hypothesis that asking me about Sage's learning might carry, might re-organize, my valuing towards an appreciation of the experience as resilience-building. She verifies that I had 'known' her intentions correctly.

I also ask her to verify my hypothesis relating to her question "And are they judging someone else as well?" In the above vignette, I write it as "I try to respond to what I think she is implying. People say that a parent should not judge themselves by their child's success or failure." I ask Sophia if she had indeed been (dis)valuing my worry, in that she saw me as insufficiently able to detach Sage's potential disappointment from my sense of self—that I was mistakenly conflating our two selves, or that my 'failure' to differentiate our two selves could be harmful to us both, by inhibiting Sage's capacity to grow or my capacity to appropriately support her.

Sophia confirms that I was correct in my understanding of her interiority—of her knowing and valuing. She explains her understanding of parenting that I describe above, which was developed over the course of raising several children who now have children of their own. I find it interesting that my responses were

generated in relation to her explicit question as well as the implicit knowing and valuing that informed the question through its phrasing and intonation.

I also find myself affirming the difference in the way that Sophia and I know and value my response to the cut. Rather than devaluing my insufficient differentiation, I affirmed the importance of co-created influence that my daughter and I have on each other. My ability to affirm Sage's vulnerability enabled me to recognize my own vulnerability, and it was coupled with an expansive sense of love and a sense of a powerful alignment with her. This awareness generated the paradoxical insight that Sage's vulnerability and my vulnerability were so deeply connected that it somehow made both of us less vulnerable.

In the ordinary ethics of this space of encounter, I became mindful of my own vulnerability in a way that was expansive rather than constrictive, so that rather than generating a set of options oriented to protecting myself by face-saving conflict, I could consider other options. The unstoppably annoyed interior monologues were no longer compelling, and I was much more sanguine when the cut actually came.

*Quality Note: saturation of inquiry. I am reaching the completion of this inquiry; the quest for intelligibility is subsiding, the satisfaction with the articulated intelligibility is settling. I feel satisfied by my rendering of the dialogical quest for significance articulated in the vignette; Sophia's enthusiastic verification of both vignette and analysis; my incorporation of her feedback and the further reflection it generates. I am pleased that I was able to depict the co-created emergence of meaning between Sophia and I, aware of McShane's (1975) observation that an*

*awareness of the emergence of meaning can contribute to the creative contribution to that emergence.*

*In completing this chapter, I am aware of the threads of inquiry latent in it. Among many possible threads of inquiry, the one that interests me most is my wondering about the acts of being a 'listener' in a dialogue about conflict, an inquiry into what is happening when I listen to another mind in conflict. It is that inquiry that forms the focus of the following chapter.*

## Chapter 7: Listening to Another Mind

This is a case that involves a consultant, my friend, who is engaged in conflict with a colleague over her refusal to work with another colleague, as well as her resentment at him for having suggested that they do so. Through eliciting an account from my friend, and recounting a version of it back to him, I witness his change from a stance of hostility to one of curiosity.

**Methodologically**, I discover a flaw in the first part of my research account, whereby I neglect to account for my interiority. I rectify this flaw by writing a subsequent account that builds upon the first. I encounter another research challenge, related to representation, insofar as my interlocutor (kindly) tells me in our debriefing interview that I do not address an aspect of the conflict that was salient to him. I respond to this challenge by accounting for my selection, presentation, and analysis of my material in the context of my project, thereby examining and affirming the quality of the research as it unfolds.

**Conceptually**, I build on the application of my framework of intersubjectivity by attending to the space of encounter and the operations of consciousness that are elicited in the process of account-giving. I pay particular attention to the aspect of everyday ethics I discern in the microprocess of negotiation over what a 'good' friend should do. In a process of co-inquiry with my interlocutor, I differentiate 'self-referenced' and 'other-referenced' curiosity. This builds on the investigation of intersubjectivity as 'knowing the other' and the complexity this entails.

## The Vignette

My friend, Gabriel, who is a consultant, calls me one afternoon for a chat. During the course of our conversation about a number of his projects, he mentions he has had a difficult encounter with one his colleagues, Felicity, related to an issue between her and another colleague, Abby. Gabriel is responsible for delivering a large contract with a big company, which would require Felicity and Abby, as highly skilled colleagues, to deliver training on a technical topic specific to their expertise. Several other projects he had launched were also developing well. I say, “wow – “there are some amazing things you’re doing in your work, and it seems that the conversation with Felicity was troubling to you?”

### The Argument

He responds that he had met with Felicity earlier that week to discuss work planning. As he outlined the timing of the training segments, he asked Felicity to work on the needs assessment in conjunction with Abby’s work. Felicity said sharply, “But we’re not actually working *together*, right?” Gabriel was taken aback by Felicity’s pointed, abrupt tone, as well as by the realization that, although he was aware of some friction between them, the conflict between the two women was more active than he had believed. He found himself very annoyed at Felicity; they exchanged a few tense words; he recognized he was shutting down in frustration; and so he ended the meeting shortly after the interchange so he could collect his thoughts.

“What upset you about the conversation?” I ask.

He responds at length, while I absorb snatches of significance. “I felt that I’d messed up ... like I should have known better... which I hate feeling ... *And* this thing with Abby has been going on for a long time, and I don’t know when it’s going to end.”

“You didn’t like that sense of yourself as messing up?” I say.

“That’s right,” he confirms, so I continue.

“And you’re upset? Angry? About the thing between them not changing?”

“Worried. We need to deliver this contract, and if this thing between them gets worse...”

“What might happen?” I ask.

“Well, we could lose the contract, I suppose, or we could not get another one...”

“So there’s a practical concern about the future of this project, a gap between how you want things to go and how they’re playing out,” I follow.

“Yes, but as I talk it through, that doesn’t seem to be what’s bothering me, because I know we’ll pull the contract off, and it will be fine.”

“The practical future isn’t the biggest concern, then... There’s also your interaction with Felicity, a gap between how you want to be treated and how she treated you, how colleagues should treat each other?”

“You know, it’s not even about what colleagues should or shouldn’t do. What bothered me was a gap between how I want to see myself—as sensitive to my colleagues—and how I ended up feeling about myself after the conversation—as a jackass.” He pauses. “And it’s so hard, how long this thing

has been going on. Felicity has talked to me about it a bit, but it's almost like she can't figure out what's going on herself... Abby hasn't mentioned it—I don't know if she just wants to avoid the whole thing or if she's just not aware of what's going on.”

“What is going on, as you understand it?”

“Well, they were pretty good friends and colleagues for several years. Then Felicity went through a messy divorce about two years ago. Around the same time, Abby got engaged and then was married last year. Felicity has rebuilt her life and is generally happy in her own terms, but there's something about Abby's life that just seems to affect Felicity in a way that she struggles to deal with, even finds hard to talk about. And I know she's trying to get over it, but she can't, and that seems to really bother her. Felicity actually likes Abby from a distance, but when they work together, Felicity really *struggles*. And Felicity doesn't have any trouble working with other people who are happily married. But with Abby, it's happened a few times when they worked together last year. Felicity has said that she's almost incoherent in front of a client group, or shuts down.”

“So Felicity is struggling. Here she is, Felicity, pretty happy in her own life as she's living it, but finds it hard to be reminded about her divorce when Abby shows up happy and kind of oblivious. Felicity is an accomplished professional, but when she works with Abby, who she *likes*, she gets grabbed by her personal feelings and shows up as some incoherent person. So she's worried about showing up as a sub-par professional, but also bothered that she's showing up

as someone who hasn't been able to get over her personal feelings in her professional life."

### **The Change**

There is a long pause. I sense that Gabriel is moved. It is like I have given him back what he gave to me, but it is completely new.

"Felicity is *struggling*," he repeats. "I've been stewing about Felicity being *difficult*. When I see her as struggling, I can see that she's trying to maintain our relationship with our clients, and with Abby, I guess, and with her self, maybe, buying time until she can figure things out more," he says. "I wonder how I can talk to her about it in a way that we talk about *that*."

*Quality Note: writing account – selection and presentation of material. This is a polished draft, written over a period of several months. In reviewing it again, I had the sudden insight that my interiority is absent. With that insight, I suddenly see the flaws in what previously seemed like an adequate account. This encounter is supposed to be about intersubjectivity—mine, his, ours—and I have not captured a crucial dimension of the intersubjective process: my operations of consciousness. Although I realize I could easily rewrite the whole account, thereby erasing the traces of the process of production, I decide to keep the original, to illustrate a research process, the effects of insight, and the iterative nature of knowledge production. I continue.*

### **Another Account, Same scenario, More interiority**

My friend Gabriel calls me. I am pleased to hear from him; I feel more expansive in his presence, appreciate his warmth and intelligence. We catch up

on some details of our lives, describe a few projects we are working on, and, among other things, he mentions that he has had a difficult conversation with Felicity related to his contract. My mind is alerted; I register his felt sense of dismay through his tone. Something is significant here. I am aware that I am considering my options: should I ask him more about it? Change the subject? Reassure him?

I feel myself hovering in two roles that relate me to him. I am a friend—who enjoys his company and respects his privacy—and I am a conflict professional who can sniff out conflict and has developed some skills to address it. I do not want to apply the conflict tools if he does not want them, but I do not want to withhold them if they would be useful.

*Quality Note: writing account. Now this feels more real, more complex. I am already intrigued by this account: what is going on in my mind as a listener? My curiosity into my own interiority is piqued; energized by the challenge of writing this complexity.*

What should I do? I hear both his cheer and his dismay; he is happy about his projects, and his conversation with Felicity was difficult. My inner dialogue went something like this:

“Should I mention the conversation with Felicity (but am prying? Would he think I’m prying? It’s a sensitive topic—I don’t want to highlight his vulnerability if that’s what he’s feeling). Or should I celebrate the smooth outcomes (but would that be insensitive, ignoring what’s bothering him?). I

want him to know I care about him, but what's the best way to do that?

Celebrate, commiserate, what?"

For a moment, it feels like only one option—either celebrate *or* commiserate—is possible, and then the idea of 'both' comes to mind. So I say, "Wow—there are some amazing things you're doing in your work, and it seems that the conversation with Felicity was troubling to you?" I breathe out, registering a sense of being more settled by this response to his complexity.

He responds by describing more details about the encounter with Felicity. Since he talks about his difficulty, rather than his satisfaction about work, I follow that he is giving us implicit permission to talk about this more sensitive topic. His description, through tone and language, expresses feelings I could imprecisely name in the moment as 'upsetting.'

My formation as a mediator has trained me to follow the affect (to more fully understand his process of valuing), so I ask: "What was upsetting about the conversation?"<sup>34</sup> The question generates a 'thick,' multi-layered response from him, about his unacknowledged effort to be a good colleague; the negative impact of her comment on his sense of self; his vague concern about some kind of awkwardness or unwelcome future if the situation between the two women does not get resolved.

There is a lot of data he is producing: my responses are cognitive and affective as I apprehend what he is saying. My attention is directed toward making sense of what matters to him, and I get a nebulous feeling that many

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<sup>34</sup> The strategy to follow the affect to elicit the process of valuing is a central feature of the insight approach to conflict. See Melchin and Picard (2008) and Picard (2016) for the theoretical and practical aspects of this strategy.

significances are at play: something about messing up; perhaps concerned about what a client thinks of his company; possibly being angry—at Felicity? How can I respond to all this complexity? What should I do now?

I follow him, use words he has spoken, with an addition of an affect/value: “You didn’t like the feeling of messing up?”

*Quality Note: representation of self. In reporting my response, I realize in retrospect that there are many other ways I could have responded to him, and wish I had said something that better reflected the complexity he presented. I would like to represent myself as a more attuned listener, but recognize that the integrity of the account depends on revealing my limitations as well as its strengths. These limitations become more obvious in the next chapter, “Tension in the Group.”*

Gabriel agrees with me—he does not like the feeling of messing up, but my question does not elicit much more from him. That is the nature of the kind of verifying question I asked: he acknowledges I was correct and our understanding is (somewhat) shared, but his self-reflexivity has not been piqued.<sup>35</sup>

Although, in retrospect, I could have asked more about the ‘messing up,’ I respond to his other feelings: upset, angry? He corrects me: worried. I notice I am untroubled by this correction: I find it does not diminish my sense of self, of being a ‘good listener’—quite the opposite, in that I have a sense of being adjusted, of being adjustable, which I value. I press on, knowing (through my

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<sup>35</sup> This observation resonates with the discussion about questions in the previous case study, “Outrage.”

training) that he is worried there must be something at stake. “What might happen?” I wonder aloud.

In the process of saying that a lost contract is a possibility, he is able to reflexively generate the evaluation that it is an unlikely future. At this point, he is wondering with me, I can feel that, so that even in his negation, his tone conveys curiosity: that if he is not upset about that, then what is bothering him so much?

I wonder if part of his (ethical) concern is whether “Felicity shouldn’t have acted that way”. Not really, he says: what follows from him is a complex expression of the significance of the encounter for him – he feels like a ‘jackass’; he is troubled that Felicity cannot really articulate what is bothering her; and Abby is unaware of what is going on. There are three nodes of significance, many affordances, as Keane (2016) would say, that could be followed. More complexity: again, what would be ‘good’ to do? How should I respond?

Aware of complexity, too much to discern directly, my mind flows in the direction of seeking a more concrete understanding of the situation, because I still have no clear sense from him about the significance of his difficult conversation with Felicity. “What is going on, as you understand it?” He explains the situation, sketching Felicity’s divorce and what he guesses might be the significance of Abby’s marriage to Felicity’s sense of self. Through his account, I find myself attuned to Felicity’s valuing, imagining myself into Felicity’s shoes, attuned to the word ‘struggling’ by Gabriel’s emphasis on the word. Partly paraphrasing what Gabriel has said, partly animating what he describes as Felicity’s inner conflict, I articulate a narrative that could be summarized like this:

“So Felicity is struggling. Here I am : Felicity, I’m pretty happy in my own life, doing lots of things I love to do; it’s a good life, I’ve made peace with the way things worked out, not peace exactly, but being OK, feeling OK with my decisions, but not OK that I had to make those decisions I had to make...and then there’s Abby, who’s a good person, she really is, but there’s something about her that just twists me up, because it’s been so easy for her, and I’m *happy* that it’s been easy for her, I really really am, but it’s so hard for me - to be reminded about the divorce, how lousy it was, how painful. And it’s OK that some people are happily married, but when *Abby* shows up happy and kind of oblivious it just drags me down. And I want to get over it, but I can’t, and I’ve tried, and when I work with Abby, it’s like I get grabbed by all this mess and I show up as some twisted up person, and I just don’t want to be that person.” My monologue goes on for longer than this; it may be about a minute of me ‘performing’ Felicity.<sup>36</sup>

There’s a long pause, and in that pause I sense that Gabriel is moved, reflecting. “Felicity is *struggling*, “ he repeats. “I’ve been stewing about Felicity being *difficult*. When I see her as struggling, I can see that she’s trying to maintain our relationship with our clients, and with Abby, I guess, and with her self, maybe, buying time until she can figure things out more...,” he says. “I wonder how I can talk to her in a way that we talk about *that*.” The argument has

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<sup>36</sup> Attentive readers might notice that the narrative point of view changed from third person to first person between the two accounts. As I discuss later, it was during my interview with Gabriel that he emphasised the importance of the first person account in my narrative about Felicity. Rather than change the point of view in the first text, I chose to leave the dissimilarities as they are, to highlight working with feedback and the iterative production of knowledge in the text.

dissipated. He is no longer considering hostilities with Felicity; he wants to have a different conversation than the ones they have been able to have previously.

### **Reflexive Commentary**

In this case, it is not my consciousness that is constricted; it is my friend's. So in the space of encounter that he and I co-create, I have the opportunity to attend to his intersubjective knowing and valuing of Felicity (as well as himself, and me.) Gabriel has referred to that conversation between us as transformative, to a point, in his encounters with Felicity; as such it merits inclusion because of its endurance as a mind-changing, although not completely transformative, conversation.

"I don't recall the details of the conversation," he says to me in another conversation (before he read the vignette and our debriefing interview). "What I remember is the feeling before I called you and after we talked, and I really remember the space that got opened up."

"What do you think opened?" I wonder.

"You were able to know her in a way that I couldn't, on her own terms" he says. "I think that made the difference. And it changed a lot, but it didn't change everything. There's still tension, but it made a difference."

*Quality Note: Theorizing. What might it mean – in an intersubjective analysis - to know someone "on their own terms?" or that I "knew her" in a way that he could not? I explore this in more detail below, as these elements made the mind-change significant for Gabriel.*

In my processes of (intersubjectively responsive) decision-making, my mind is simultaneously carried and choosing in the space of our encounter. My mind is carried by my training as a 'good' mediator and my notions of how to be a good friend. I am also making moment-to-moment choices – ask, reflect, share - that respond to him (and my own interiority), framed by that training and those notions. As I discuss below, this encounter reveals the 'everyday ethics' of ordinary conversation, negotiated in our mutual attunement and disjunctures with each other.

*Quality note: research cycling, pointing to implications beyond this text. Also on my mind as I write this analysis is a recent conversation I had with a senior leader in an organization. The purpose of that conversation was to develop a business strategy. The conversational dynamics in that meeting were similar to the ones I had with Gabriel, in that she was simultaneously guarded and forthcoming as the conversation went along. The meeting with the senior leader was an ongoing process of my being attuned to our mutual intersubjective knowing, valuing and deciding in relation to each other, as well as the subject matter, in the dynamic between us. I had been drafting this vignette before I met with her, so I was particularly attentive to these dynamics.*

*The conversation with the senior leader went particularly well, since we discovered new possibilities for the business strategy as we dealt with very sensitive organizational issues. I recognize that there is significant value in increasing (my) critical awareness of intersubjective knowing, valuing and deciding in non-conflictual encounter. Just as I discover in the amicable debrief*

*with Rebecca and Georgine in the “Intransigent Conflict”, decision-making processes of all kinds involve forms of knowing, valuing and deciding in intersubjective spaces of encounter.*

### **Everyday ethics**

An illuminating moment of everyday ethics emerged in my decision-making, particularly in my deliberating options in response to Gabriel’s mention of the difficult encounter with Felicity, amidst his description of success. It was a pivotal shift in the kind of conversation that was taking place, a shift that moved us away from (fairly straightforward) affirmations of success, into an exploration of a more difficult, complex, sensitive, and uncertain topic of conflict.

As I recount it above, I recognize my rapid inner dialogue – deliberating and evaluating options with varying affects – in response to his dismay and celebration. Ethically, I want to do good: respect his privacy (not pry), while helping him if he wants it. The criteria of ‘being a good friend’ (in all its complexity) carries my consciousness and frames my decision-making. I also want to avoid being seen (by him as well as me) as a bad friend – prying or ignoring.

These narratives of “what it means to be a good friend, and avoid being a bad one” are carriers of consciousness, complex fields of social and personal meaning. “Good friends respect privacy” and “good friends help each other” are both valid social narratives in my world; by what criteria could my consciousness evaluate the best? Although it feels for a constricted moment that I could only

choose one option - of celebrating or commiserating - the insight that 'both' was possible is freeing to me.

In my formal debriefing inquiry with Gabriel, I wonder about his interiority in that moment, mentioning my own concerns of not prying and wanting to help. "It wasn't prying," he says, quite definitively. "Prying is like using a wedge, forcing something ajar, pushing open a closed mind. What you did was invite an opening. I could feel that you weren't asking me about it for your own titillation, or for feeling special that I would let you in. There was a lot of space in the way you asked about the thing with Felicity."

"What does space mean?" I wonder.

### **Eliciting Gabriel's ethical reflexivity**

"It felt like many options were possible," he responds. "I got the sense that you would have been fine to talk about it or to leave it alone. You didn't have an agenda." I recalled a therapist friend of mine who is fond of saying, "people change when they have the sense of being accepted." In the sophistication of our intersubjective knowing of each other, intentions are discerned. Unlike in the previous chapter, in which at one point I discern Sophia's question about Sage's learning as intending a hoped-for change in me which I (defensively) resist, Gabriel says he discerned a unconstricted curiosity about his difficulty, which generated a responsive curiosity in him. He started to talk about Felicity, and our conversation shifted to his encounter of conflict.

In that conversation about his conflict, I find myself aware of my capacities as a friend, and as a professional mediator. As a mediator, my mind is carried by

a theoretical framework and practical strategies that guide my decision-making. For example, as a mediator I recognize that when an individual is invited to give an account of feelings, (“what was upsetting about the conversation to you?”), a person often gives an account of the valuing through which the feelings are expressed (as he does, by talking about being a good colleague, maintaining a positive sense of self, and achieving a desired outcome). Giving an account of valuing is often an opportunity for new affordances to be made, as Keane (2016) claims, or for more expansive valuing, as Price (2013) contends. So in his account, Gabriel recognizes that the lost contract is not the concern that dynamizes his annoyance with Felicity; instead he becomes somewhat clearer that what matters is his diminished valuing of himself as well as his concern about the lengthy, uncertain (in a way that neither Felicity nor Abby seem able to articulate) conflict between the two women.

In reaction to my wondering “what is going on, as you understand it”, Gabriel describes his understanding of Felicity’s interiority: her distress about her own divorce shapes the way she is able to know and respond to Abby.

In my response to him, I found myself realizing that as a mediator, I might ask him more questions to generate his self-reflexive accounting to discover new possibilities. However, as a friend, I might share something of my own knowing, valuing and deciding: recount my own tales of difficult colleagues, offer advice, suggest solutions about how Abby and Felicity might divide the work in a way that avoids contact. These are strategies, as a friend, in which my consciousness

might be flowing, that are less exclusively focused on Gabriel's interiority than I would seek as a mediator.

### **Differentiating self-referenced and other-referenced curiosity**

In our debriefing interview, Gabriel and I discuss the difference between these conversational moves – of maintaining a focused attunement to the other's sense-making, or of expressing one's own interiority (knowing, valuing and deciding) to the other. In a co-created insight, we recognize that if I respond to my own knowing, valuing and deciding, distinct from what Gabriel has generated in our specific space of encounter, then my move is 'self-referential' – that is, oriented more to my own consciousness, rather than to his.

An example of more 'self-referential' curiosity might be if he tells me about an interaction over a car purchase and I respond by asking him for the name of dealer, as I am considering purchasing a similar car; in this case, I would be curious about something of significance to me that is not significant in the narrative he described. Similarly, as he recounted his difficulties with Felicity, a (more) self-referential move on my part might have been to defend her ("but she seems like a nice person") or condemn her ("people like that can be so difficult!") based on my own valuing.

There is nothing inherently 'bad' or 'wrong' with this more self-referenced conversational move. Sometimes the more self-referenced accounts of a friend are welcomed, as we intersubjectively share our specific knowing, valuing and deciding. Hearing someone else's mind at work often stimulates new possibilities to emerge in my own mind, or helps to create shared understanding. I self-

reference frequently with people in my life: share my experiences, suggest solutions, impart advice (even when it is not solicited, as I was eager to do to my partner in the first vignette of “The Intransigent Conflict”). However, if I was acting in the role as a professional mediator with Gabriel, my decisions would be more specifically oriented to eliciting his self-reflexivity, rather than expressing my own.

*Quality Note: theorizing. Through an intersubjective framework of analysis, I acknowledge that it is difficult to discern where “self-referenced” and “other-referenced” curiosity begins and ends. I believe there is a continuum of attunement from self to other, a moment-by-moment discernment of self-and-other in intersubjective relation to each other. In its more extreme forms, self-referencing can be recognized if I respond to something another person says (“I swam a mile today”) by recounting something of my own (“a mile? I swam 3 miles yesterday. Outdoors! In the freezing rain!”). In contrast, “understanding someone in their own terms”, as I understand it, is the effort to elicit and respond to the other’s knowing, valuing and deciding (“you swam a mile? How was that for you?)*

*In understanding someone in their own terms, my effort is to understand more fully what that person knows, values and decides, rather than referencing my own knowing, valuing and deciding. Having said that, it is not possible to be completely attuned to someone’s mind, as if my subjective frames of understanding and valuing can be absolutely set aside to fully be absorbed in and by the other’s consciousness. Again, the self-other attunement is a moment-*

*by-moment continuum in complex dynamics of consciousness, encounter and fields of meaning.*

### **Eliciting ethical reflexivity through expansive attention and curiosity**

As a way of elaborating on Gabriel's self-reflexive articulation of his knowing and valuing of Felicity, I find myself 'performing' an interior monologue of Felicity. I have not done that conversational move before, either as a friend or a mediator. Although it may exist, I am not aware of a conflict resolution approach that would advocate 'performing interior monologues' as a strategy of intervention. Nor have I done a monologue like that in the context of a conversation with a friend. So what I do is spontaneous, appropriate, attuned, as a friend-who-is-a-mediator in that specific space of encounter. Gabriel narrated his account of Felicity's concerns in the third person ('she had a difficult divorce'); I animated her valuing in the first person ('I'm OK with my decisions and not OK in that I would have preferred different options").

This performance of Felicity in the first person was particularly significant to him, he tells me in our debriefing interview. It felt to him that through my performance of Felicity, he could listen to her without his own self-referenced concerns inserting themselves to 'distort' the way he knew and valued her. So instead of self-referentially valuing her as "the-difficult-colleague-who-makes-me-feel-like-a-jackass", he found himself valuing her as "the-struggling-colleague-who-is-trying-to-deal-with-her-difficulties". His valuing of her actions changed. Once his valuing changed, his mind spontaneously went to deliberating options:

wondering how he could talk to her about her struggles rather than (only) enact his annoyance.

In our interview, Gabriel and I articulate ‘self-referential knowing and valuing’, and its role in shaping what is possible to know and value in intersubjective spaces of encounter. As a contrast to self-referencing, he considers that my invitation for him to talk about his dismay was more ‘transcendent’ in that it orients my attention away from myself and towards him. At the beginning of my conversation with him, I want to be a good friend, and I want him to see me as a good friend, but I am not sure what the best actions to be a ‘good friend’ would be in that moment.

I discover that ‘being a good friend’ does not exist as some absolute ethical code of conduct (‘respect privacy’ or ‘help with difficulty’). Instead, what it means to be a good friend is subtly, intersubjectively, negotiated in the moment, of what I offer as a friend (celebrate? commiserate?) and how he responds (more details about the difficulty with Felicity). Another day, another context, and our everyday ethical negotiation might have determined that respecting privacy was the best “good friend” thing to do at the time.<sup>37</sup>

Another dimension of the more transcendent curiosity, as he experiences it from me, is related to my having ‘no agenda’, insofar as he felt I do not ask him about his difficulty so that I could feel special by his disclosure. The choice I offer (celebrate? commiserate?) is not constrained by my own preference or self-referenced valuing of what would be the best choice for *him*, as a friend to *me*, to

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<sup>37</sup> This notion – of evaluating ethics or efficacy by the response of the other – is taken up in a quality note in the next case, “Tension in the Group”.

do. In other words, my mind is not carried by more self-referenced (ethical) narratives of what he should do: such as “good friends don’t burden others with their troubles” (therefore he should focus on celebrating accomplishments) or “good friends share their sorrows and commiserating is intimacy” (therefore he should talk about his difficulties with Felicity). My more unconstricted offer in the conversation invited an expansive response in him, he reports.

In a similar fashion, my ‘performance’ of Felicity has an expansive effect on him. In rendering my performance of her, I have no access to Felicity’s interiority; my only sense of her is what he has told me in the conversation, and the affect with which he tells it to me. Through my animation of her knowing, valuing and deciding, dynamized by my enactment of her affect, Gabriel has the sense that I “know” Felicity in a way that he could not, and that this knowledge is closer to “Felicity on her own terms” than he was able to achieve.

### **The change**

How does the interpersonal argument dissipate for new possibilities to emerge? He reports that by knowing Felicity differently, through the space of encounter between him and me, he was able to have a different conversation with Felicity in their next meeting. Knowing her as ‘struggling’ (which paradoxically was the word he had used and through my depiction of it, he had come to appreciate differently), he could attend to her struggles, as well as his own. Although difficult, their subsequent conversation was not conflictual. They were able to talk –imperfectly, impermanently - more explicitly about their personal disquiets and practical concerns.

## **Ethical negotiation**

As I describe above, in the moment-to-moment space of encounter, I realize that my ethical concerns to be a 'good' friend are intersubjectively negotiated. I also have come to see that a 'good' response – question, narrative, monologue - is similarly intersubjectively discerned. Reflecting on the previous vignette, Sophia's question, "and Sage learned something?" is not a 'poor' question; it is a question that does not generate an energizing insight in me, at that time. In response to my lack of energized reply, Sophia followed my response and asked a question that turns out to be more salient: "where is the conflict for you?" This process of knowing, of being known, of mutual reciprocating influence, is continually underway in the complex intersubjective encounters we enact. The ethical negotiation in that intersubjective, interactive process of valuing is ongoing, attuned, somewhat distinct to each of us at the same time as being deeply connected to each other and the wider social fields of meaning.

As another example of this 'ethical negotiation', when Gabriel corrects me by saying that he feels 'worried', rather than upset or angry, I do not feel devalued as a bad listener, as I might have been. Quite the contrary: I feel valued as an 'attunable' listener. Had he used another tone, or been situated in a different context, I might have had to reckon with a diminished sense of self arising spontaneously in response to his comment. This practice of recognizing my own interiority, even as I seek to respond to his, is a practice of differentiation

and integration, a long practice of attending inward and outward in complex moves of attending, understanding, valuing and deciding.

Satisfied with the articulation and insights in this part of the *sense-making* of my inquiry, I turn to another issue of quality in the research process:

*Quality note: representation. When I ask Gabriel about his felt response to the draft vignette that I had sent to him, he responds – very kindly and thoughtfully - that the text does not address the considerable role-related tension he experienced in the conflict between the two women. In other words, much of the intensity of his distress in the conflict was related to his differing roles with them, and that these roles have not been mentioned in the text. I agree with his assessment that the text does not attend to the particulars of their differing roles and expectations, and I start wondering about this. Does it mean that this is a ‘bad’ or ‘poor quality’ text, because it has not adequately captured his interiority related to roles? Or is it perhaps ‘bad’, or ‘unethical’ to represent him in the conflict differently from the way he would tell the story? I can account for my decision to exclude the aspect of ‘roles’ in this conflict: I do not want to reveal identifying information about the institution/context in which he and the women are situated.*

*Based on that valuing, which he shares, I make the decision to exclude the roles in the vignette. I judge that excluding his role-related dilemmas maintains a sense of the significance of the conflict without describing the details of the conflict. Context matters here: because these texts privilege my interiority,*

*as self-reflexive accounts, then my decision to exclude his roles, and account for their exclusion, is 'ethical' and 'good quality' research.*

*Gabriel and I discuss the options of what and how to write this encounter, what is valued in the text as a piece of scholarship (and the epistemic community in which it is situated) and as a moment in our friendship. Ultimately I produce this text, which represents him, and his very supportive and yet dissenting concern, as a strategy of accounting for my representation and its limitations. I need another debrief interview with him to discuss the questions of representation, to create a better quality account.*

*Quality note: saturating inquiry. Recognizing that I have unanswered questions about representation, I highlight that this inquiry is not yet saturated (as the previous two chapters have been at roughly this point). That recognition also heightens my awareness of additional paths of inquiry, more questions to ask him: what is his felt response to the text now? Is there anything more I could include about the dissipation of the argument with Felicity, or between Felicity and Abby? In asking questions this way, I highlight that knowing, valuing and deciding is integral to this method of social science research. This points to research-cycling – of other paths of inquiry - which I address in the final chapter.*

### **Debriefing Inquiry**

Gabriel and I speak on the phone after he has read the entire vignette and commentary above. He considers my representation to be more 'adequate', my depiction of our conversational moves to be 'right.' When I ask him about what makes the account (significant to him as) adequate or right, he tells me that he is

impressed by the effectiveness of the second, more interior, vignette; he says that in representing more of *my* interiority, I represent more of *his*. The dialogical, more nuanced text of my interiority necessarily relates to, and evokes his interiority, too, he says. Not only does this enable him to remember and recover the encounter more clearly as one who experienced it, he considers that it commendably illuminates the intersubjective complexity into which I am inquiring so deeply. I ask him more of what he remembers and recalls, particularly about how the polarized argument dissipated for new possibilities to emerge.

He says that his polarization was multiple; he was sharply critical of himself for not being more sensitive; he was also critical of Felicity. His criticism of Felicity related to how she processed her pain about her divorce, that her pain had a way of expressing itself as blame, so that he became a target for her criticism: that he had not adequately ‘read her mind’ by arranging for Felicity to work with Abby, even though she had indicated earlier that she was feeling better about her relationship with Abby, and in this way he had felt ‘led on’<sup>38</sup>. How did our conversation make a difference? I ask him. “Hmm...”, he responded, “you’ve covered it pretty well already.”

“But” I press on, “you say that it changed a lot, but it didn’t change everything, that there’s still tension.”

“Well,” he pauses, and then responds with a Biblical reference, “it wasn’t like Paul’s conversion on the way to Damascus, where he was felled by an angel”

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<sup>38</sup> Some of the conflict is about Felicity’s criticism – and his defense – of his intersubjective intention-reading. She (implicitly) expects him to read her intentions, while he feels ‘led on’ by the disparity, the gap, between what she says and how she reacts. More theorizing on this would be interesting, but takes me beyond the text.

(and went from being a persecutor to being Jesus's strongest proponent). "But it set up a greater *probability* of being changed, particularly because I wanted it. I still do. And that affects Felicity, and Abby, too. I don't mean that Felicity is going to get all Kum-ba-ya with Abby,<sup>39</sup> but I can tell you that she is more likely to change with Abby when she is not getting attacked by me."

Something about his reflection is settling to my inquiring mind. Our conversation ends with an "aha", the relief of having generated a meaningful insight. The idea of probability, of setting up conditions for the emergence of probable outcomes, sits well with my sense of complexity and uncertainty in intersubjective encounters. Probability, as a word, has a nice weight to it – it leans into a moment, not determining it, inclining towards an eventual, sooner-or-later outcome that may never arrive.

With that, I prepare for the complexity of the following account of a large group process that goes awry.

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<sup>39</sup> ..meaning that the relationship between Felicity and Abby was not going to be infused with the spirit of peaceful, and somewhat naïve, harmony that characterizes the campfire song Kum-ba-ya.

## Chapter 8: Tension in the Group

This case is about an encounter involving a group meeting that I facilitated, in which an argument arose that had the potential to derail an extensive deliberative process that had preoccupied the group for several months. The argument dissipates insofar as one, and many, participant(s) decide to engage more collaboratively, rather than defensively block the conversation from continuing. The complexity of the encounter is foregrounded, so although change is clearly discernible, it is recognized as partial and incomplete, without being inaccurate or invalid.

**Methodologically**, because of its many aspects of complexity, this case presents significant challenges, particularly in the research aspects of sense-making and representation of self and others. I encounter oversights in my practice and learn through the process of writing about them. The choice of possible interlocutors is a decision that requires discernment and explanation in accounting for the quality of this research. Moreover, I recognize the iterative process of sense-making, while acknowledging that concepts of complexity and emergence are most useful in accounting for what takes place.

**Conceptually**, I attend deeply to the intersubjective complexity of this space of encounter and consider the role of the leader in shaping, but not determining, the way that a group can know, value, and decide. I delve again into the issue of 'intention-reading,' inquiring into how I make sense of what others are thinking, even when they are not speaking. I reflect on some moment-by-moment operations of my consciousness, of my knowing, valuing, and deciding.

In doing so, I am able to discern moments where conflict does not arise, despite the presence of threat, as well as respond to the conflict that actually arises. I consider how change can occur in a space of encounter where account-giving takes place in a group context; and notice that expansiveness has an influence on change.

### **The Vignette**

**Context:** I am co-facilitating a meeting for a group that is having a conflict related to a difficult decision. Two days before, my colleague and I led the group through a two-hour workshop about strategies to address interpersonal conflict. Today's facilitated meeting is an extension of that workshop, so that participants can discuss their challenging decision with support from us, while practicing the skills introduced in the workshop.

Maria, one of the leaders of the group, welcomes us all to the meeting, and points out the refreshments. She then gives a brief account of her recent meeting with a senior leader of the organization, who has indicated a (decisive) preference for a timeframe, of several months hence, in which the group's deliberations should be concluded. She turns the meeting over to my colleague and I. As preface to the meeting, my colleague and I propose a process and introductory topic: each individual would speak in turn around the circle, expressing their hopes about the decision and what is getting in the way of making it.

## **Threat without Conflict**

One member of the group, Jack, protests our recommendation; another supports him. I feel a small flutter of dismay; gaps on many levels. A personal constriction: did they value me as incompetent? A practical concern: would all our precious time be spent on setting up the process? I steady my discomfort by focusing more intently on Jack, the intervener, rather than my own concerns, listening to his suggestion, watching the others in the room, signalling their turn to speak, paraphrasing what was significant to them, connecting to possible options, inviting responses, and inclining toward decision.

The group deliberates several options and, with facilitation, eventually agrees to a modification of the topic, which is very similar to the original one, incorporating the recognition of the senior leader's preference. I feel a release from that tension of uncertainty; we had settled on a process. I feel that their sense of confidence in me, us, and each other has expanded: the decision-making about process has been energizing for the group. As my colleague and I have agreed previously, at this point I take the role of lead facilitator, while she maintains an actively silent presence in the group, available as needed.

Individuals begin to speak around the circle. The first few speakers express their hopes and concerns about the significance of the decision, while I model active listening. When it comes time for Jack, the intervener, to speak, he declares he will pass. Glancing around the room, I sense surprise and confusion in the group, and ask him, "Can you say a little more about your decision to

pass?” He explains that he has said a lot already and that he would prefer to listen; that if time remains, he will contribute at the end.

Again, I glance around the room and, not noticing any heightened signals of distress or desire to intervene, invite the next member to speak. Four or five more individuals speak. When it comes time to speak for a second, usually outspoken group member, Lucas, he too declares he will pass. I register surprise in me, and concern in the group. There is a pause as I, we, process this turn of events. The woman next to him, Leila, draws in her breath. I invite her to speak. In a calm but emotionally inflected tone, she says that she is concerned about participants’ passing.

“It makes me feel less secure, less safe, actually, to share my hopes and concerns when there are other people passing,” she says. Although I register some relief in me, that she has spoken a concern that I sense others are feeling, I am also aware that the meeting will not continue, if at all, until we have moved through this. As I register this awareness, just as Leila is finishing her sentence, another group member, Maya, who had recently spoken in her turn at the circle, abruptly intervenes, “Yes!” she says sharply. “It’s rude and disrespectful!”

### **The Argument**

The tension in the room is palpable. My attention is heightened, simultaneously registering discomfort and uncertainty within both myself and the group; a gasp from someone, another person pushing back their chair, many eyes on us, others focused on the interveners and passers. Active conflict has emerged. Responding to my own consciousness, I recognize both discomfort and

a confidence in applying the skills I have honed for difficult moments such as these: notice, follow, slow down, make explicit what is implicit, exude equipoise; simultaneously attend to threat and seek to expand around it.

I look at the second passer, Lucas. His eyes are downcast, his face distressed and his body tight. In attending to him, I can see/sense his strong emotions, although I am not certain what they are; at the same time I see/sense some of the impact of his behavior on the other participants. I open my arms, holding the space that seems to have become constricted. I say: “Here we are! Just like we talked about two days ago in the workshop, this conversation has just become very difficult, and now we have a chance to practice what we talked about then!”

I describe the situation carefully: two people have passed, and participants have different responses to the same behavior. For one, it makes her feel less secure, for another it strikes her as rude, and for the individual who has just passed, it most likely means something very different. The two interveners look at me, nodding, confirming that I have understood their concerns.

The second passer, Lucas, still gazes downward. Having verified with the speakers, I direct my attention to him. I reflect that there is clearly a lot going on for him; he nods. I note that he looks uncomfortable. He nods again. I say that I do not know all the details of what is going on, but that I can imagine that his decision to pass was based on caring a lot, not a lack of caring. At this, he looks up, makes eye contact with me, and I/we can see the distress in his face. I say, “And one of the possible decisions you could have made is to leave the room, but

you chose to stay, although it's really hard, and you're staying in this hard place rather than running from it." He nods with what looks like relief.

I glance at the faces of people in the room and see compassion in many faces looking at him, some perhaps annoyed, others hard to read. I turn back to him and say that since it appears he wants to remain silent in this moment, I wonder if he would consider contributing at the end of the circle if there is time. He nods again, much more relaxed, and the group, including the two interveners, also appear to relax. I check in with them, taking in the group as I do—how does that sound? They agree it is okay.

### **The Change, Sort of**

I invite Leila to speak again, as it is her turn in the circle. She speaks of her concerns and hopes, incorporating her concerns about conflict, as well as how important it is for her that everyone contribute. Looking around the room, I can see the signs of concern subsiding. The remainder of the group speak their hopes and concerns, including some ideas for the future, with considerable honesty. New possibilities appear to be emergent.

There is enough time at the end for the two passers to speak, and once again substantial debate and tension about the decision surfaces. Although considerable information and ideas have been exchanged, there has been no affirmative decision, other than there will be another meeting that they will manage on their own.

Immediately after the meeting, I am tired; I had processed a lot of feelings, valuing, and deciding. There is some recalibrating chit chat among us, in which I

can hardly put a sentence together, and then we all drift out of the room and into the night air. From my point of view, the meeting is not 'perfect,' not even 'very good,' in that it does not appear to have significantly resolved the longstanding concerns of the participants. I feel both discouraged and accepting; there is a gap between my hope for some sort of outcome that both they and I could feel good about, and the sight of the drained tired faces that had been around me.

There is also a gap between my desired sense of self, as efficacious and wise, and my current sense of self in a deep, almost disoriented wondering, "What in the world just happened?" I accept that the group is dealing with complexity, and complexity can take time. In some part of my mind, I recognize that my not-knowing is a reasonable, perhaps even wise, response to the complexity that was encountered.

In reflecting on the meeting, what strikes me as significant is that moment where the group is polarized, the conversation is blocked, and the tension is high. And something happens for the conversation to move on, for information or dialogue to resume, imperfectly, and for possible next steps to surface. What in the world did just happen?

*Quality note: criteria for selection. I had written an earlier draft of this vignette and for several weeks I was unsure whether to include it as a case study. Then I recalled a segment of the story, which follows, which was very significant to the outcome of the process. With this recollection, it became included as a case study—because it illustrated a longer term, significant change of mind, as well as the complexity of change taking place in non-linear ways.*

I wonder how other participants are making sense of the meeting. I speak with my colleague, and we discuss it briefly, but there is too much to process in a short time, and she leaves the city for an extended period the next day. A day after that, I call one of the group leaders, Maria. We talk about the meeting, making some sense together of what happened, both of us puzzling and a little deflated.

### **Another Change**

A week later, I check in with Maria again, still curious about what might unfold. As it turns out, she is pleased that she has had a brief conversation with Lucas. In that conversation, he tells her that he is deeply worried that a possible outcome of the group's decision would mean that one part of the group would become disenfranchised by the other. Maria tells me that this is the first time that this worry has surfaced so explicitly, or that she has been able to hear it so clearly. She says that now that they both recognize that avoiding disenfranchisement is important, it is possible to discuss new options, including a future governance structure that would equalize decision-making power for both parts of the group. Months later, I get a celebratory email from Maria that the group has made their difficult decision, with a new governance structure, and is moving forward in a hopeful direction.

*Quality note: sense-making. That Lucas shares something of significance with Maria, thereby facilitating a larger change, is not a direct effect of my intervention; and yet my participation is not irrelevant. I have some influence in enabling that meeting to flow, rather than implode, which, according to Maria,*

*was a turning point in the long process of decision-making. I am aware that my account is inevitably incomplete because of my partial perspective; it also risks oversimplifying, attributing linear cause and effect, of unduly attributing agency and even of stable, coherent selves. Notwithstanding its partiality, the account is not 'wrong.' I can claim that my perspective is valid, despite its limitations.*

*I had revised a draft of this vignette, which included a portion of the reflexive commentary below, and was presenting it to the epistemic community of my dissertation committee. As I was rendering my account to my committee, of my choice of case, as well as my privileging of events and voices in the complex meeting, there was a sense of confusion among us. Even though I had made the case 'recountable,' and in doing so had differentiated six decision-making minds in the meeting (Jack, Lucas, Leila, Maya, Maria, and me<sup>40</sup>), my analysis was still unclear. How could I account for the de-escalation of conflict in the meeting, a de-escalation that enabled the group discussion to proceed, thereby creating conditions for Lucas and Maria to have the transformative conversation that produced a new outcome? It was not clear. From that sense of confusion, bordering on a frustrated desire to know, one committee member asked intently, "But I'm still trying to understand whose mind, exactly, was changed?" The answer burst out of me, in responsive energy to her tone and vigorous wondering: "Leila!" I said. The insight came with a release like a mystery novel's denouement.*

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<sup>40</sup> My beloved and capable colleague is not foregrounded in this account, with her permission, for several reasons: recountability and identifying information being of primary significance.

*Hers was a question whose structure and tone generated a transformative insight. I continued, "I can only see this looking back, and of course it's not this simple, but one way to tell the story is this: Leila reacted to Lucas by refusing to share her concerns, and after I responded to her, as well as Maya and Lucas, she changed her mind, so the group as a whole could move along. That meeting, among many other things, helped Lucas, and Maria, creatively use their minds to create new possibilities, which the rest of the group eventually endorsed. But Leila's mind made a determining decision in how the meeting proceeded." The committee, our own little group of complex wondering minds, had come to an insight. And another mind, participant in meeting, or reader of this text, might have a different interpretation, appealing to alternative criteria of significance.*

### **Reflexive Commentary**

The case exemplifies, and raises many questions about, intersubjectivity in the context of a group conversation: how can a group, *of individuals*, align and change their minds, dissipating argument so that new possibilities can emerge? In applying conceptual tools of intersubjectivity, what is the role of a facilitator related to operations of consciousness, spaces of encounter, and complex fields of meaning? What are the everyday ethics at play in this scenario?

The meeting is enacted in, suffused with, inexplicably complex fields of meanings and affordances: expectations about groups, presentations of selves, appropriateness of emotion, previous interactions with each other, deference or resistance to authority, among many others. These shape our behaviors, and provide horizons for what is possible to know, decide, and determine to be 'good'

and 'bad' within our roles as participants, facilitators, and racialized, gendered, aged, and embodied subjectivities.

I am the temporary leader of the group, with considerable—but negotiable—power. My role, as I understand it, is to help the aggregate of individuals, the group, to align and optimize their operations of consciousness, their collective knowing, valuing, and deciding, by helping to create conditions that can help individuals to know, value, and decide more effectively. My training carries my consciousness to value contexts with more safety, less threat, as better conditions in which individuals can be more curious and creative (rather than incuriously certain or uncreatively positional) so that new decisions are possible. As I discuss below, my role as leader is also to establish a process, a pattern of co-operation, through which individual decision-making can be aligned.

*Quality note: theorizing. I realize that in writing this analysis I am touching on topics on which enormous bodies of literature have been produced: leadership, group interventions, and complexity, to name a few. My effort in this section is to articulate my own particular, limited, critical understanding of the specific encounter, rather than to engage with those bodies of literature, with which I am inexpertly acquainted.*

As the meeting gets underway, my colleague and I shape the space of encounter through suggesting *carriers*—the process and topic—through which their individual minds could engage; we thereby direct individuals' thinking and deciding towards loosely determinate ends. As I discuss in "Outrage," the structure of questions carry people's thinking in generating a response that is

shaped by the structure of the question. So the question, “What are your hopes and what gets in the way of making a decision?” carries the aggregate of individual minds in a determinate, but not determined fashion. People contest and revise it to include a response to the senior leader’s preference, so that the question provides a slightly different frame through which responses are generated. Similarly, the proposed process of speaking in turn orients, (but does not determine), people’s deciding about when to speak and when to refrain from speaking. In this way, the intersubjective space of encounter shapes the operations of consciousness of individuals and aligns the collective process of knowing, valuing, and deciding together.

My colleague and I invite input on the process and topic, through another question, this one elicitive of group decision-making, specifically an evaluation: “Is this what we should do?” A contradiction arises from a group member, supported by another.

“I don’t think that’s the best way to approach this meeting,” he intervenes in a somewhat aggrieved tone of voice (at least as I hear it).

Internally, I register some dismay at their interventions, a small worry that I might be seen to be ‘bad,’ a poor suggester of process, and that our time would be ‘wasted’ in debating the process. My valuing is expansive enough to intersubjectively register the intervener as *not* annoyingly disruptive, but rather as helpfully corrective (although somewhat annoying). Perhaps a better way to express and conceptualize this is that I am able to value the intervener as not *only* annoyingly disruptive *but also* helpfully corrective. My consciousness was

sufficiently expanded to hold multiple significations, multiple self-states of him (and me).

*Quality note: sense-making. This insight, and capacity, to respond to several kinds of significance in my interiority, as well as another person, is resonant with my discovery in the case of "Listening to Another Mind." With Gabriel, I register the possibility of both commiserating and celebrating; with Jack I register his behavior as both annoying and helpful. I have generated these insights, about intersubjectively knowing self-and-other, through the process of making this self-reflexive written account, reflecting, speaking with others, and writing more. These particular insights, generated through this writing, illuminates writing itself as a process of inquiry. And complexity.*

Being in a sufficiently expanded state of consciousness to value him as both annoying *and* helpful, my deliberating and deciding is also more expansive than contracted in defense. Instead of my deciding being principally engaged with how to defend myself (and fight, flee, fawn, or freeze), my deciding is focused on further curious questions (oriented to the group's evaluation): what would be better to do?

I focus my attention and direct my curiosity on the group's decision-making: if we should not do what was proposed, what then should we do; what is a better option? Speaking to each other and through me, the group deliberates their options briefly, evaluates a better question, and settles on it. In these interactions with the group, I encounter disagreement with our proposal, even register a sense of threat, but it does not engender conflict between me and the

intervener. Although I apprehend a threat, my response is sufficiently undefended to facilitate a flow of further information: no conflict ensues. The group vigorously debates the best course of action based on implicit and explicit criteria of ‘the good’; this is everyday ethics in its complex dimensions of determining what is the best thing to do in these circumstances, as a group.

*Quality note: theorizing. In the complexity of a group discussion such as this, I cannot overclaim agency in aligning the group’s understanding, valuing, and deciding. Other participants respond to Jack’s concern, voice their own ideas, evaluate the options without engendering further threat, and settle on a decision. This decision is mutually co-created, many minds making micro-decisions towards a unified one, generated in a complex space of encounter.*

There seems to be a palpable sense of satisfaction in the group when the process is decided: the agreed pattern of co-operation, through which the decision will be discussed, has been co-operatively generated.

### **Another Threat, and its Change**

We then begin to proceed around the circle one by one. When Jack, the outspoken, annoying/helpful intervener, announces his decision to pass, I am aware of a disruption in the expected pattern of co-operation. Although I briefly mentioned to the group that individuals could choose not to speak (as part of the freedom and safety necessary for unconstrained participation), it is significant that *Jack* chooses not to speak. So it is not (only) the violation of the explicit pattern—anyone was free to pass—but a dissonance between his outspokenness and his decision to not contribute. Somaticly I sense others in

the room reacting. Cognitively I know there is a gap, although I am unsure of its significance. I am aware in my own mind that once I register the dissonance, my mind spontaneously generates explanations, seeks intelligibility— perhaps he wants to undermine the process, or perhaps he disagrees strongly with what others are saying.

Although I can sense that my mind is inclining toward a kind of certainty about him and his motives, I am able, through practice, to be curious: I ask him to elaborate on (give an account of) his decision. What gets elicited is (some of) his valuing. He says that listening to others is important to him, and he has already spoken a lot. I surmise that there is likely a complexity of meanings motivating his decision, but I decide not to engage my curiosity there.

*Quality note: theorizing. Writing this segment of the account surfaces significant issues about intersubjectivity: how do I 'know' what other individuals in the group are knowing, feeling, and valuing in these complex spaces of encounter? What is my mind doing as I intersubjectively know, value, and responsively decide in these contexts?*

The concept of 'everyday ethics' becomes salient in this intersubjective encounter with Jack. I recognize that my intersubjective valuing is profoundly contextual. Having no knowledge of Jack beyond my (less than five minutes of) superficial contact with him, I notice that I am inclining to impute (un)ethical intentions to Jack because of a divergence in my expectations of his behaviour, even though he is conforming to the explicit norms established in the group.

I am practised enough to (sometimes) notice that when I incline toward (premature) certainty, some curious questions might be helpful. As I indicate in “Listening to Another Mind” and “Outrage,” questions that elicit the other’s knowing and valuing are likely to elicit an account that might create an opportunity for re-valuing to take place and new affordances to be combined, by the other, or myself. I ask Jack for an account of his decision to pass, and he affirms a positive valuing of others’ voices.

### **Discerning Others’ Knowing, Valuing, and Deciding**

I wonder how others are responding to Jack’s account of his decision to pass. I can sense that individuals are not discernably expressing fight or flight responses, there is a kind of ‘wait and see’ feeling, with many eyes turned to me. I invite the next participant to speak. She expresses hopes and concerns in such a way that it furthers the conversation, adds more to the aggregate of the group’s understanding of the multifaceted nature of the decision. The next participant expresses a different dimension of the decision; it appears that there has not been a disruption in the flow of meaning with Jack’s passing. We continue.

As the conversation proceeds around the circle, Lucas’ decision to pass generates a complex node of reactions. Inside me, I am surprised and dismayed. Again, my own speculations wonder: is he reacting to Jack, the other speakers, or his own contracted sense of self? I register threats related to an uncertain present and unwelcome future—what is going on? What if everyone passes?

The subsequent speaker, Leila, protests Lucas’ decision (evaluates that he has not ‘acted right’ insofar as she feels threatened, and also decides that

asserting this concern is her best course of action). She expresses that she feels more exposed, and more personally contracted in response to his decision. I am touched by her comments; they register in me as reflective of an (esteemable) openness, a willingness to take risks, and to speak about the impact respectfully. As I am processing her comments, considering options of response, another speaker, Maya, intervenes sharply to state that the passers are 'rude and disrespectful'.

Boom.

Despite the disruptures and disjunctures, threats and defending, that have been arising and subsiding in the conversation until now, active conflict is not emergent until this moment. Although Leila in effect blocks the continuation of the meeting, the way she expresses her feeling of threat—as a contracted sense of self—registers (in me) as offering some potentially expansive, non-conflictual possibilities: responding to her intervention, the group could conceivably have considered how to communicate more generatively. Maya's intervention, on the other hand, expresses a moralizing judgment: her knowing and valuing is conflated in such a way that her (contextual) disvaluing of Jack and Lucas' decisions to pass is taken (by her) to be the verifiable certainty that Those Who Pass Are Rude, and Disrespectful Besides. She decides, as evidenced by her action, that her preferred option of defense is to make a declaration of her disapproval.

## Knowing, Valuing and Deciding in Conflict

Maya's intervention illustrates a conflict behaviour: she has registered a threat and decides to defend by articulating a moralizing judgment.<sup>41</sup> It is not clear what is at stake for her, whether it was a diminishment to her sense of self, fear of a jeopardized process, unmet expectations of appropriate group behaviour, all of them, or other concerns. In discerning threat(s) and deciding to defend, she makes a moralizing judgment that elicits threat, in me as well as in others.

My particular sense of threat is related to the process—I am concerned that others might make defended decisions to fight (attack Maya or join her in condemning Jack or Lucas), freeze (shut down), or flee (leave the room), which would jeopardize the conversation we were collectively committed to generating. I did not register her comment as disvaluing my own sense of self, so in this way I did not feel diminished or threatened. I did register the moralizing judgment as targeted at (diminishing) Jack and Lucas' senses of self, so was attuned to that dynamic.

What should I do? In the complex moment, I had plenty of options, most of which I disregarded. I could have reprimanded Maya for name-calling; called a break; revisited ground rules for interaction; or oriented my curiosity in several directions—but which ones? What was the criteria for establishing the best, most conscientious decision at the time?

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<sup>41</sup> Maya's moralizing judgment of the passing as 'rude and disrespectful' is not unlike my contracted evaluation of the hockey coaches' behavior as 'uncaring and unfair.'

*Quality note: theorizing. I sometimes tell the story of this meeting in my workshops, as a way to discuss how one might apply conceptual tools about conflict to particular cases. After briefly telling the story of this “meeting gone wrong,” to which many participants can relate, I ask them to refer to the conceptual tools of conflict we discuss and suggest the course of action they consider to be best. They deliberate by generating different options, which we briefly evaluate by identifying the advantages and disadvantages of a proposed response, making explicit the criteria by which ‘a good response’ is determined.*

*Among the many suggestions that emerge, some students consider the best course of action to be seeking clarification of the moralizing judgment; opening a discussion about the ground rules / pattern of co-operation, directing participants towards the decision at hand; appealing to the leader; and so on. In evaluating the best response, we recognize that although our theories carry and shape our evaluations, the ‘goodness’ of the response can only be discerned by the response it elicits in the participants: does it generate more threat? Does it facilitate curiosity, expansiveness, and inventiveness?*

*My evaluative criteria are guided by my valuing of expansiveness in its many forms because I recognize that individuals, and groups, can generate innovative solutions if they can know, value, and decide in conditions that heighten, rather than inhibit, wondering, mindfulness, and creativity. Expansiveness, of course, needs to be balanced by appropriate contraction such as verifications of fact, agreement on decisions, taking action, and so on.*

In my case, my (split-second) criterion for selecting my best option is that which enables exchange of meaning rather than mutual defense. What I do is open my arms, hold space, and breathe. I acknowledge the intelligibility of the situation: “Here we are! Just like we talked about two days ago in the workshop, this conversation has just become very difficult, and now we have a chance to practice what we talked about then!”

I have a strong sense of ‘leaning into’ the uncertainty of the moment; of being attentive to my own unknowing, aware that my hunches are in need of verification. I articulate what I know. Two members of the group passed, so that two other participants registered significance in different ways. For one it makes her feel less secure, another considers them to be rude, and for the people who decided to pass, they likely have very different meaning. I look at each of the interveners in my brief summary: acknowledging their concerns somatically, and cognitively through my slowed-down speech, my open arms, and my effort to recognize and encompass their expressions—spoken and unspoken—of what matters, deeply, to them.

Leila and Maya nod to me as I look elicitive at them; in our complex, silent interchange, I verify that I have sufficiently understood their concerns and they have no immediate need to speak. I feel carried in the flow of the moment to turn my attention to Lucas.

### **Account-giving with the Silent Lucas**

Amidst my complex responses to Lucas, I orient my attention to understanding him, to seek intelligibility in his actions. Although he is silent, he is

providing a lot of information: his reddening tight face, downcast eyes, and shallow breathing. Since he is clear that he prefers not to speak, I phrase my questions to generate yes or no answers in response to my hunches. I acknowledge his discomfort, reflecting that there is clearly a lot going on for him. His nods are barely perceptible. Oriented to his process of valuing, I say that although I don't know for sure what is going on with him, I could imagine that his decision to pass was based on caring a lot, not a lack of caring.<sup>42</sup>

At this, he looks up, makes eye contact with me, and his face has changed from downcast closure to more visible distress. I say, "And one of the possible decisions you could have made is to leave the room, but you chose to stay, although it's really hard, and you're staying in this hard place rather than running from it." His nods and his facial expressions are much less contracted, more animated. It seems that my recognition of his ethical stance to remain in the room, even as he was being negatively judged for passing, made a difference to him.

I glance around the room and see softness in some faces looking at him, others concerned, and others disengaged. I say that, although in this moment he wants to pass, he could consider contributing at the end of the circle if there was time. He nods again, much more relaxed, and the group, including the two interveners, also appear to relax. I sense that we, the group, might be ready to move on.

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<sup>42</sup> Identifying caring (and not a lack of caring) in conflict is a concept and strategy taken from Picard's (2016) practice in insight mediation.

*Quality note: representation. "I kept wondering when I was reading this vignette why you didn't take on Jack: why did he get off so easy?" remarks one committee member, with a laugh, during our discussion of an early draft of the vignette and commentary. She evaluates that addressing Jack's decision to pass would have been a(nother) good option, based on the criterion of fairness; that Jack, as the first passer, who may have instigated Lucas' decision to pass, should have been called upon to give more of an account.*

*Maria, in our debriefing interview, mentions her (ethical) concern about Jack's passing, and wonders if it might have been helpful if I had addressed Jack in that moment. My response is to wish that I were writing fiction so I could describe myself as doing that (and a whole lot more)!*

*Similar to my encounter with Gabriel, I write myself as limited, partial, and willing to learn. By 'learn' I mean that as I respond to these relevant questions, I expand my horizon of what can be known, valued, and decided upon. Addressing Jack had not occurred to me in that earlier moment, and now I see a more expansive set of options for intervention in future encounters. Although those future encounters will inevitably be different, I have wider horizons of possible options and enhanced criteria on which to choose a 'good' response.*

### **Leila Changes her Mind**

I sense that the tension in Leila, as well as other participants, has diminished, and that it might be possible to invite her to speak her turn in the progression around the circle. We look at each other, in a look that conveys my unspoken wondering about how she is doing; the inclination of my head, my

smile, a gesture of my hands, conveys respect and support (however she might interpret it). She responds with a small smile. In response to this silent interchange, I ask her explicitly if she feels comfortable enough to continue. She nods, and takes another breath.

Leila talks about her hopes for the process as a whole, the importance for her that all voices are heard so that everyone has a stake in the solution, and her willingness to work together in this situation involving risks. Leila's decision to participate in this way is considerably different than her decision a few minutes before, where she resisted the invitation to speak because of the previous participants' behavior. Leila's mind has changed; she makes a different decision.

Importantly, Leila's opinion of Lucas may not have changed; she could still disvalue his decision to pass, and his role in the group. But his decision to pass is no longer the 'deal breaker' to her that it was a minute before. Instead, she decides to verbally engage with the group. The subsequent participants take up what she expresses and add additional considerations, so that more complexity emerges, and possible next steps are suggested.

In my understanding, it is Leila's decision to speak, and how she speaks, that dissipates the conflict for new possibilities to emerge. Her change of mind orients the group's attention, carries our minds toward the hoped-for future, and the process to achieve it that involves challenge and collaboration. Despite the importance of Leila's change of mind, she does not effect the change alone. Maya decides not to escalate her concerns; Jack and Lucas decide to refrain from defending themselves against her moralizing judgment; the subsequent

participants take up Leila's words and build the collective understanding of the issue and significance of it.

My intervention as the leader has some effect on shaping the conversation, too. Leila and I have several unspoken interchanges in which I register an exchange of meaning. I recognize—especially from my first case study of the “Intransigent Conflict” —that it is possible for two people to know and value interchanges very differently. Nevertheless, I suspect that my ‘relationship’ with Leila, my interactions with Lucas and the rest of the group, effected a change in her mind, from her decision to block to one of more openness.

### **What Happens Next: Non-linear Change**

The meeting then continues further, which surfaces substantial debate and tension about the decision. Although the group has exchanged ideas and information, they reach no conclusive decision, other than there will be another meeting that they will conduct on their own. A week and a half later, Lucas and Maria speak. He articulates his sense of threat in such a way that Maria responds by suggesting new possibilities for governance, which paves the way for the decision and the celebratory email I receive a few months later. Many decisions create possibilities for a new outcome.

*Quality note: choosing and incorporating feedback. Throughout the writing of the case, I wondered about with whom I would talk as interlocutor(s). I deliberated many options. I could interview all the participants; only my co-facilitator; just the participants involved in the interpersonal conflict I describe; only one of the participants in the conflict; one non-conflicting participant; or other*

*possibilities. Selecting the best option was predicated on what was important to me in soliciting and integrating feedback.*

*Part of me wanted to consult with all the participants in the conflict to illuminate and work with the complexity of multiple perspectives. I discarded that option as too unwieldy for my purposes. Part of me wanted to consult with only one participant, with whom I could engage deeply in a collaborative generation of insight. It was a consultation with my dissertation committee, who reminded me of my primary task of accounting for my interiority in intersubjective encounters, that helped me decide on Maria as my interlocutor.*

*This decision was based on what I know and value about Maria: she is a thoughtful seasoned leader, someone who could reflect on her interiority and be a skillful listener to help me reflect on mine. She had been one of the participants in the meeting—present to, but distinct from the conflict. She was privy to the game-changing conversation with Lucas. She could also help me decide, again, about including some or all of the other participants in the encounter. I felt I needed to confirm my decision to interview her and not the other participants with whom it might be useful to speak.*

*After securing her consent to participate, I completed the draft of this vignette, which I sent to her to read. I also drafted a small portion of the above analysis, mainly to clarify my thinking, as I recognized how complex and difficult it was to recount and analyze this complicated meeting. Prior to my interview with Maria, I chose to share only the vignette with her, rather than the reflexive commentary. I had a feeling that the commentary was only half-baked at the*

*time, and might have carried our minds towards verifying the commentary rather than discerning intelligibility in the vignette.*

### **The Debriefing Inquiry**

Maria and I sit together in one of her organization's beautiful meeting spaces. We begin the conversation with my thanks for her participation. She responds with appreciation, saying how much she enjoyed reading the vignette. I ask her about the degree to which she thinks I should involve other participants in a debriefing interview such as this. She reflects for a moment or two. She says that although she appreciates that as a researcher I want to be accountable for my representations of others, she recognizes that my focus is on my own interiority, and that consulting many others might detract from the thesis rather than add to it. She adds that at least one of the participants in my vignette has become physically distanced from the group and would be difficult to contact, if at all. She affirms my decision to limit the feedback, to be 'good.'

Having addressed this substantial concern, we settle into a conversation about the encounter itself. I ask her, "What was significant about the meeting for you?" She says that the discussion that I attended was one of a series of meetings, so she found my vignette very helpful to recall the dynamics of that particular encounter.

### **Maria's and Others' Knowing and Valuing**

"I was incredibly anxious," she recalls. "Going into a potentially explosive situation...it felt a bit like walking into a fire." Maria's preoccupation was that she had to deliver the news from the senior decision maker, which she knew would

be very controversial. “When I dropped the news,” she says, “I could see the mixed reactions. And something that you didn’t pick up on in your story is the reaction of one usually outspoken member... he threw down his pen and pushed his chair back.” Maria knew that many members of the group would have been aware of that particular participant’s silence throughout the meeting, and that his silence affected the discussion in ways that I would not have been able to discern. It is another example of how this encounter has multiple significances; told from Maria’s point of view, the story might barely be recognizable as the one I have recounted.

Similarly, the accounts that people made in the circle were diverse and multi-perspectival. Although carriers were provided to orient attention and behavior (in the form of a topic and process), individual minds generated their own accounts, expressed their views, stayed silent, or spoke at length. Maria remarks that the participants in the conversation were well known to each other, and their conversational moves had been activated many times. The participants would have had a sense of what to expect from each other, “Almost like dancers completing the steps in a predictable way,” she says. Jack’s, and then Lucas’, decisions to pass, however, were surprising moves.

Over the course of our conversation, Maria reflects that she had many (intersubjective) interpretations of participants’ intentions, in the vignette I describe. For her, Jack’s decision to pass seemed like an effort on his part to manipulate the conversation, as a deliberate strategy to speak last, to have the last word. She saw Lucas as being overcome with an intensity of frustration and

concern that he could not process at the time, “Afraid that he was going to explode.” She respected Leila’s intervention as naming a concern—that Maria considered might have been directed at Jack’s potentially manipulative move. And she thought that Maya’s intervention was characteristic in being forceful and discouraged.

*Quality note: sense-making and theorizing. As I recount, to another friend, the story of what happened, he wonders if Leila’s intervention was possibly a relief to me, insofar as she named concerns that many in the group, including myself, might be registering. His expertise in complexity leads him to observe that Leila’s intervention, and her change of mind, does not happen in isolation: maybe she notices some expressions on key faces around the room and decides to say something. Maybe I look like I need help as I take in Lucas’ declaration that he would pass, or perhaps through my somatic interaction with her she recognizes an invitation. There are multiple interpretations of these complex moments, pointing to the importance of using theoretical frames that embrace complexity, contingency, emergence, and uncertainty.*

### **The Non-linear Complexity of Change**

Maria remarks that my “work with Lucas was a watershed moment for him, which he would mine only partially then, but more so later when we were able to have a conversation. It’s like it started there, for him... I’m not sure that he had touched that place within himself that was the root of his real concern... and if he had, and articulated it, I hadn’t heard it, so maybe it was a change in me. Because it was only in that subsequent conversation with Lucas that I finally

heard, or maybe he finally said, what mattered to him. I think in that moment, with you, he kind of dug deep.”

We reflect together on the non-linear complexity of the encounter: how meanings and outcomes can emerge in retrospect but are unpredictable in the moment. Maria laughs as she says, “It’s like working with a dream. You can try to interpret it ‘muscularly’ and parse it out, but sometimes you don’t have to understand the dream for it to have an impact you. That’s what we’re talking about. We don’t have to exactly understand that meeting to have an appreciation for what came together to make something profound happen.”

“But that can be kind of ... scary,” she says, smiling, “because it’s not immediately reproducible. You just have to learn, through experience, to trust the process, don’t you? And trusting the process doesn’t mean that it’s a perfect process!” We talk more about how a leader develops practice in recognizing and verifying our perceptions, our hunches, as we interpret and respond to others’.

Amidst the complexity, she feels that the turning point for Leila, as well as the group, was the interaction I had with Lucas. She says, “One of your particular gifts in this work is what I would call a non-anxious presence, an ability to be present in an uncomfortable moment...without having to escape the discomfort or take excessive control of it...that’s worth a lot.”

### **Leadership in Spaces of Encounter**

In response to her, I affirm the importance of a leader’s presence, and trust, in the process. Although “there are people in the process who are shut down, the process itself is not shut down. It can be possible to expand around

contraction.” She takes up the theme of a leader’s importance in supporting a group’s thinking, particularly in my interaction with Lucas. Although this was a group well known to each other, she says that in that moment, “people might have been seeing him again for the first time through your eyes. We were noticing you noticing him, and what he was grappling with. Maybe that becomes contagious in the group. So that respectful noticing really matters....

The other thing, too that was really effective, and it just occurred to me. I think you mirrored back to us, the willingness that there was in the whole group to move forward. By naming his willingness to stay in the room, although it was difficult for him, you noticed in a subtle way that everyone was deciding to be there...Maybe that’s another function of a leader in a process like that: to mirror back to the group what the group has put out, just like a mother mirrors a child and that’s how the child comes to know herself.”

*Quality note: theorizing. As Maria names a foundational concept in intersubjective theory, of how a child comes to know themselves through repeated interaction with caregiving others, I also realize that the ‘coming to know’ is not uni-directional. As I discover in my second vignette of “Outrage,” the parent also comes to know herself (as a caregiving self) through the interactions with the child, just as the leader exists only in relation to the group who ‘follows.’*

Maria sighs with a grin, “I wish working with groups, or working with conflict, could come down to three variables, and we could just tweak those variables. It’s not chemistry, is it?” I respond that, “I’m starting to think that maybe putting more compassion into systems like these can often produce better

outcomes... but how to do that, that's the tricky part." She nods. "When a person believes they are on the receiving end of compassion from another person, suddenly the world becomes a safer place...At their best, I guess, that's what major world religions are aiming at: compassionate people building compassionate communities in compassionate ways... Imagine what we can do if we believe we're in a safer place." On that note, we look at each other and smile. The conversation feels done, our co-inquiry saturated, and our hearts (I can speak confidently for her, even without asking) are a little more light.

## Chapter 9: Epilogue

The preceding four cases have been crafted as distinct and interdependent studies, with varying layers of context and intersubjective complexity, building on insights and concepts in relation to each other. As a whole, they form an account of many accounts, a multi-reflexive autoethnographic inquiry into how interpersonal argument can dissipate so that new possibilities can emerge.

This epilogue traces the development of the methodological and conceptual arcs throughout the cases to present a more integrated examination of the complex and nuanced research that took place. Intersubjectivity, conflict, and change are necessarily messy, amorphous, and shambolic; any account of them is fundamentally incomplete. Recognizing the incompleteness of an account does not make it unworthy or deficient; on the contrary, recognizing partiality is fundamental to the quality of this research into complex terrain. Summative clarity can sometimes mask the fundamental uncertainty of complexity, making it necessary to resist creating an overview that is too tidy, definitive, or conclusive.

The chapter begins with a short overview of the cases before turning to a case by case consideration of the methodological arc, which progressively develops the layered accounts from their introductory elements to a more sophisticated application. Subsequent to the methodological arc is a consideration of the conceptual arcs of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change. Although not linear, there is a cumulative progression of method and analysis

that generates a multifaceted response to the question that guides the research as a whole.

### **Overview of the Cases**

Case 1, the “Intransigent Conflict,” investigates a domestic interpersonal argument over household cleaning products that is dissolved by the inclusion of a friend in the space of encounter, and whose remark instigated my re-valuing, or discerning different significance, of my partner’s behavior. “Outrage,” the second case, inquires into the dissipation of my hostile ruminations about my daughter’s hockey tryout; the dissipation is effected through a discovery that a sense of helplessness dynamized my outrage, so that non-conflictual possibilities became preferable to the face-saving conflict I was previously considering. The third case, “Listening to Another Mind,” examines the researching self in the role of listener who helps facilitate the dissipation of a friend’s argument with his colleague by interactive account-giving so that new affordances are made. “Tension in the Group” studies a complex group process in which an interpersonal argument erupts and subsides, creating the condition for a new possibility to eventually emerge.

### **The Methodological Arc**

This section reflects on the research process through which the cases were produced. Throughout the cases, I experiment with and progressively develop a flexible, reflexive autoethnography that investigates the interiority, relationality, and sociality of the researching self engaged with the phenomena of interpersonal argument and its dissipation.

The cases each begin with a dramatically analytical vignette of an encounter that narratively expresses the cognition and affect of the researching self in her encounters with others and the occurrence of interpersonal argument. The layered accounts in this thesis generate first-person dramatic vignettes and third-person analysis, thus producing reflexively analytical and rigorously accountable research. These vignettes express affects, like shame and love, that dynamize interpersonal argument and its dissipation. The reflexive accounts produce more abstract understandings of how interpersonal argument can dissipate for new possibilities to emerge. The debriefing inquiries are a further development of the method that include interlocutors' perspectives to produce multiply reflexive accounts.

Within the commentaries, I create 'quality notes' that relate to assessments of quality in the research process. Situated within each case, the notes create a further layer of reflexivity by permitting the researching self to comment on the analysis and account for significant points of quality in research.

### **Case 1: "Intransigent Conflict"**

Case 1 introduces the methodological arc of the research. It articulates the importance of consciousness as the locus for investigating how interpersonal conflict can arise and dissipate. It recognizes the challenge of writing the complexity of individual consciousness that is situated in relation to others in complex social contexts of meanings. The challenges of writing as a process of inquiry are multiple: it is difficult to recount a fleeting moment (of annoyance at my partner's behavior, for example) that is imbued with complex meaning; it is

impossible to account for all the aspects of the encounter of which I am aware, and there are many aspects of each encounter that are beyond my awareness. Recognizing these limits, the case accounts for how the selection of material is shaped by many factors: the specific context and exigencies of a dissertation, the conceptual resources of the research, the inclusion of interlocutors, and the drama and humor of key moments.

Although writing as a process of inquiry has its challenges and limitations, the case develops the substantial power of writing to generate quality aesthetic and analytical insight. As a craft of introspective interpretive engagement with interior and exterior data, the writing process, including its revisions and refinements, is impelled by the self-reflexive questions: is it accurate enough? Dramatic enough? Critical enough? This reflexive writing progresses throughout the cases as a sustained critical attention to analytical validity, significance, and relevance. Several quality notes point to the importance of writing for stimulating insights, evoking related data, improving analysis, and for moving tacit knowing to more explicit assertion and reflective inquiry. This is a key facet of my development of the autoethnographical method of the research.

The case recognizes the complexity of interpretive sense-making, as both partial and generative. The sense-making is partial, in the sense of being necessarily incomplete; it is also generative, in that describing the account generates additional meanings from listeners, such as the reciprocating story of the person with a cane in the elevator that expands the interpretive possibilities in the moment. Although recognizing the risk of uncritical certainty, the case affirms

with clarity that my re-valuing of my partner's behavior had a direct impact on dissolving the argument.

The first debriefing inquiry is introduced, in which I am uncertain about how to elicit my interlocutors' response to the research as well as how that response will be incorporated in the text. As an opportunity to verify my analysis of the argument's dissipation, the debriefing inquiry is helpful as an account of quality. I also gradually develop a capacity to engage more deeply with my interlocutors' interiority. In this case, engaging with my partner's interiority elicits the recognition that her sense of the encounter was different from mine, thereby generating the insight that shared interpretation is not necessary for dissipation of interpersonal argument to occur. This is a significant insight generated through my development of the research method of inquiring into others' interiorities while maintaining a focus on my own.

Of importance is the recognition that their interiority, like mine, is relationally shaped; the first debriefing inquiry becomes attuned to that relationality in the process of asking questions and sharing perspectives. The relational method of the debriefing interview is subsequently developed explicitly through the progression of the cases. I identify relevant questions for the subsequent inquiry, depicting the progressive development of the process. I also account for the presentation of this relational material, so that the first case presents a more summative account while the final case depicts more in-the-moment relationality of a turn-taking conversation between Maria and I.

The "Intransigent Conflict" accounts for closure by recognizing a sense of

mental satiety as a signal that the account is sufficiently analyzed. The satiety is experienced as a sense of fewer emergent or relevant questions, an assessment that within the scope of its inquiry the insights have been critically verified (enough) and the interpretive significance accounted for (enough), whereby the measure of 'enough' is generated from my own sense of sufficiency and is subsequently validated by the epistemic community of my dissertation committee.

### **Case 2: "Outrage"**

Case 2 continues to develop the autoethnographic craft of writing its compelling analytical vignettes, with their moments of emotional spontaneity as well as complex uncertainty. I reflect on recollection and recording as different kinds of data collection, discovering that listening to the recording of my conversation with Sophia presents the non-linear messiness of the actual conversation. It is a messiness that recollection can sometimes make problematically smooth, even as I recognize, with Sophia, that recollection (rather than recording) is the repository where affect, and significance, lies.

As Sophia further points out, the vignette traces the movement between the interiority of my consciousness and the exteriority of our dialogue, so that a page-by-page comparative review of the recording's transcript would be irrelevant, insofar as a fragment of our conversation elicits a spontaneous reflection in my consciousness that is represented at length in the vignette.

The case of "Outrage" acknowledges that the vignette is an excised portion of a long conversation, and accounts for the closure of the vignette at a

midpoint in the conversation, just after the emergence of my expansive sense of love that relates to a shared vulnerability with my daughter. I recognize that I privilege the emergence of love to conclude the vignette, primarily because of the expansive role it played in dissipating the conflict. In choosing a point of closure, I recognize the importance of Sophia's perspective in validating my account and contributing to the sense-making. In this way, the presence of interlocutors becomes more visible throughout the text, as part of my epistemic community to whom I am accountable, as well as contributors to the production of insights.

Members of my dissertation committee appear as an embodied epistemic community in this case's reflexive commentary. Their presence in the text provides reflection-inducing questions ("is this a conflict?") that develop the analytical strength of the case, as well as the narrative features that are foregrounded. Further analysis is provided by Sophia's recognition of the surplus of complex social meanings that are underexplored areas in my reflexive commentary, such as the significance of my being a (non-hockey playing) mother responding to hockey-cultured men who were making decisions about my daughter. Her contribution adds reflexive depth to the account, asserting the many analytical possibilities available and validating the ones that have been accountably presented.

In the debriefing inquiry, my conversation with Sophia illuminates her interiority and then opens a space to verify my 'intention-reading.' I ask if I had accurately 'read' her intentions behind some of her questions and responses to me. For example, I wondered if her question, "And Sage learned something?"

was an effort to diminish my outrage by inclining my mind toward insight into the benefits of the tryout. She confirmed that my intention-reading was correct. In doing so, she helped me to affirm intersubjectivity as a complex process of knowing (the other), being known (by the other), and knowing I am being known, all of which generate relational responses in me. This is a significant analytical insight that is generated through my development and application of the research method. Further inquiry into this analytical insight on intersubjectivity and intention-reading had to be set aside for the main focus of the research to be maintained.

Saturating inquiry is thus accounted for in the case with the recognition that areas of investigation need to be set aside to maintain a focused attention on the current research. The role of shame in dynamizing conflict, as another example, is set aside as an inquiry for a future time. I repeatedly realize, without belaboring the point, that quality in research depends on a disciplined focus to refrain from pursuing too many lines of inquiry, no matter how interesting.

### **Case 3: “Listening to Another Mind”**

This case continues to develop writing as a process of inquiry. Although the first section of this case’s vignette has merit—for its dialogue that addresses threat in conflict—the section lacks an account of my interiority. The rewritten version presents more interiority that includes the (ethical) deliberations of the researching self’s response to her friend. As a significant aspect of quality of research, Gabriel informs me in our subsequent debriefing inquiry that by writing my interiority, I evoke his own interiority more intensely. This evocation

responsively sparks his recollection and related analysis more vividly, which makes our collaborative inquiry very generative. One of the outcomes of this generative inquiry was the insight about self-referenced and other-referenced curiosity. This recognition, that high quality attention to interiority can generate high quality analysis, is a significant methodological discovery. In other words, the interiority *and* relationality of the method can produce analytically powerful results.

Representation emerges as a significant consideration in this case. Gabriel tells me that I did not adequately represent the role-related tension he experienced in the conflict. I grapple with his concern for some time, wondering if this is possibly an example of 'poor quality' in research. I subsequently account for my vignette as 'good' by appealing to the criteria of the (shared) valuing of removing identifying information, and the unapologetic recognition that the account is a partial one focused on the researcher's subjectivity and cannot reflect the conflict in all its complexity. In our second debriefing inquiry, Gabriel affirms the validity of my choice.<sup>43</sup> In this way, everyday ethics are negotiated in the investigative research process as well as in the encounters I am investigating. Providing this evidentiary narrative, accounting for the research choices, is part of the assertion of quality in the research process.

Saturating inquiry is discussed in this case by recognizing when an inquiry is *not* saturated. Because further relevant questions remain, I find myself still unsettled, energized in my curiosity about the change in his conflict behavior. I

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<sup>43</sup> If he had disagreed with my decision, a subsequent conversation would have been needed. This issue of dissension in an autoethnographic account should be taken up in further lines of inquiry.

re-engage with him in a second de-briefing inquiry, generate more insights, and recount them in a way that I discern to be more complete and more settled in their sense-making. Research cycling in a quality note in this chapter points to implications beyond this case, of my encounter with a senior manager in a large organization, engaged in an account-giving process of discerning ‘the good thing to do’ in a business decision. I recognize that knowing, valuing, and deciding take place in many everyday spaces of encounter, and that attention to these intersubjective processes would be a useful path of further inquiry.<sup>44</sup>

#### **Case 4: “Tension in the Group”**

This case engages with the methodological complexity of researching a group process through the subjectivity of the researcher. With more participants, there is exponential amplitude of complexity in the space of encounter, making it difficult to select and analyze material without being overwhelmed by complexity or asserting a linearity that does not exist. In this way, the method in this case is based solidly on the substantial development that has taken place in the previous three cases, in which: the process of writing-as-inquiry has progressed; the partiality and validity of my interpretive sense-making has been affirmed; the theorizing of complexity is practiced; questions of representation are accounted for; and the debriefing interviews have matured.

The analysis in this case benefits from engaging with my epistemic community. For example, the insight-generating question (“whose mind

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<sup>44</sup> There is a similar recognition in “Tension in the Group” that my research touches on conceptual resources from diverse epistemic communities such as leadership and organizational development.

changed?) elicited a clearer articulation of the argument and its dissipation than I had been able to generate up to that point.<sup>45</sup> In addition to clarifying my knowledge-production, the epistemic community also elicited reflection on my decision-making (“why did you let Jack off easy?”); I noted how the question elicited a more expansive set of options for intervention in future encounters. Insofar as my committee’s calls-to-account took place in encounters without threat, they helped me to learn: I discovered new intelligibilities and generated further options of action. These notes highlight the iterative intersubjective nature of knowledge production and decision-making.

Representation—of self and other—is a continual challenge that is acknowledged and addressed in this text. As with the other cases, I account for this representation by recognizing the vignette and commentary as a partial portrayal of complexity mediated through the subjectivity of the researching self. In each of the other cases, I provide additional accountability by including the perspective of the interlocutor(s) directly involved. The complexity of the multiple participants in this encounter, however, makes the choice of interlocutor a further point of accountability that is addressed in a quality note.

Maria, as my chosen interlocutor, validated my account, even as she acknowledged that her account would have had different elements, such as the silent pen-dropping participant. Affirming my vignette, she recognized the significance of my expansive response to the emerging conflict and identified the interaction with Lucas as a watershed moment—a recognition which generated her further reflection about the significance of the event. In this way, our different

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<sup>45</sup> The role of questioning to elicit insight is discussed in further detail in the case of “Outrage.”

perspectives had a shared commonality; more significantly, the differences can instigate reflexivity (when they do not engender threat) by seeking to understand the variances.<sup>46</sup> The relationality and interiority of the method is again confirmed as a powerful methodological tool for generating quality analysis.

### **The Conceptual Arc: Intersubjectivity, Conflict, and Change**

Recalling the guiding question of the research—of how polarized argument can dissipate so that new possibilities can emerge—the following section of this epilogue accounts for the application and conceptual development of the notions of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change.

#### **Case 1: “Intransigent Conflict”**

The first case, the intransigent conflict over cleaning products, is an entryway through which key concepts of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change are introduced. Through the inquiry into a conflict over my toxicologist partner’s decision to use cleaning products I disvalue, I differentiate my operations of consciousness from spaces of encounter and complex fields of meaning. Our argument was enacted in a space of encounter in which I know and register the significance of her behavior that is shaped by the social meanings of good partner, consumer, and toxicologist. Moreover, my incomplete, constricted knowing of her was enacted in a space of encounter in which our account-giving was accusatory and defensive. These aspects of intersubjectivity are differentiated in the analysis, providing empirical support to the conceptual development of the tripartite approach I advance.

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<sup>46</sup> Disagreement without conflict is taken up at greater length in the summary of the following case; it is also the area of intersubjectivity that Matusov (1996) studied at length.

After differentiating the operations of consciousness, the spaces of encounter and the complex systems of meaning, I further differentiate the operations of consciousness to distinguish my 'knowing' from my 'valuing,' and identify their role in my conflict behavior. This differentiation is important because the argument was not about facts, or knowing. Georgine had, in fact, applied non-vinegar products, thereby disregarding my preferences. I was not incorrect in the argument; my knowing was verifiable by an appeal to observable data. What animated the argument was my discernment of the significance of the products and her application of them that sparked my unreflexive decision to criticize. This differentiation of operations of consciousness—between my knowing, valuing, and deciding—is a foundational component of the analysis that is developed through the remaining cases.

Two further foundational analytic components are that the discernment of threat dynamizes this conflict, and that affect signals a discernment of threat. In seeing Georgine using those products, my mind discerned threat in the aspects of the personal ("I am unimportant"), practical ("there are health risks"), and social ("she is a bad toxicologist who should know better"). At the time, these nodes of threat were not registered as ethical narratives; these narratives were recognized in subsequent reflection. Instead, the threat was registered in my affect of annoyance, signaling that something of unwelcome significance had been discerned. This is a foundational analytic recognition of the relation between affect and cognition that is recognized and explored at length in this

autoethnographic research. My affect registers a significance that my cognition can discern.

This relational concept between affect and cognition is identified in subsequent cases. The threats discerned in “Outrage” were signaled by anger and shame; the threats in “Listening to Another Mind” were registered in Gabriel as worry and frustration; while the affects that dynamized the conflict in “Tension in the Group” were implicit yet evident in their manifestation of criticism and withdrawal. The subsequent cases continue to explore how affect can register significance that cognition can discern through the process of eliciting ethical reflexivity.

I further recognize that the discernment of threat has a constrictive effect on my cognition. My annoyance at Georgine did not generate an expansive consideration of options. Instead, my mind was swiftly carried to the unreflexive, choiceless choice of contemptuous criticism. My contracted criticism of Georgine did not change her mind to align with my valuing; quite the opposite. Instead of changing her mind, my criticism generated threat in her, so that in her state of contraction she lashed out with a critical remark of her own. In this case, our simultaneously contracted operations of consciousness did not produce an expanded result—it produced a choiceless reactive bickering that was generated by threat and sustained by our increasing efforts to defend. The constrictive effect of threat is another fundamental component of the analysis of interpersonal argument, so that the diminishment of threat is a central part of the research into how argument can change.

In sum, this first case generates a foundational analysis. This analysis integrates the conceptual application of intersubjectivity and conflict to provide a detailed and nuanced account of interpersonal argument as an intersubjective process of knowledge-production and decision-making. It identifies how knowing, valuing, and deciding in relation to the other can dynamize conflict. The case reveals that the discernment of threat can constrictively impel unreflexive decisions in intersubjective spaces of encounter so that decisions are more 'carried' than 'made.' These decisions are enacted in account-giving spaces of encounter where ethical judgments are asserted and defended, appealing to broader systems of social meaning. This foundational analytical framing of intersubjectivity and conflict is a significant aspect of the autoethnographical research that develops over the four cases.

The account of change—the dissipation of interpersonal argument—is also a foundational point of analysis in this case. Interpersonal argument can dissipate by diminishment of threat and changes to the intersubjective processes that engender it. Rebecca's call altered the space of encounter so our recriminating account-giving changed. I recount that Rebecca was able to expansively, affectionately acknowledge my threat without inhabiting it, and to affirm Georgine in a way that Georgine could more expansively affirm. Rebecca recognized our different valuing so that each of us could be right without the other being wrong. This diminished my sense of the constrictive effect of threat. This diminished threat instigated a more expansive state through which I was able to hear her remark about Georgine and her family of origin in a way that

further expanded the interpretive possibilities, to consider Georgine's behavior as protective industriousness rather than pointed disregard. The diminishment of threat supported a change in the way I intersubjectively 'knew' Georgine.

No new factual knowledge was acquired in the course of that encounter. But in that more expansive space of encounter where a third person intervened to diminish the sense of threat, the change in mind involved revaluing, a contingent recombination of ethical affordances. The diminishment of threat in the intersubjective space of a three-way encounter precipitated my re-valuing of her behavior, which subsequently changed my own behavior.

Importantly, my high esteem of the non-toxic cleaning products remained, even as my valuing of her behavior changed. Similarly, I discovered through our debriefing inquiry that Georgine's interpretation of the encounter was quite different from mine. This affirms a key concept: that shared interpretation or intersubjective 'common ground' is not necessary for interpersonal argument to dissipate. In the absence of threat, diverse interpretations can co-exist without conflict.<sup>47</sup>

The case of "Intransigent Conflict" introduces the foundational analytical dimensions of the research in which the tripartite approach to intersubjectivity is applied, concepts of conflict are illuminated, and the account of change congruently advances the claims that the diminishment of threat, and changes to aspects of the intersubjective processes, can dissipate interpersonal argument. The case of "Outrage" explores in more detail how eliciting reflexivity is an additional aspect of accounting for the dissipation of interpersonal argument.

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<sup>47</sup> See also Melchin and Picard (2008) for more extensive elaboration on this idea.

## **Case 2: “Outrage”**

In this case, intersubjective processes are explored in more depth and complexity. Two ‘realms’ of intersubjectivity were active in this vignette. One intersubjective ‘realm’ was with Sophia, where we knew each other, engaged in account-giving, and mobilized (and were carried) by complex systems of meanings such as ‘good mothering.’ The second ‘realm’ of intersubjectivity was with the coaches and the hockey tryouts. I ‘knew’ the coaches to be unfair; the space of encounter with the coaches was enacted through the hockey tryouts and the conversations within them; and my knowing and encountering of them was contextually shaped by the complex systems of meanings about hockey teams, gender, and tryout ethics. The intersubjective space of encounter with Sophia gives me the opportunity to reflect on the intersubjective realm of the hockey tryouts. This was also true in “Listening to Another Mind” in which the account-giving between Gabriel and I offered him an opportunity to reflect on the intersubjective complexity between himself, Felicity, and Abby.

Analysis of conflict continues to develop in this case, particularly the notions of threat, defense, and intersubjective processes. Like in “Intransigent Conflict,” threat contracted my knowing and valuing so that I found my mind being choicelessly carried by ruminations of anger and recrimination. In this case, the social dimension of threat (the violation of norms) was particularly active, as my repetitious narratives of the coaches’ unfair behavior occupied my mind. Although I knew myself to be outraged, part of me recognized the degree to which I was being choicelessly carried by those fuming narratives. The sense of

choicelessness made me want to try to change my mind. It signaled the need to talk to a friend or, in more technical terms, to seek a more expansive intersubjective space of encounter to support a reflexivity that might discern what happened (the knowable intelligibility), and what mattered about it (the significance). Although I wanted to change, I noticed that I could not induce my own ethical reflexivity—I was too constricted by the threat and was carried by the repetitious narratives of injustice. This case thus articulates a further elaboration on the concept of threat and the constrictive choicelessness it can engender.

Account-giving in the space of encounter is a primary focus of inquiry in this case, particularly the aspects of questioning and responding, and the knowing, valuing, and deciding that are responsively activated in the process. The research attends to the structure of questions that can elicit reflexivity in spaces of encounter. The question “Sage learned something?” did not induce my reflexivity, insofar as I considered that Sophia had missed my point.<sup>48</sup> The questions “Where is the conflict? What are you protecting her from?” elicited my reflexivity into what was known and what mattered about the conflict to me. In other words, Sophia’s question oriented my attention to reflexively wonder about my knowing and valuing. The structure of questions to carry consciousness and elicit reflexive account-giving in spaces of encounter is an analytic point that is taken up in the subsequent cases. As I note in “Tension in the Group,” the ‘best’ question is not identifiable as ‘already existing out there.’ Instead, the value of a

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<sup>48</sup> I note a similar distinction between kinds of elicitive questions in “Listening to Another Mind” when my question, “You didn’t like the messing up?” generates a verifying agreement from Gabriel, but does not elicit reflexivity.

question can be discerned by the response it elicits: does it generate more threat? Does it facilitate reflexivity or curiosity?

I discover in the research that instigating reflexivity can help to recognize new aspects of an event; to discern other significance; and to make explicit what was previously implicit. After some struggle to identify it, I realize that a sense of shame is a salient affect that is dynamizing my consciousness. The relationship between affect and cognition is further affirmed in this instance. With cognitive reflection on affect, I recognize that the feeling of shame registers a helpless inability to protect my daughter from loss. The diminished sense of myself as being unable to protect her is a constriction-inducing threat that dynamizes my preoccupying search for face-saving actions. Once I discerned the significance of my sense of helplessness, other options became preferable to conflict. Thus reflexivity, induced in spaces of encounter, had a role to play in changing in my valuing and deciding that dynamized the conflict. This was a further development of the insight generated from the case of the “Intransigent Conflict.” Whereas re-valuing in that case happened spontaneously, the process of instigating re-valuing through reflexivity was a salient factor in dissipating conflict in this case. Reflexivity affected my behavior, insofar as my decision-making becomes oriented to responding to my helplessness rather than ‘righting the wrong’ of the tryout process.

I emphasize in this case that the ethical reflexivity elicited in that space of encounter might have had a different outcome. It might have generated a clearer discernment of the importance of the social threat of the coaches’ unfairness,

which might have led me to develop strategies to make a complaint or withdraw. The analytic point is not that conflict is bad, but that it can be reflexively instigated or choicelessly carried towards behaviors of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Conflict might be the most principled course of action, or it might be hastily, choicelessly enacted. Ethical reflexivity appears, in this case, to be a salient factor between the sense of being choicelessly carried or more conscientiously responsive.

A further salient factor in the change is the expansive sense of love I encounter in recognizing that our mutual vulnerability as mother and daughter produces a powerful strength of intersubjective connection. In the presence of that love, that powerful attunement, my mind could expand. I started to wonder how I could respond to my vulnerability, and hers, rather than how I could teach the coaches a lesson. I recognized that my sense of social ethics (the coaches were not acting right) was less salient than my sense of a diminished self. I also recognized the difference between discerning a diminishing, shameful vulnerability that is isolating, and an expansive vulnerability that connects me to others, a vulnerability of solidarity. The expansiveness of affect on knowing, valuing, and deciding is a further conceptual aspect that contributes to the analysis of the case.

### **Case 3: “Listening to Another Mind”**

Whereas the first two cases explore intersubjectivity, conflict, and change from the perspective of the researching self who is involved in actual or potential argument, the third case, “Listening to Another Mind,” explores these concepts from the researching self’s perspective as a ‘listener’ to a friend’s conflict with his

colleague. The case builds on the foundational concepts of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change that have been developing in previous cases. It furthers the notions of intersubjectivity as a process of knowing the other (operations of consciousness), interactive account-giving in spaces of encounter, and the carrying/affording dynamic of complex systems of meaning.

At the beginning of the vignette, Gabriel mentioned the difficulty he had encountered with Felicity. The first version of the vignette depicts the researching self eliciting ethical reflexivity by asking questions about the threat that may be animating the conflict. I ask about the affect, which is identified as worry. I wonder what the worry might signify—an unwelcome future? What Gabriel discerns is that his diminished sense of self (as a jackass) related to the lack of his attunement to Felicity as a colleague. In this way, the vignette builds on the concepts that discernment of threat, registered in affect, can dynamize conflict.

Moreover, the process of eliciting ethical reflexivity is facilitative of change. Gabriel's reflexivity was induced by questions about the salience of the argument for him, which led to an account of Felicity and her difficult divorce. My animation of an affect-rich account of Felicity's interiority instigated Gabriel's re-valuing: he recognized her as (ethically) struggling rather than (unethically) being difficult.

The second version of the vignette maintains these conceptual accounts of threat, ethical reflexivity, and change. In expressing my interiority in the second version, the focus of research turns to exploring the foundational concept of the ethical aspect of account-giving in everyday ethical negotiations. In this case, for example, I wonder how to be a 'good' friend and discover that being a good

friend is intersubjectively discerned in moment-by-moment ethical negotiations between self and other.

This ethical aspect of account-giving, in negotiations about the 'good,' have taken place in the previous accounts. Georgine and I (disputatiously) negotiate what it means to be a good cleaner or partner. I negotiate with Sophia the concept of 'good mothering' and whether I am enacting it. Throughout these cases, it is discovered that being a 'good' friend, or mother, does not exist as a manifestation of some absolute code of conduct. Instead, these notions of the 'good' are relationally discerned through the valuing mind, negotiated in spaces of encounter, and are carried, shaped, and appeal to complex systems of social meaning.

Further, the concept of the 'good' can be unthinkingly assumed or reflexively discerned. The research continues to develop the conceptual importance of eliciting ethical reflexivity in account-giving spaces of inquiry. Gabriel, for example, reflects that he responded openly to my invitation to talk about the conflict because he sensed that I had no 'agenda,' or particular outcome in mind, when I did so. This lack of agenda, of expecting him to respond in a certain way, facilitated a more expansive and open-to-be reflexive state in him. Ethical reflexivity, then, was facilitated by a sense of openness or emergence of possibilities in the orientation of my attention to him.

In our debriefing inquiry, Gabriel and I discuss different relational moves that can heighten, or distract from, an awareness of interiority. A listener's focused attunement to the other's sense-making can elicit the other's interiority,

whereas a self-referenced focus to one's own interiority (knowing, valuing, and deciding) can detract from instigating reflexive awareness in the other. However, the development of my research has identified that sometimes a heightened self-reflexivity can responsively instigate reflexivity in the other. In other words, sometimes a relational orientation to interiority can elicit reflexivity; sometimes not. As with the 'good,' the relational moves that elicit reflexivity are emergent and intersubjectively discerned.

For example, in response to Gabriel's account of what he senses to be the impact of Felicity's difficult divorce on her relationship with Abby, I find myself attuned to *Felicity's* interiority as presented by Gabriel. As part of our conversational account-giving, I briefly perform a monologue of Felicity's feelings, valuing, and threats. Through my 'performance,' Gabriel finds himself more attuned to Felicity's interiority. In this attunement, Gabriel shifts from his self-referenced knowing of Felicity-as-one-who-made-him-feel-like-a-jackass to his other-referenced knowing her 'on her own terms' as one-who-is-struggling-with-threat-and-acts-defensively. His change of mind, that alters the conflict, is mediated by our intersubjective space of encounter; he was able to know her differently through my knowing and performing her interiority. This was an emergent moment of change—unforeseen and surprisingly effective.

As Maria notes in "Tension in the Group," an emergent account of change can seem difficult because it does not provide a reproducible recipe for change. Although unable to advocate specific behaviors to definitively alter conflict, the research explores how the diminishment of threat and inducement of reflexivity

on interiority can make the emergent dissipation of conflict more probable. Gabriel highlights the probable aspect of the emergence of change in our second debriefing inquiry. When Gabriel's threat was diminished—when his sense of himself as a jackass was not at stake—he was able to know Felicity from a more expansive stance of curiosity rather than constricted certainty about her 'being difficult.' He could then reflect on his valuing—of her valuing—thereby enabling his decision-making to change. This did not transform their entire pattern of interactions; there was still tension between them. Gabriel recognized that his willingness to engage with her, and his efforts to appreciate her, had a greater probability of transforming his difficulties with her than his contracted annoyance.

The emergent nature of change, then, means that authoritative demands for change are unlikely to elicit it. My contracted criticism of my partner's use of cleaning products in "Intransigent Conflict" did not convert her to my point of view; instead it generated a point-of-view-blocking constrictive threat that produced an argument. Similarly, although he wanted her to change, Gabriel recognized that Felicity was more likely to change her relationship with Abby when she was not being attacked by him. Although change cannot be scripted, conditions can be created that make a dissipation of argument more probable, through the diminishment of the constrictive effect of threat and the inducement of reflexivity on interiority.

#### **Case 4: "Tension in the Group"**

In the fourth case, I research the complex intersubjective process of a group meeting to investigate the dissipation of an interpersonal argument that

threatened to disrupt the group's crucial decision-making process. This research develops the concepts of intersubjectivity and conflict with more analytic complexity that is built on the insights of the previous cases. The study of intersubjectivity continues to be developed through a process-oriented analysis that attends to the activities of intersubjectivity: the knowing, valuing, and deciding of individual minds; the interactions of individuals in spaces of encounter that include account-giving; and complex systems of meaning that afford/carry those subjectivities and interactions.

The case attends to the researching self in the role of a group's temporary leader. As a leader, I performed a number of intersubjective functions that took place in the complex of systems of meaning among many participants. These functions depended on my role as leader so that I could shape the interactions in the space of encounter; orient the knowing, valuing, and deciding of individual minds towards group knowledge and decisions; and help the participants to know each other and their collectivity more expansively. These functions had an impact on the decision-making process in the group, as well as the dissipation of conflict when it arose.

At the meeting's outset, my colleague and I proposed the topic for response and the process to speak. In doing so, we shaped the conversational interactions of the individuals. We also oriented individual thinking and deciding towards loosely determinate ends (of how, and about what, they would speak to each other).<sup>49</sup> Although these were proposed guides to orient the knowing and

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<sup>49</sup> This is a further elaboration of a point introduced in the case of "Outrage": the structure of a question can orient people's attention.

deciding of individuals, the participants made their own decisions: they spoke about what was on their mind, interrupted each other, or stayed silent. They even contested the guides, which induced a discussion to select a better topic. The leader's guides, in other words, generated more probable responses but did not necessarily dictate them.

The leader's intersubjective function of providing guides and regulating the interactions in the space of encounter became salient in the conflict when Maya's unmediated rebuke was mediated by my expansive response. The accused individuals did not have to defend themselves against her attacks in interactions that probably would have become an escalated argument of defensive attacks. Instead, I mediated the interaction and addressed the entire group with my remark that the eruption of this argument signaled an opportunity to practice what we had discussed in the workshop two days previously. Thus, in addition to regulating interactions of the participants in the space of encounter, I performed a function of mediating (rather than dictating) the significance of the argument. By identifying the significance of the argument, I provided another guide that could orient individuals' own discernment of significance.

In addition to shaping the valuing of the group towards discerning the significance of particular instances, I helped the group to intersubjectively know each other. Maria recognized the importance of this role in dissipating conflict during my micro-'space of encounter' with Lucas, when I elicited a back-and-forth account from him about his decision to remain silent. My emergent knowing of Lucas' interiority drew on complex systems of meanings to recognize him as

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caring and overwhelmed rather than rude and disrespectful. As I came to know Lucas (and better understand the interiority of his valuing and deciding) the rest of the group came to know him differently, which enabled a different kind of interaction in the space of encounter. In this way, the micro-encounter with Lucas, and the other encounters between the participants and myself as a leader, were intersubjective processes in which leader and participant became more expansively known to each other and the wider group. This more expansive knowing had a significant impact on the dissipation of interpersonal argument.

As a leader I also helped to intersubjectively orient individuals' knowing, valuing, and deciding towards group decision-making and knowledge-production. For example, when Jack disagreed about the topic for discussion, I sought to clarify his reasoning, signaled turns for others to speak, articulated the significance in their suggestions, and inclined the group toward a collaboratively-made decision. This was a space in which, as a leader, I facilitated the integration of individuals' knowing, valuing, and deciding to generate new possibilities in a non-conflictual, more expansive moment of encounter.

A further point of analytic importance is the mobilization of the conceptual distinction among the intersubjective aspects of knowing, valuing, and deciding. In the interaction with Lucas, I did not ask him about his knowing of facts; instead I focused my attention on the interiority of his operation of valuing. I recognized that he was uncomfortable and that the intensity of his discomfort signaled that something of consequence was at stake for him. I affirmed that by his affect I could surmise that he cared a lot, not a little, about this decision. This attention to

the interiority of his valuing had the effect of eliciting his emotionally charged look of confirmation. Others in the group could see his response, thereby offering an opportunity for them to draw new affordances from the complex systems of meanings in which the encounter was enacted. Most participants responded with compassion in their eyes, while others looked annoyed. As a leader, my capacity to differentiate and elicit reflexivity on salient operations of consciousness had a role to play in the dissipation of conflict.

To summarize the discussion to this point, there is considerable conceptual wealth in the analysis of intersubjectivity in this complex context. It identifies intersubjective aspects of the leader's role to regulate the interactions of participants in the space of encounter; facilitate the development of group knowledge and decisions; and expansively help the participants to know each other and the group more expansively. Additionally, account-giving in various forms is illuminated as a relational process in which selves and others—through their operations of consciousness—become known to each other. The conceptual arc thus advances in this case to analyze how the researching self as a leader can mobilize concepts of intersubjectivity to support the dissipation of interpersonal argument.

The development of conceptual tools about conflict are furthered in this case, particularly in the attention to the constrictive role of threat and the expansive effect of its diminishment; the decisions to defend; and the contributions of moralizing judgments—that conflate knowing and deciding—to the emergence of conflict. The account of change in interpersonal argument is

also further developed, showing how a leader can elicit reflexivity to support the dissipation of interpersonal argument within a complex group process. Moreover, the emergent, non-linear nature of change is a significant conceptual aspect that advances through the research in this case.

The conceptual aspects of threat and defense are investigated through recognizing their presence in the argument that emerged, as well as noting their absence in the discussions in which an argument did not emerge. There were several instances in this vignette in which I discerned threat—in me and in others—and yet conflict did not emerge. For example, when Jack contested the suggestion of the topic for discussion, I registered an internal dismay that signaled a practical threat to the group process, even as I recognized and affirmed the merit of his intervention. Rather than choicelessly defend myself, or the proposed process, with a constrictive rebuke, I was able to reflexively recognize threat and consider options other than defense. In this instance, I spaciously, curiously responded to his intervention. Although threat was present, the decision to defend was not. In the absence of a defense-oriented conflict behavior, conflict did not emerge.

The analysis that the absence of defended conflict behaviors can avoid or dissipate conflict is further recognized in Leila's response to Lucas' decision to pass. Leila registered the significance of Lucas' passing as a threat to her social sense of group process and a personal sense of safety within it. She articulated this threat in a self-reflexive statement of concern about her sense of safety (rather than an other-oriented judgment of the unethicity of his choice). Her

intervention was an expression of threat without an accompanying decision to defend through fighting, fleeing, freezing, or fawning. Moreover, I recognized that the self-reflexive nature of her intervention had the effect of inducing self-reflexivity in me and the potential to induce it in others.<sup>50</sup> Although difficult to predict, Leila's intervention had the potential effect of opening more dialogue about the process in the group.

In contrast, the discernment of threat that produced a defended behavior, rather than a self-reflexive account, generated a paralyzing moment of conflict. Maya's moralizing judgment, which condemned 'the passers' as rude and disrespectful, instigated a constrictive frozen expression of conflict in the group. In this instance, her knowing and valuing had become conflated, so that the act of 'passing' was valued, with the certainty of fact, as an expression of disrespect, a threat to which she responded by defensively condemning it. The (defensive) accusation of 'rude and disrespectful' then created in others the defensive conflict responses of 'freeze' (and possibly fantasies of flight). This case, then, provides an important conceptual development about conflict. It examines instances where the discernment of threat is activated but the decision to defend is not. In these instances, conflict did not emerge, whereas in the instance where both threat and defend were activated, a moment of conflict erupted. In response to that moment of conflict, I leaned into the uncertain contracted space of conflict, using the conceptual tools about change to respond.

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<sup>50</sup> This notion, that self-reflexivity can elicit a responsive reflexivity in others, is a possible conceptual explanation of why "I" statements are advocated as a conflict-reducing strategy.

These conceptual tools, cumulatively developed throughout the previous cases, identify several salient aspects to the dissipation of argument. The diminishment of threat, the inducement of reflexivity on the operations of consciousness, and changes to intersubjective processes can all contribute to a more emergent probability of an argument's dissipation. I described above the actions I took that were oriented to this dissipation: I mediated the interactions of the individuals in the space of encounter; I provided an orienting discernment of the significance of the moment; and I elicited an account-giving of Lucas' valuing for the group to 'know' Lucas differently (and for him to know himself differently, according to Maria). These actions had a contributory effect to preventing the argument from escalating, and facilitating its dissipation.

There were several additional actions taken by me as group leader that were oriented to the diminishment of threat. In holding my arms open, I enacted a more spacious opening to which participants could intersubjectively respond. This gesture was accompanied by an affirmation of the significance of the moment as an ethically 'good' moment to practice skills, rather than an ethically 'bad' moment of degenerative chaos. I drew this notion of the good from the complex available meanings that could have been mobilized in that moment. Thus the strategies to diminish threat were embodied, affective, and cognitive.

As other strategies to dissipate the conflict, I attended to the spaces of encounter to support account-giving and reflexivity. I elicited a reflexive account from Lucas (involving his silent nodding) that instigated a broader re-valuing of Lucas' behavior as ethically 'caring' rather than unethically 'rude and

disrespectful.’ I non-verbally interacted with Leila in a way that conveyed my support and elicited a responsive smile from her. It was that micro-negotiation that prompted my decision to invite her to speak, to provide an account, which she did in an expansive and self-reflexive manner. She spoke about the importance, for her, of participation in which all voices are heard. Her threat had sufficiently diminished for her contracted concern about process to be replaced by an articulation of what mattered to her about the group and the decision-making meeting. This case provides additional empirical affirmation that the dissipation of conflict can be supported by diminishing the constrictive effect of threat and eliciting reflexivity in account-giving spaces of encounter.

There is a complexity of responsive decisions producing the dissipation of this conflict. This was not a linear cause-and-effect process; it was emergent, co-created, and diverse. As in the first case of “Intransigent Conflict,” where Georgine and I had different interpretations of the event, I do not conflate alignment with agreement in the dissipation of argument in this group process. It is possible for individuals to maintain different, even contrasting, points of view, without conflict, if they are not constricted by threat. Leila can devalue Lucas, and his behavior, at the same time as she makes a decision to be a more collaborative participant in the group. Other influences on the argument’s dissipation were evident, such as Maya’s decision to remain silent and not articulate further criticism; Jack’s and Lucas’ decision to refrain from defending themselves against her moralizing judgment; as well as the subsequent

participants' choice to make their individual contributions to the decision-making meeting. Many decisions create possibilities for an emergent new outcome.

The emergent nature of change is highlighted in this case. Although the dissipation of the interpersonal argument enables the decision-making meeting to continue, it did not effect a resolution of the group's broader decision-making process. Sharp disagreement arose again, and I left the meeting with uncertainty and concern about the future of that process. It took time for the non-linear emergence of change: Lucas and Maria had a conversation in which his (ethical) concerns were more clearly articulated, or she was more attuned to the significance of his concerns. Together they were able to identify a new possibility that subsequently produced a group-endorsed decision. The dissipation of the interpersonal argument made a contribution to a broader change, insofar as the potential disintegration of the group was avoided and set conditions for a subsequent expansive conversation between Lucas and Maria. Although identified in retrospect, the process of change was protracted and did not have a certain or predictable outcome.

Although no definitive account of change is presented, the case identifies several factors that made dissipation of the argument more probable: I mediated the interactions among the participants in the space of encounter; created a more expansive space when it became contracted; discerned ethical significance in key moments; elicited an account from Lucas that re-valued his behavior from rude to caring; and engaged with Leila and secured her consent to re-engage. These were discernible aspects of the argument's dissipation. The effect of this

dissipation was to continue the conversation, and provide conditions for the unpredictable and eventual discovery of a transformative arrangement.

### **Conclusion**

By accounting for the methodological and conceptual arcs of the four research cases, the cumulative and progressive development of the research is shown to generate complex multifaceted accounts of how interpersonal argument can dissipate for new possibilities to emerge.

The methodological arc of this reflexive autoethnography is introduced in “Intransigent Conflict,” where the foundational elements of the approach are identified, including writing as a process of inquiry; sense-making as partial and generative; and the challenges of representation and working with feedback. The development of the method cumulates in the research undertaken in the final case of “Tension in the Group.” By this point, the methodology is applied to investigate a complex process through the subjectivity of the researching self-as-leader. The method has developed in such a way that it can account for the complex emergent process of change without being overwhelmed by it; engage generatively with the interiority of the interlocutor while maintaining a focus on the self; and interrogate the method and its findings while affirming its validity and conceptual power.

The conceptual arc, too, reflects a progressive development. The first case identifies the foundational aspects of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change. It recognizes the salience of the three parts of the intersubjective framework and accounts for the emergence and dissipation of conflict through the application of

core concepts such as the constrictive effect of discernments of threat; choiceless or reflexive decisions to defend; and account-giving as capable of eliciting reflexivity to afford the opportunity for change. By the fourth case, there is sufficient conceptual development that the researching self-as-leader can investigate her role in mediating the complex intersubjective processes of a group through which interpersonal argument can arise and dissipate. In sum, the methodological and conceptual arcs form a substantial contribution to sociological knowledge of, and research into, interpersonal argument as a process of knowledge production and decision-making. The following conclusion identifies some of these contributions and points to areas of further inquiry.

## Chapter 10: Conclusion

Returning to the point of departure, on a journey that has travelled through many terrains, this project has been guided by the research question of how can polarized interpersonal argument dissipate so that new possibilities can emerge? The inquiry intent, justified at the outset and supported through the development of the thesis, asserts that an investigation into interpersonal argument is capable of contributing significant knowledge to diverse epistemic communities. This conclusion highlights these contributions by summarizing the methodological and conceptual insights generated during the course of this thesis, while at the same time pointing to areas of further research and inquiry.

The significance of interpersonal argument lies in its everyday ubiquity as well as its impact on more socially consequential processes. Interpersonal arguments arise in ordinary conversations where individuals accuse, explain, judge, and forgive (or not). In this regard, this microsociological investigation makes an everyday phenomenon more intelligible, thereby contributing to sociological knowledge about a significant aspect of social life. Moreover, interpersonal arguments can impede larger-scale processes, from local working-group meetings to international negotiations. Investigating how these interpersonal arguments can arise and dissipate can be generative of new possibilities within those impeded larger processes.

The research is framed as a process-focused investigation. Dissipation is acknowledged as a process that can give rise to new possibilities that cannot be

determined from the outset, but are emergent, complex, and contingent.<sup>51</sup>

Interpersonal argument, too, is understood as an outcome of the process of defense-oriented decision-making, which is based on knowledge-production (more specifically the ‘valuing’) that registers a sense of threat.

Empirically, the cases illuminate how (sometimes choiceless) decisions to engage in interpersonal argument are dynamized by threat, so that changes in the processes of knowing and valuing can alter the decision-making that impels conflict behavior. Thus interpersonal argument is framed as a process of knowledge production and decision-making in which implicit and explicit knowing, valuing, and deciding—about self, other, and social—are activated, circulated, contested, defended, and changed.

Defining the phenomenon of interpersonal argument in this way frames the investigative lens on how the self can come to know the other differently, or how the self can make different decisions in relation to the other (or others). This framing means that the self is identified and investigated as a unit of analysis within the complex social contexts in which arguments are enacted. Identifying a focus of inquiry on the knowing and deciding self thus requires the investigation to identify appropriate methodological and conceptual resources.

### **Methodology: Summary, Contributions, Further Research**

Autoethnography is identified as the appropriate methodology to investigate interpersonal argument, insofar as it attends to the subjectivity of the researcher in relation to their social context. This thesis contributes to the

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<sup>51</sup> Characterizing change as an emergent process also points to the challenges of nomenclatures such as “conflict resolution” or “conflict transformation.”

development of autoethnography as a social science research method, by advancing the method in general and specifically applying it to the phenomenon of interpersonal argument. Advancing autoethnography as a method in this thesis occurs through its units of analysis, its objects of inquiry (or data for analysis), and the multi-reflexive forms through which the autoethnographical investigation is developed and presented.

Autoethnography identifies and investigates the subjectivity of the researching self as the primary unit of analysis. The method as employed in the thesis maintains this investigative focus on the researching self while attending to the interactions of self and other in complex social contexts. Facilitating the analysis of self, other, and social, the autoethnography uses first and third person perspectives to develop a complex investigation of the self as an object of knowing, the knowing self in relation to the known other, and the situated sociality of self and other in their encounters. This sophisticated analytical tool is further developed by incorporating others' perspectives as part of the inquiry, while accountably maintaining focus on the self as the primary unit of analysis.

Because of the primacy of the self as the unit of analysis, the method's investigative attention is focused on the interiority of the researching self. By identifying and differentiating aspects of interiority to which the researching self can attend, this autoethnography develops a powerful investigative frame. Aspects of knowing, valuing, and deciding are recognized and distinguished as operations of consciousness or aspects of interiority; the autoethnographical account is thus able to present its analysis through these conceptual categories.

Focusing on these aspects of interiority offers a process-oriented investigative frame through which the researcher can reflect on what she knows, values, and decides in relation to the other, as well as the affective and cognitive process through which they are discerned and produced.

The method further advances the investigative frame by identifying a conceptual relationship between valuing and affect. The operation of valuing is identified as conceptually related to the phenomenon of feeling, insofar as affect expresses a significance that cognition can discern. Shame can be reflexively investigated to discover that the feeling points to a helpless inability to protect a daughter, or the affect of love can be discerned to signal a powerful solidarity. These feelings do not correspond to meaning invariantly or absolutely; in other words, depending on the context, shame can indicate many meanings. that the reflexive self can discern. Identifying the conceptual relationship between feelings and valuing offers the researcher an investigative frame to inquire into the affective and cognitive aspects of interiority.

The focus on these operations also provides the researcher with analytic tools to inquire into the interiority of others. The debriefing inquiries show how a researcher can use the conceptual categories of knowing, valuing, and deciding to elicit and interpret interlocutors' responses. This capacity to generate insight into others' interiority enables the researcher to investigate the other 'on their own terms' as well as in relation to what the self knows of the other, and what the other knows of the self. The capacity to identify and inquire into specific aspects of interiority affords significant conceptual leverage for the researching self to

inquire into the interiority of others, and generate a relational analysis while maintaining a focus on her own interiority.

Another methodological contributions of this autoethnography is the development of the multi-reflexive layered accounts. As a preliminary layer, the first person vignette conveys the interiority of the researching self's affect and cognition through an experiential narrative. The reflexive commentary then produces more abstract understandings of how interpersonal argument arises and dissipates, while situating the vignette within larger contexts of social science research. The subsequent debriefing inquiry provides the opportunity to validate the research as well as to investigate the interlocutor's interiority in relation to the analyzed encounter.

The metacommentary of the quality notes is an additional reflexive thread that is woven into the other layers of the account. Marshall's (2004) categories of quality are applied in these notes to interrogate and affirm methodological and conceptual challenges in the research. The difficulties and strengths of writing as a process of inquiry are recognized; the challenge of representation is worked through; or the closure of inquiry is accounted for. In this way, the quality notes permit the researching self to reflect on the research as it unfolds, while providing a conceptual frame through which first-person research can be affirmed as valid. In sum, the quality notes, debriefing inquires, reflexive commentaries, and vignettes are integrated into a research process that contributes to the development of autoethnography as a method to investigate complex social phenomena.

To summarize, this research maintains a focus on the researching self as the primary unit of analysis to advance a process-oriented examination of interiority. This process-focused inquiry into interiority attends to the specific cognitive aspects of knowing, valuing, and deciding, in which affect is identified and investigated as conceptually related to the activity of valuing. The method also attends to the interiority of others, generating a relational analysis mediated through the researcher's subjectivity. The investigation's multilayered accounts constitute further elements of this methodological approach to the investigation of interpersonal conflict.

Through its inquiry into interiority, the method proved to be an effective tool to investigate and analyze the emergence of interpersonal argument. In one case, feelings of anger signaled a diminished sense of self that produced an unreflexively contemptuous criticism and generated a responsive attack. In another case, a sense of outrage impelled the consideration of a variety of conflict-oriented responses.

This analysis of interiority can also identify salient aspects of the dissipation of conflict. An expansive sense of affection and acceptance from a friend, coupled with her incisive insight, facilitated an altered valuing that diminished the impulse to engage in conflict. The persistent responsiveness of a confidante facilitated recognition of other affects, like shame and love, which signaled new meanings of the situation, thereby creating space for non-conflictual options to emerge. This method's investigation of the knowing, valuing, and deciding of the researching self, with its affective and cognitive

dimensions, provided empirical weight to the claim that interpersonal argument is a process of knowledge production and decision-making. It further offers evidential support of the analysis that conflict arises as a result of the discernment of threat and a decision to defend. Thus the contributions of this research are empirical as well as methodological.

There are many further avenues of research to explore into autoethnography as a general method. This thesis has demonstrated the autoethnography's capacity to investigate phenomena in which the self in relation to the other is an appropriate unit of analysis. Although this unit of analysis may not be suitable to address all phenomena, there are an abundance of phenomena that could be usefully illuminated with this investigative attention. For instance, the multilayered method could be used to investigate community theatre as a vehicle of social change, or the training of community police officers to respond to retaliatory violence. Other researchers, situated in different contexts, could adopt the method to investigate a variety of phenomena from everyday interactions to more consequential large-scale negotiations.

In considering the applications of the method to study other phenomena, a number of salient questions emerge. What refinements would be necessary to adjust the method for new contexts, and what limitations might be identified in doing so? How might one examine more complex social processes, such as the one investigated in the final case? How would questions of power and representation be theorized in further inquiries?

A further area of investigation relates to the development of the

methodology of the layered account. What would be the implications of a co-authored autoethnographical text, where contestations of meaning might be more explicitly encountered and addressed? What other methods of data collection, selection, and presentation might contribute to an autoethnographical account? How does power affect the encounters with interlocutors, as well as the analysis and debrief? How might the method address contestations—even conflicts—over the researcher’s representation of others? What other forms of writing accounts, theoretical resources, and interpretive strategies might lend themselves to this method? These, and other questions related to quality such as representation and saturation of inquiry, could be generative of additional developments in theoretically informed, affectively analytical first-person accounts. In sum, the substantial methodological contribution of this work could be further developed by the consideration of other phenomena for investigation as well as the development of the methodological form itself.

### **Conceptual Tools: Intersubjectivity, Conflict, and Change**

Several conceptual challenges were presented at the outset of this investigation into the phenomenon of interpersonal argument as a process of knowledge production and decision-making. Furthering the research required the conceptualization of how the self knows, and makes decisions in relation to, the other in instances of interpersonal argument. Conceptual support was needed to affirm and examine a process-focused understanding of interpersonal argument as knowledge production and decision-making. Finally, a conceptual explanation of the dissipation of interpersonal argument was needed to account for how

knowing, valuing, and deciding might be changed for new possibilities to emerge. Addressing these challenges through concepts of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change provided a robust analytic foundation to conduct autoethnographical research into the dissipation of interpersonal argument.

### **Intersubjectivity**

As a foundation to this research, a tripartite approach to intersubjectivity was conceptually developed and empirically applied. This tripartite approach was developed as a conceptual framework by recognizing – through Bohleber (2013) and Price (2013) – three aspects of intersubjectivity. These aspects were conceptually enriched and elaborated through other literature, particularly Keane’s (2016) account of everyday ethics. The result is a process-focused tripartite approach to intersubjectivity that provides a conceptual frame through which interpersonal argument can be investigated. The three aspects of this approach are: operations of consciousness by which the self comes to know the other; spaces of encounter whereby self and other exert mutual influence through account-giving and other interactions that are often ethical in nature; and complex systems of meanings that can shape, as well as provide affordances to, cognition and encounter.

In its empirical application, the tripartite framework yielded significant analytic results by enabling the researching self to critically examine each aspect of intersubjectivity in the emergence of interpersonal argument. In the first aspect, the research identifies how the self’s knowing, valuing, and deciding in relation to the other can dynamize and dissipate an interpersonal argument. The

affective and cognitive aspects of the operations of consciousness were explored in depth to illuminate that: the operations are functionally related, so that a change to one's valuing can precipitate a decisional change; when knowing and valuing are conflated, discernments of ethical significance can be asserted as judgments of fact; these ethical discernments have a significant role to play in dynamizing conflict through apprehensions of threat that generate decisions to defend; feelings and valuing that dynamize conflict can be obscure yet reflexively discerned; and in the process of reflexive re-valuing, alternative ethical discernments can be made, thereby changing the trajectory of conflict.

In the second aspect of intersubjectivity, spaces of encounter—of account-giving in particular—are analyzed to understand how ethical judgments are asserted and defended, appealing to complex systems of social meanings. Various forms of account-giving are investigated in the eruption and dissipation of interpersonal argument. Accusations and blame; questions and responses; ethical micro-negotiations; a 'performance' of another's interiority; interactions of a group deciding on a discussion topic; a self-reflexive disclosure of one's own interiority; and other forms of account-giving are explored in depth. The second aspect is a useful analytical category because spaces of encounter can be sites of argument in which ethical notions are contested, and where reflexivity can be elicited so that new affordances are made to alter the knowing, valuing, and deciding that dynamize a conflict.

In the third aspect of the framework, the complex range of socially available contextual meanings are conceptually identified as shaping the spaces

of encounter and the operations of consciousness that are enacted within them. Individuals discern, negotiate, and enact notions that are drawn from vastly complex available possible meanings. Although that which is identified as 'good,' for example, varies by contextual and cultural systems of meanings, the process of identifying and negotiating the good happens as a feature of human sociality. Empirically, the research attends, in several instances, to the ethically-oriented meanings that can shape interpersonal argument. The research articulates how notions of good (and bad) toxicologists, mothers, friends, or participants in groups, are socially available meanings that are enacted, negotiated, and contested. These notions of the 'bad' or unethical can impel argument insofar as they relate to a discernment of threat.

When threat is discerned (as a violation of a 'good' social norm; a disruption to a 'good' practical concern; or a diminishment of a 'good' sense of self), it can produce a constrictive state of consciousness that impels decisions that are unreflexively enacted rather than purposefully made. In contrast, more expansive operations of consciousness can recognize and affirm the complexity of socially available meanings: a partner can be industrious and impervious; a participant can be both annoying and helpful; and a colleague can be simultaneously difficult and struggling. Discerning new or more expansive meanings can alter the decision to engage in conflict.

In sum, the process-oriented conceptual frame directed investigative attention towards the activities of consciousness, the interactions in spaces of encounter, and the affording/carrying of social meanings. The empirical results of

applying this framework provide evidentiary validation of the merits of this tripartite approach and its capacity to illuminate interpersonal argument and its dissipation.

Further research into intersubjectivity could add conceptual and evidentiary depth to its capacity to investigate interpersonal argument. Each of the aspects could be more deeply conceptualized. For example, the aspect of complex systems of meanings could be elaborated in greater detail, supported by additional literatures, so that a more precise articulation of its contextual complexity in relation to cognition and encounter could be advanced. How does power work through complex systems of meanings (and spaces of encounter) in this intersubjective frame? How do complex systems of meanings constitute, or precondition, spaces of encounter? To what extent are systems of meanings abstract notions and how could they be further conceptualized as more concrete manifestations or artifacts of culture?

The aspect of spaces of encounter could be further developed to address many of its complex dimensions. The concept of 'contingent positionality' might be investigated to explore the dynamic relationships between specific aspects of individual identities and their structural location in a moment or context. Moreover, an examination of larger-scale contexts might look at spaces of encounter in more abstract forms, for example the space of encounter between a leader and her staff that is mediated through email. Account-giving, including non-verbal exchanges, could be conceptualized as interactive aspects of a space of encounter. Additional questions that could contribute to an analytic

development of the aspect might include: what are additional practices other than account-giving that are enacted in spaces of encounter? How can one conceptualize the absent presence of others in spaces of encounter (such as the hockey coaches or the fighting colleagues)? Can spaces of encounter be conceptualized across time, so that a memory of a previous encounter informs the enactment of an encounter in a present moment?

Operations of consciousness could be more fully investigated to provide a detailed understanding of each operation. Valuing, in particular, is an operation that would benefit from additional conceptual development, as it is a distinct formulation of an operation alongside the more conceptualized and complex operations of knowing and deciding. How can one further the conceptual development of the role of affect in the operations of consciousness? Are there feelings that do not register cognitive significance but are just 'there'? What is the role of physiology in accounting for affect and cognition?

In addition to a conceptual development of the tripartite approach, there are further empirical applications that could advance the framework. Other instances of interpersonal conflict could be analyzed with this framework to generate meaningful results. The framework could be applied to non-conflictual instances, such as decision-making processes in government or business. Additional work could be done to develop the research into the role of an individual in shaping intersubjective processes towards organizational purposes or a social good. In sum, the development of a process-oriented, three-part conceptual approach to intersubjectivity makes a significant analytical

contribution to the study of interpersonal argument. Further work could elaborate the framework and apply it in a variety of research contexts to continue its development as a useful conceptual approach.

### **Conflict and Change**

In addition to addressing the challenge of conceptualizing the intersubjective aspect of interpersonal argument, the research required conceptual resources to investigate the phenomenon as a process of knowledge production and decision-making. It also needed to conceptually identify changes in this process that could facilitate the dissipation of interpersonal argument.

Drawing extensively from the insight approach (Melchin and Picard, 2008; Price, 2013), the research advances the conception of interpersonal argument as a process of knowledge production and decision-making. The concepts that are advanced identify conflict as the result of a decision to defend, generated from a discernment of threat registered in the cognitive operation of valuing. In conflict, valuing shapes knowledge production and decision-making, insofar as judgments of value are often registered as a certainty of knowledge, while discernments of threat shape the kinds of decisions that individuals feel compelled to make.

These salient aspects of conflict—decisions to defend and discernment of threat—are conceptually developed through this investigation. Decisions to defend are manifested in conflict behaviors of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Identifying conflict behaviors as a range of defensive responses conceptually expands an understanding of interpersonal argument beyond mutually aggressive fights. Frozen silence, abrupt endings to meetings, and overly friendly

gestures to mask a sense of threat are considered in this research to be behavioral manifestations of decisions to defend, and one of the necessary elements in the emergence of interpersonal conflict.

In addition to the concept of defense, the concept of threat is extensively developed in this research. Threat is understood to be registered in the operation of valuing: the discernment of significance of the 'bad' (degenerative, unwelcome, rejected) and the 'good' (welcome, affirmed, desired). Threats are registered in constrictive or contracted affects, so that feelings like worry, anger and fear unreflexively activate a sometimes choiceless decision to defend, whether through contemptuous criticism or silent refusal to participate. With greater reflexivity, threats can be discerned as gaps related to personal diminishment of self, practical concerns, or social wellbeing.

Decisions to defend are oriented towards protecting the self against these discerned threats.<sup>52</sup> These decisions are enacted as conflict behaviors, which often evoke a discernment of threat in the other, generating a reciprocal defended response in a pattern of escalating conflict. For example, a person's efforts to defend against the diminished sense of self was manifested in criticism of toxic cleaning products (and those who use them), which triggered a diminished sense of self in the other who protectively lashed out. The discernment of threat and the defensive response are thus identified as significant elements of conflict, thereby advancing and affirming the

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<sup>52</sup> It is not only 'the self' to which decisions to defend are oriented; sometimes the defense is oriented to upholding notions of the social good or to protect the practical interests of a group.

conceptualization of interpersonal argument as a process of knowledge production and decision-making.

Applying these concepts to investigate interpersonal argument through autoethnographic research produced evidentiary validation of the concepts themselves. The empirical research recognized that both the discernment of threat and decisions to defend were salient factors in conflict: in several examples, conflict did not emerge where the discernment of threat was present, but there was no decision to defend. Moreover, several instances of non-conflictual disagreement were identified, prompting recognition that, in the absence of threat, differing interpretations can co-exist.

Through the research, different gaps relating to threat were discerned and analyzed. These gaps appeared as unwelcome senses of self, such as unimportance or foolishness; as practical fears about the risk of health concerns or lost contracts; or social concerns about performance of roles (selecting hockey players, collegiality, or participation in group meetings). The discernment of threat was further investigated through the affects that can dynamize interpersonal argument. Fear, frustration, annoyance, and worry became instances in which threat was registered; in reflexive spaces of encounter, their significance could be discerned and articulated as threats, gaps, or risks. The constrictive effect of threat on impelling unreflexive decision-making was empirically explored. A diminished sense of self generated a contemptuous criticism; a social concern dynamized considerations of publicly protesting unjust tryouts; and a contracted

sense of being a jackass instigated a heated exchange with a colleague and a subsequent flight from her.

Further research could advance the conceptual development of these aspects of conflict. How can instances of greed or narcissistic self interest that instigate conflict be conceptualized in terms of discernment of threat and decisions to defend? How can the terms 'constrictive' and 'expansive' be further conceptualized? Are there additional manifestations of threat beyond the identified aspects of personal, practical, and social gaps? How can the sense of a gap be conceptualized more fully?

Empirically, these concepts of conflict could be further investigated in research into a variety of other conflicts. To what extent are the concepts of threat and defense valid in larger-scale conflicts? How can an analysis of interpersonal argument be furthered in larger-scale conflicts? How might one conceive of interpersonal argument, and the role of affect, in disputes involving legal representatives, who may not have a personal stake in the outcome? How can affect be discerned in spaces of encounter where it is not culturally appropriate to express these feelings?

## **Change**

The research question—of how interpersonal argument can dissipate so new possibilities can emerge—signals a process-oriented investigative focus. The dissipation of argument is framed as an emergent process of change, without determining what the outcomes might be. Affirming this complexity, the conceptual account of change integrates the foundational concepts of

intersubjectivity and conflict to contend that the dissipation of interpersonal argument can be made more probable by altering the intersubjective processes in which it emerges.

Examining each aspect of the tripartite approach to intersubjectivity reveals the salience of this account of change. With regards to the operations of consciousness, diminishing the constrictive effect of threat can facilitate more expansive possibilities in the operations of consciousness. A different significance can be discerned in the operation of valuing, or the sense of choiceless necessity to defend can be changed to more purposeful decision-making. Spaces of encounter can be altered to interrupt the pattern of mutual defensive conflict behaviors generating threat in the other. Eliciting reflexivity in spaces of encounter can also provide the opportunity for conflict to diminish insofar as the process of account-giving can generate new possibilities. Moreover, in considering the third aspect of the conceptual approach to intersubjectivity, new affordances from the complex systems of meanings can be mobilized to alter the significance of a conflictual moment, or provide more options from which to discern meaning and make decisions. In sum, the dissipation of interpersonal argument can be effected through changes in the operations of consciousness, spaces of encounter, and the complex systems of meanings in which they are enacted.

This conceptual account of change was empirically investigated in the autoethnographic research. In one case, change spontaneously occurred through an altered space of encounter that reduced threat, and instigated fresh

discernment of the significance of the situation, so that the defensive conflict behavior stopped and did not return. In another case, ethical reflexivity was instigated in a space of encounter, thereby revealing a different threat of personal helplessness rather than social wrong. The discernment of this threat did not compel the choiceless necessity of a conflict behavior, but instead instigated a reflection on more purposeful responses, and helped dissipate the impending conflict. The third case accounts for the dissipation of conflict through a process of account-giving that instigated a reflexive re-valuing of the difficult colleague, thereby opening the possibility for dialogue rather than recrimination. The fourth case recognizes the complexity of elements that contributed to the dissipation of argument, which involved regulating the interactions of participants in the space of encounter; diminishing the constrictive effect of threat through an expansive gesture and affirmation of the potential 'good' in a complex moment; and eliciting reflexive account-giving that enabled new affordances to be made. The empirical results of this investigation into the dissipation of interpersonal argument thus validated the pertinent conceptual elements in an emergent account of change.

Additional conceptual and empirical research into the process of dissipating interpersonal argument could address the intersubjective elements of emergent change in more detail. Examples of further work include conceptualizing a dissipation of interpersonal conflict that does not involve reflexivity, such as conformity to authority. Greater exploration of the variations possible to a space of encounter—such as changing the participants or altering the interaction—would also be useful. Deeper conceptual work on the

intersubjective aspect of complex systems of meanings could provide a fuller account of its role in carrying/affording opportunities to dissipate interpersonal argument. In sum, the account of emergent change in interpersonal argument has been created from the robust conceptual frameworks of intersubjectivity and conflict developed throughout this research. Applying this conceptual account, the empirical research yielded considerable results while generating further points of potential development.

### **Intervention Skills**

Throughout this research, considerable attention has been devoted to the process of facilitating emergent change. Identified are a range of activities that an individual can perform to support the diminishment of interpersonal argument. A friend's affectionate acceptance and incisive remark instigates a change; a confidante's persistent eliciting of reflexive account-giving enables the discovery of different options; a listener's 'agenda-less' attunement to the affective and cognitive significance of threat prompted more expansive possibilities; and a leader's attention to, and intervention in, a variety of intersubjective processes facilitated the dissipation of argument.

These empirically recognized activities point to a more conceptual identification of skills that an individual can develop to facilitate change. Whether in the role of a participant, listener, or facilitator, reflexivity is an important skill through which an individual can reflect on the operations of their own consciousness to discern the significance of their affect and make more purposeful responses. The attention to operations of consciousness and the role

of affect can also encourage an individual to inquire into the interiority of others and generate more attuned relational responses. One can develop skills to elicit reflexivity in account-giving, through attentive listening and questioning directed to knowing, valuing, and deciding, while maintaining a flexible responsiveness to what emerges. Moreover, recognizing the importance of the constrictive effect of threat, an individual's stance of respect and friendliness can instigate a responsive expansiveness that can support a movement toward change.

There are further areas of inquiry into the development of skills that can facilitate the dissipation of interpersonal argument. Research into strategies that support reflexive account-giving might further explore the skills of asking questions and making responsive statements. There is considerable work to be done to explore, both conceptually and practically, how an individual can intervene in intersubjective processes to facilitate change. Moreover, further work could be undertaken on how to generate reflexivity in the self, as well as to reflexively inquire into the interiority of others.

### **Conclusion**

Reaching a point of saturation, this inquiry has addressed and illuminated the methodological and conceptual complexity of researching interpersonal argument and its dissipation. A robust methodology has been developed that can be used to conduct further inquiries. The conceptual resources of intersubjectivity, conflict, and change have been advanced to develop an understanding of how interpersonal argument can arise and subside. The empirical results have been significant in generating analysis that is accountable,

valid, meaningful, and interesting—to write and to read. My hope is that this research elicits further relevant questions for inquiry, thereby continuing the development of knowledge about a phenomenon that is of significant social consequence.

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