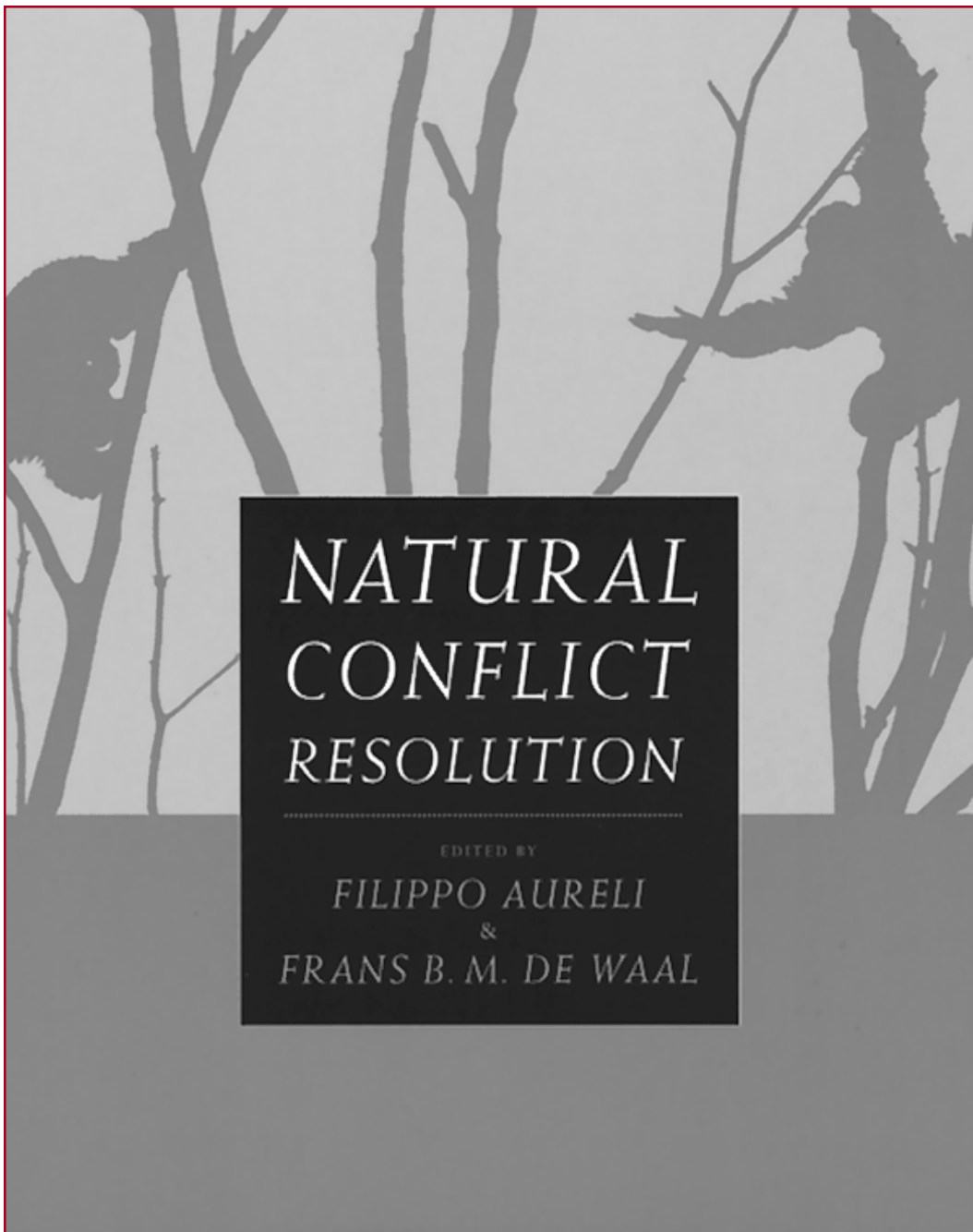


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# Introduction



# Why Natural Conflict Resolution?

Filippo Aureli & Frans B. M. de Waal

The reason we customarily speak of the *need* for cooperation and the *potential* for conflict is because the former is desirable whereas the latter is inevitable. Whether the units are people, animals, groups, or nations, as soon as several units together try to accomplish something, there is a need to overcome competition and set aside differences. The problem of a harmonization of goals and reduction of competition for the sake of larger objectives is universal, and the processes that serve to accomplish this may be universal too. These dynamics are present to different degrees among the employees within a corporation, the members of a small band of hunter-gatherers, or the individuals in a lion pride. In all cases, mechanisms for the regulation of conflict should be in place.

It is sufficient to reflect on our everyday life to find examples. We employ various “rituals,” such

as handshaking or verbal apology, on a regular basis to prevent or mitigate conflicts. We have developed social rules to regulate interactions within a community and legal procedures to solve disputes when the individuals in conflict are not able to find an agreement by themselves. We are so concerned about the disruptive consequences of conflict that we celebrate its resolution at various levels: within our family, community, and nation and at the international level. Conflict resolution, like conflict and cooperation, appears to be a natural phenomenon. We should then find similarities in its expression and procedures across cultures and species.

During the past two decades we have witnessed a change in interests across disciplines from competition, aggression, and war to cooperation, peace, and conflict resolution. For example, there

has been recognition that peace is more than the absence of war and that conciliatory reunions between former opponents play a key role in animal societies. Interest in spontaneous forms of conflict resolution has also increased among developmental psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and political scientists, and the legal system has recently emphasized conciliatory alternatives to the more traditional forms of litigation.

This growing interest in the mechanisms of dealing with conflict requires some explanation. We would like to address this issue in two ways. The first focuses on why natural mechanisms for conflict resolution and conflict management exist. The second follows from the first and explains how we decided to put this volume together and to provide views from various disciplines on the convergent trend toward the study of conflict resolution.

### *Why Natural Conflict Resolution Exists*

Natural history teaches us that when individuals live in a group they gain benefits from the presence of others and from active cooperation in locating food, rearing offspring, or detecting predators. These basic functions are of paramount importance for the survival of the members of the group, whether they are ants, birds, or human hunter-gatherers. In modern societies, cooperation may be expressed in more complex ways (e.g., the cooperative fine-tuning of the LINUX operating system by computer experts at different locations on the globe via the Internet), but the underlying functions are still related to improved survival in a given environment.

Group life also entails costs. Living in close proximity to members of the same species implies the simultaneous exploitation of resources; under these conditions competition is likely. These conditions are easily encountered by various species

in their natural environments as well as in various settings of modern human societies. More indirect costs result when group members are obliged to coordinate their activities in order to remain together. This may lead to clashes of interests when individuals of different age, sex, dominance rank, and reproductive condition differ in their needs and, accordingly, would like to follow different courses of action. For instance, in macaques the feeding requirements differ between males and females, and the presence of females with young infants tends to slow down group movement (e.g., van Schaik & van Noordwijk 1986). Accordingly, group members have conflicts over when and where to carry out important activities and over travel decisions (Menzel 1993; Boinski in press). Similarly, scheduling conflicts are a daily occurrence among family members in our societies.

In order to maintain the benefits of group living, individuals need to reduce its costs by mitigating competition and solving conflicts of interest. It follows that mechanisms of conflict management are a critical component of the social life of any group-living species. Natural selection should have favored the expression of the mechanisms best fitting the social organization of each species. This does not imply that these mechanisms are strictly genetically based; in fact, there is ample evidence for learnability and flexibility of expression, as reported in several contributions in the present volume. According to evolutionary theory, it is logical to expect conflict management mechanisms as natural phenomena that function in maintaining the integrity of groups and the associated benefits to each group member.

A balance between costs and benefits is a universal feature of stable social relationships: we would argue that major imbalances threaten the stability. Consequently, so long as an individual is interested in maintaining a cooperative bond, he or she should ensure that the cost-benefit balance for the

partner does not tip to the negative side. This implies that whenever a conflict of interest between partners arises, both partners have an interest in constraining exploitation of the other, so as to keep their balances positive. When competing for a resource, group members should therefore take into account not only the value of the resource or the risk of injury but the value of their relationships as well (de Waal 1989a).

Aggression is not a negative social force per se (de Waal 1996). Traditionally, psychologists, social scientists, and evolutionary biologists have presented aggression as an antisocial behavior. The new perspective on conflict management views aggression as an instrument of negotiation between partners. To exchange services and favors or to combine their efforts in cooperative actions, partners need to communicate their relative positions and clarify potential conflicts. Overt expression and especially the threat of aggression (e.g., in the form of punishment) are powerful tools during the bargaining process between partners. Considering the mechanisms for its control and the mitigation of negative repercussions, aggression becomes a well-integrated component of social relationships.

The critical role played by the mechanisms for the control of aggressive expression and conflict resolution explains why they have been readily found in animal societies once researchers started to look for them. We know, of course, that the same mechanisms exist in our own species, and in fact the terminology employed in animal studies borrows heavily from concepts traditionally applied to human social relationships. The beginnings of conflict management skills are present at an early stage in human children, and cross-cultural comparisons indicate the universality of these skills. The recent emphasis on alternative techniques for dispute resolution in the legal system is strongly based on the revival of natural forms of dealing

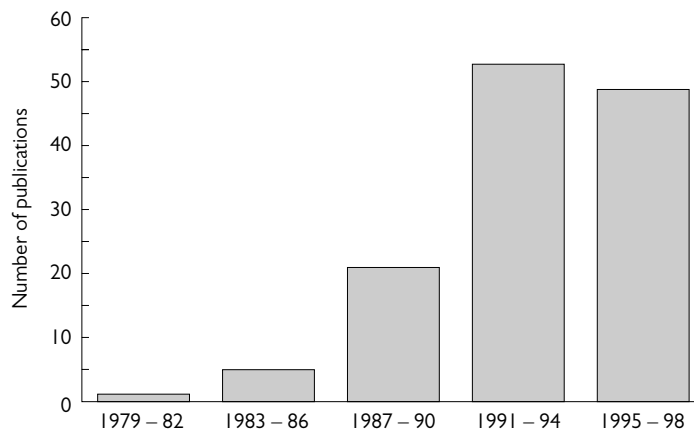
with interpersonal conflict. Even the least spontaneous forms of conflict resolution, such as the mediation of international conflict, are based on the natural foundations of the phenomenon, that is, interpersonal relationships. In sum, conflict among monkeys, people, and even entire groups or nations follows a certain dynamic that is universal, and so is its resolution.

### *Why a Book on Natural Conflict Resolution?*

Both of us have been trained as ethologists—that is, biologists studying animal behavior—and we have mainly studied nonhuman primates. The history of this volume necessarily is influenced by our background and by the perspectives on conflict and its regulation that we have developed in the course of the years. If scientists from other disciplines were to put together an analogous volume, the starting point would certainly have been different, but the end product might be rather similar. Our background and experience with animals have made us appreciate the natural bases of the various human expressions of conflict management and consequently stimulated an interest in the common ground across disciplines. The convergence among various disciplines on the theme of conflict resolution is so compelling that we cannot imagine delivering a different final product at this empirical and theoretical stage, even though the species selection is obviously biased.

Some animal societies, such as eusocial insects, are characterized by great genetic similarity among group members and have apparently little conflict. The conflicts of interest are mitigated at the genetic level and are not as individualized as in human societies. In any society, conflicts of interest certainly have evolutionary bases, and much has been theorized, for instance, on the conflicts of interest between parents and offspring (Trivers 1974; Bateson 1994) or between breeding individuals of the

FIGURE 1.1. The number of publications on the topic of reconciliation in nonhuman primates in the past 20 years (1979–1998). The figure is based on a literature search using PrimateLit database of the Primate Information Center of the University of Washington, Seattle. Abstracts, media news reports, and dissertations were excluded. No publication was found before 1979. We supplemented the search with four additional publications known by us.



opposite sex (Trivers 1972; Gowaty 1996). Those conflicts often manifest themselves at the behavioral level, and this is the level at which our volume deals with conflict. Our perspective provides a complementary view to the more theoretical approach to conflict (cf. Godfray 1995) by focusing on the behavioral expressions of everyday conflicts and the mechanisms that individuals use to regulate them.

To follow the history behind this volume, we need to go back to the late 1970s when the first ethological study focusing specifically on conflict resolution was conducted on captive chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) by de Waal & van Roosmalen (1979). After this study, many researchers from different backgrounds began to examine various aspects of animal conflict resolution. The behavior that has been most extensively studied is *reconciliation*, that is, a friendly reunion between former opponents soon after an aggressive conflict. Most of this research has focused on nonhuman primates; 27 species have been studied so far, and post-conflict reunions have been found in the vast majority of the studies (Appendix A). Only recently has systematic research started to focus on post-conflict reunions in other animals (see below). Figure 1.1 shows the rapid increase of pub-

lications focusing on these reunions in nonhuman primates in the past two decades. From the virtual absence of systematic studies before 1979, we have witnessed a slow but steady increase of publications in the 1980s and a substantial production in the 1990s.

The increase of interest in conflict resolution has not been limited to primatologists. In fact, primatological studies have stimulated similar research on other taxonomic groups. In 1994, during a plenary lecture of the XXXI Meeting of the Animal Behavior Society, in Seattle, Thelma Rowell concluded that the major contribution of primatology to the general field of animal behavior over the past decades has been the study of reconciliation. The Reconciliation Study Group was formed in 1994 and consists of members from various disciplines and from many countries covering five continents. The group has organized several roundtables and workshops and has its own Internet discussion network and home page. Through discussion sponsored by this group and direct contacts between scientists, the approach and methodology used in studies of nonhuman primates crossed the taxonomic and discipline traditional boundaries. This fruitful exchange has led to research on post-conflict resolution mechanisms in species

other than primates and in children (some of the products of this research are included in this volume).

In the past few years, scholars from different disciplines have found one another despite quite different perspectives because of the common interest in problems related to conflict management. Various plenary lectures and symposia at meetings of anthropological and psychological associations and other interdisciplinary initiatives have included speakers on conflict resolution in nonhuman primates. Religious foundations and primatologists have joined forces in the study of the origins of "forgiveness." The Gruter Institute for Law and Behavioral Research has been instrumental in helping biologists interested in conflict resolution and lawyers realize the similarity in recent trends within their disciplines toward more emphasis on cooperation and peaceful resolution.

Interdisciplinary forums have provided, and will continue to provide, opportunities for useful exchanges of methodological and theoretical issues. Ethological observations of naturally occurring behavior typical of animal research on conflict resolution can be applied in other settings, such as children's playgrounds, cross-cultural studies, and even mediation sessions. Noninvasive, carefully designed experiments that had provided pivotal information about the functions and the rules of post-conflict behavior in nonhuman primates (Cords 1994) can be revealing for the study of the basis of human conflict resolution skills. Emphasis on the role of personality and individual differences in psychology can bring useful insight to research on animal conflict regulation. Similarly, concepts such as attachment and separation (Bowlby 1969), so central in developmental and social psychology, appear to share unexplored similarities with aggressive conflict and post-conflict reunions in nonhuman primates. Primatologists and other students of animal behavior would

benefit from learning more about these psychological concepts.

Based on current knowledge, similarities across disciplines are already emerging. One of them is especially interesting. The quality of social relationships plays a key role in the occurrence of conflict resolution not only among nonhuman primates (de Waal & Aureli 1997). As reported by several contributions in this volume, relationship quality also has important theoretical and practical implications in the regulation of conflict among children, in conflict intervention in various cultures, and in mediation processes at various levels including international conflict. Such similarities suggest that contributions from all disciplines (i.e., ethological studies of primates and other animals as well as the various approaches to human conflict resolution in anthropology, psychology, political sciences, and legal studies) would provide evidence for continuity of behavioral mechanisms for conflict regulation across situations and species. This evidence will in turn help to trace the evolution of human skills for conflict management.

From our perspective we have seen the development of a new approach that started from the original study on chimpanzees and expanded first to other nonhuman primates and then to other animals. Human conflict resolution was also being studied, but on a very small scale, so that the curious situation arose that more was known about conflict resolution in nonhuman animals than in our own species. Given current growing interest in the issue, this imbalance will probably soon be corrected. While the number of species studied has increased over time, progress on empirical and theoretical ground has also been made. From the initial focus on post-conflict conciliatory reunions, research interest has grown to explore the mechanisms for controlling aggression with various forms of appeasement or intervention by

third parties. Research has also focused on the mechanisms to alleviate distress and reduce tension. In the meantime, we have realized the similarities of research trends in other disciplines and the probable natural bases of these similarities. The idea to put together an interdisciplinary volume on management and resolution of conflict came to us, then, as a *natural* consequence of these developments.

### *Common Ground and New Perspective*

The experience at interdisciplinary meetings and the reading of work by scientists from other disciplines confirmed our intuition regarding the overwhelming similarity in the basic themes underlying conflict regulation. We also realized, however, that the terminology was not always the same across the various disciplines. In order to put together an interdisciplinary volume that would convey the universality and the natural bases of the mechanisms for conflict regulation, we needed to reach a common ground in the terminology. We formed a panel of colleagues from various disciplines with the task of producing definitions of key terms that were compatible across disciplines (Appendix B). We then circulated the list of terms among volume contributors and asked them to conform to the definitions provided while writing their pieces. If authors needed to use a term with a different meaning than that provided in Appendix B, they clearly stated so in their contribution and provided the alternative definition.

Our volume does not exist in isolation. It is part of a recent trend that has emphasized (1) that social conflict should not be equated with aggression because many conflicts do not have aggressive outcomes and (2) that the view of aggression as an antisocial component of group life is surpassed (de Waal 1989b; Silverberg & Gray 1992; Mason

& Mendoza 1993). There has also been a growing interest in the study of peace viewed as an independent concept and not simply as the absence of war (Gregor 1996). Pioneering work has also been published on the new perspective of social regulation of aggression and competition in primates and other animals (de Waal 1989b; Moynihan 1998). Our volume follows the path outlined by this previous work and integrates detailed knowledge recently accumulated in various disciplines to provide a broad view of the naturally occurring mechanisms of conflict management and the principles underlying them. The emerging picture is a new perspective of social life, a perspective strengthened by the empirical and theoretical convergence from different species and disciplines.

The organization of the volume follows the main research trends to offer a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge. Natural conflict resolution is a rather new field of study, and many of the investigators are relatively junior. In addition, some of the areas of investigation are at an early stage. To include much of the diversity in studies and perspectives, we adopted a volume organization that combines review chapters with shorter contributions (boxes) on specific topics that are embedded within the chapters.

The volume consists of five main sections. It begins with a historical section with broad overviews of the changing emphasis from aggression and authoritative intervention to negotiation and resolution within biology, psychology, and legal studies. The following section deals with current knowledge on the mechanisms for controlling aggression. Many of the contributions in this section report on behaviors that have been previously described in various contexts and are now reinterpreted in view of the new perspective of conflict management. Most of these contributions deal specifically with animal examples, but we believe

that most principles underlying the various behaviors have validity for human cases as well.

The section "Repairing the Damage" presents contributions summarizing research that has been the core of the study of conflict resolution, that is, post-conflict conciliatory reunions between opponents. The section consists of chapters and boxes on children, nonhuman primates, and other animals; some contributions review research done over the past twenty years, whereas others present progress on less-studied aspects or species. Building on this knowledge, the section provides both developmental and phylogenetic perspectives and incorporates analyses of the underlying causes and functions of conciliatory reunions.

The following section examines the role of third parties in the process of conflict management. The

four contributions are based on nonhuman primates for which more data are available and focus on functional and cognitive issues of third-party involvement during and after conflicts. Viewing third-party intervention as a mechanism for conflict regulation is a rather new development, and these contributions attempt to present a framework for future research. The last section provides the broad scenario needed to appreciate fully what we know about conflict resolution and management in humans and other animals. Socioecological, cultural, and moral issues relevant to conflict regulation are examined in detail. These analyses highlight once more the similarities across species, cultures, and disciplines and strengthen the perspective of conflict resolution as a natural phenomenon.

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# Conflict Management in Children and Adolescents

Peter Verbeek, Willard W. Hartup, & W. Andrew Collins

## *Introduction*

Successful social development reconciles individuation with social integration and requires the acquisition of conflict management skills that afford both. The interplay between individual and social motives is already apparent in conflict between toddlers. For instance, Hay & Ross (1982) found that 21-month-old winners of toys would often abandon the toy they had just taken from a peer in order to engage in a new dispute over another toy held by the former opponent. Such tendencies were common even when the toy held by the other was an exact copy of the toy originally won. Earlier, Eckerman et al. (1979) showed that to one-year-old children the attractiveness of a toy increased after another person touched it. Thus toddler conflict may serve to test the "social waters" and may be instrumental in the acquisi-

tion of knowledge about social relations as well as ownership.

In this chapter we trace the development of conflict management skills from toddlerhood through adolescence, beginning with a brief overview of contemporary conceptualizations and proceeding with a discussion of what we currently know about conflict management in two principal arenas: the family and the peer group. We then consider how socioeconomic and cultural conditions affect the development of conflict management skills. We present our discussion within the framework of relationship theory and practical implications regarding adult mediation of children's conflicts.

Throughout development interpersonal conflict can take many forms, ranging from isolated

TABLE 3.1

Examples of Unilateral and Bilateral Conflict Management and Post-Conflict Events

<i>Conflict Phase</i>	<i>Unilateral</i>	<i>Bilateral</i>
TERMINATION	standing firm subordination power assertion: verbal/physical coercion temper tantrum avoidance/withdrawal	justification negotiation cooperation granting appeals disengagement compromise conciliation
IMMEDIATE OUTCOME	distributive standoff	variable integrative
POST-CONFLICT EVENT	separation	continued interaction peaceful reunion

incidents to interlocking series of oppositional events. Developmental research commonly focuses on distinct episodes that are separated in time and that can be broken down conceptually into three sequential phases: (1) instigation; (2) termination; and (3) immediate outcome (or *resolution*). The emphasis in this chapter is on conflict termination and immediate outcome, and for the purpose of our review we combine these under the heading of *conflict management*. Conflict management can be unilateral or bilateral. Unilateral conflict management is characterized by opportunism and lack of consideration for the opponent’s perspectives and wishes, as well as by subordination. Conversely, bilateral conflict management is characterized by mutual perspective taking and often by dovetailing of opposing goals and expectations (see Table 3.1 for an overview of basic terms).

Instigation is commonly classified according to two main causal domains: moral and social (cf. Killen & de Waal, Chapter 17). For instance, among

preschoolers a conflict may be about ownership of a toy (moral domain), or it may be a dispute about the rules of a game (social domain; Fig. 3.1).

Termination refers to children’s strategies aimed at ending conflict. Termination strategies can be unilateral (e.g., power assertion, coercion) or bilateral, for instance, when children negotiate or use conciliation to end their dispute.

Immediate outcome is commonly classified in two main categories: *distributive* and *variable* conflict outcomes. A distributive outcome includes situations during which one child’s gain is the other child’s loss. A variable outcome refers to situations in which both win or benefit from the resolution (cf. Littlefield et al. 1993). A variant of this latter category is the *integrative* outcome (cf. Anderson 1937). In this situation a shared interest in social interaction provides the basis for a mutually beneficial resolution. For instance, two children may have a similar stake in a particular interaction and may agree to overcome their differences in order



FIGURE 3.1. An example of a conflict in the social domain. Two preschool girls use physical assertion to terminate a dispute over taking turns in pushing a boy on a swing. Illustration by Eric P. Snowden from video observations by Peter Verbeek.

to resume the mutually rewarding interaction. Conversely, two children may share a long-term investment in an established relationship and may reconcile their differences in order to preserve the integrity of their relationship (see de Waal, Chapter 2; Cords & Aureli, Chapter 9; and van Schaik & Aureli, Chapter 15, for similar concepts in non-human animals).

Opponent interaction that extends beyond immediate conflict outcome has largely been ignored in the developmental literature. Not long ago we knew little about whether or how children make up with some delay following a conflict-induced separation. In this chapter we review recent evidence of peaceful post-conflict reunions that serve to reconcile former opponents' relations (Table 3.1; see Butovskaya et al., Chapter 12; cf. de Waal, Chapter 2).

### *Parent-Child Conflict Management*

Conflict among family members manifests two basic principles: differentiation and developmen-

tal change. Conflicts between children and their parents differ from those between children and their peers in terms of instigation, termination, and ending or resolution (Laursen & Collins 1994). Conflict instigation and management vary as a function of both developmental change and changes in normative expectancies regarding appropriate behavior.

### *Childhood*

Research on parent-child conflict during the first decade of life most often has focused on emotional outbursts, such as temper tantrums (cf. Potegal, Box 12.1), and coercive behavior of children toward other family members as evidence of conflict. The frequency of such behavior begins to decline during early childhood and continues to do so during middle childhood (Goodenough 1931; Newson & Newson 1968, 1976; Patterson 1982). The frequency of episodes during which parents discipline their children also decreases between the ages of three and nine (Clifford 1959). Consequently, research on conflict management in this period has focused on the relative effectiveness of various parental strategies for gaining compliance and managing negative behaviors. As a result there is little descriptive information about the characteristics of conflict between parents and children and the role of each in conflict management.

With young children, parents typically employ distraction and physical assertion for preventing harm and gaining compliance. In middle childhood, however, parents report less frequent physical punishment and increasing use of techniques such as deprivation of privileges, appeals to children's self-esteem or sense of humor, arousal of children's sense of guilt, and reminders that children are responsible for what happens to them (Clifford 1959; Newson & Newson 1976; Roberts et al. 1984). These techniques may reflect changes

in parents' attributions about the degree to which children should be expected to manage their behavior and also a greater tendency to regard misbehavior as deliberate intent and, thus, as warranting both parental anger and punishment (Dix et al. 1986).

Several emotional characteristics of six- to twelve-year-olds complicate parent-child conflict management. Compared with preschool children, six- to twelve-year-olds are more likely to sulk, become depressed, avoid parents, or engage in passive noncooperation with their parents (Clifford 1959). Furthermore, children are increasingly likely to attribute conflict with parents to the inadequacy of parental helping behaviors and disappointment in the frequency of parent-child interactions. In preadolescence, children also increasingly blame conflicts on parents' failures to fulfill role expectations and on lack of consensus on familial and societal values (Fisher & Johnson 1990). These attributional patterns may affect children's expectations about what type of conflict management is required.

#### *Adolescence*

Conflict management studies that focus on this age group are divided between those focusing on management of actual conflicts and those seeking preferred responses. These two methods often yield different estimates. For instance, Sternberg & Dobson (1987) found clear preference for compromise and mutual discussion in hypothetical disagreements, with disengagement (e.g., wait and see, avoid) being infrequently endorsed. The same subjects, however, reported that recent, real-life conflicts are terminated with disengagement as often as with negotiation (see also Youniss & Smollar 1985).

Naturalistic observations, experimental analogues, and self-reports with both peers (Goodwin 1982; Youniss & Smollar 1985) and family mem-

bers (Montemayor & Hanson 1985; Schoenleber 1988; Raffaelli 1990; Smetana 1991) show clearly that adolescents' conflicts are most commonly terminated through power assertion and disengagement, rather than through negotiation. Later in adolescence preference for power-assertive techniques declines, thus making more complex bilateral techniques, such as negotiation, relatively more common.

Between adolescents and parents, integrative and distributive resolutions are about equally likely, and conflict rarely has a detrimental impact on future relations with parents (Laursen 1989). Nevertheless, family members are less likely than individuals without familial ties to report positive feelings once a conflict has ended (Laursen 1989; Raffaelli 1990). The importance of satisfying resolutions, however, is indicated by repeated findings that bilateral engagement in terminating conflict, rather than the occurrence of conflict, is a marker of adaptive, well-functioning relationships (e.g., Kelley et al. 1983; Grotevant & Cooper 1986).

#### *Explanations for Age-Related*

##### *Changes in Conflict Management*

Explanations for shifts toward more adultlike, less power-assertive terminations have ranged from hormonal causes to psychological ones. For example, pubertal levels of certain hormones appear to be correlated with individual differences in the intensity of conflicts (Inoff-Germain et al. 1988). Individual variations in pubertal timing may also be tied to the incidence of adolescent conflicts with parents. Conflicts over family rules in early adolescence, for example, have been found to be especially likely in families with early-maturing offspring, both male and female (Hill & Holmbeck 1987; Hill 1988).

Various investigators have predicted that knowledge of appropriate skills and strategies for

negotiated terminations should increase from middle childhood to late adolescence, on the assumption that logical competence, including understanding of interpersonal relationships, should be more advanced among older individuals than younger ones. Such changes potentially alter the degree to which the reasoning of children matches the complexity of parental reasoning about conflict. For example, most studies indicate relative congruity in the perceptions of 10- to 11-year-olds and their parents concerning matters in which parents' authority is legitimate (Smetana 1989), whereas incongruity becomes more likely during adolescence. Children's concepts of the basis for parental authority also change with age. Whereas preschoolers view parental authority as resting on the power to punish or reward, children in early middle childhood increasingly believe parental authority derives from all the things that parents do for them. After about age eight, parents' expert knowledge and skill are also seen as reasons to submit to their authority (Braine et al. 1991). Consequently, Maccoby (1984) speculates, parental appeals based on fairness, the return of favors, or reminders of the parents' greater knowledge and experience may increase in effectiveness during middle childhood, with parents less often feeling compelled to resort to promises of reward or threats of punishment. Central to these practices is an emphasis on the implications of children's actions for others (induction), rather than on use of parents' superior power to coerce compliance (Hoffman & Saltzstein 1967; Hoffman 1988).

### *Summary*

During the toddler years parent-child conflict management is primarily a unilateral affair. Coercion, often manifested through temper tantrums, is a common termination strategy used by children

at this young age, and it is usually up to parents to use appropriate measures to maintain positive relations with their child (but see Potegal, Box 12.1).

During the preschool years conflict management commonly consists of children's voluntary submission to parental authority. From middle childhood through preadolescence, children come to appreciate parental knowledge and expertise as reasons to submit to parental demands in conflict situations. Parent and child roles are further specified, and role expectations often become points of contention. At this age children are also more prone to sulk during the aftermath of parent-child conflict, and negative affect may imperil the parent-child relationship.

During much of adolescence, power assertion and disengagement become the termination strategies of choice for youth in conflicts with parents. Satisfaction with their relationships becomes especially important to both parents and adolescents. Expectations often differ, however, and parents and adolescents may blame each other for violating expectations. Synchronized expectations depend on synchronized cognitions, and cognitive growth enables older adolescents to negotiate rather than coerce resolutions to conflicts with parents.

### *Sibling Conflict Management*

Conflict is universally embedded in sibling relationships. Since most children have siblings, this means that sibling conflict is widely experienced. These conflicts, however, are both unilateral and bilateral in terms of the management tactics used. The use of unilateral tactics such as coercion has been found to be negatively correlated with cooperation between siblings. Unilateral tactics also negatively correlate with helping, sharing, and sympathy expressed by older siblings toward younger ones (Dunn & Munn 1986). Bilateral tac-

tics, however, have different correlates: attempts to reconcile positions and justify them are positively correlated with sharing, helping, and the comforting of older siblings by younger ones, and conciliation and justification are both positively correlated with cooperation by older children with their younger siblings. Patterns such as these suggest that conflict management is embedded in more general "types" of sibling relationships according to whether the efforts are generally bilateral or unilateral.

Home observations conducted with school-age children suggest generalization of conflict management involving siblings. Patterson (1982), for example, found that the use of coercion between siblings was correlated, first, with the use of coercion in parent-child relations and, second, with antisocial behavior in the children's dealings outside the home. Hetherington (1988) also found that children with coercive, aggressive sibling relationships evinced poorer peer relationships, behavior problems, and trouble at school. Causal interpretations are difficult, however, especially as to whether pathways from relationship to relationship are direct or indirect, but the generality of the child's modes of conflict management across relationships is striking.

Sibling relations differ according to parents' behavior toward their children—separately and together. For example, conflict and hostility in parent-child relations involving one sibling are correlated with conflict between the parents and the other sibling (Radke-Yarrow et al. 1988). When mothers or fathers favor one sibling (or children perceive them that way), greater conflict and more coercive relations ensue between the children. Moreover, psychosocial adjustment is poorer among children who perceive themselves to be less positively treated by their parents than their siblings (Boer & Dunn 1992). Overall, cross-

relational continuities in conflict management suggest that families constitute social systems rather than separate dyads.

### *Peer Conflict Management*

In most societies children and adolescents spend a considerable amount of time interacting with age-mates in peer groups (e.g., Barker & Wright 1955; Whiting & Whiting 1975). Initially, such groups are commonly same-sex groups (e.g., Harkness & Super 1985); later, throughout adolescence, mixed-sex groups become more prominent (e.g., Hartup 1983; Berndt & Savin-Williams 1993).

Much of the literature focuses on conflict taking place in dyads of close peers. In the next section we discuss how concerns about the future of a close friendship can mitigate peer conflict. However, even when not concerned with the integrity of an existing close relationship, children, especially boys, are concerned with maintaining their status in the group, which can affect their choice of conflict management strategy (Maccoby 1996; cf. Strayer & Noel 1986). In fact, when children grow older—and this is true for boys as well as for girls—maintaining peer relationships becomes an increasingly complex task that involves concerns of closeness and friendship, as well as concerns of social status, and peer group integration and functioning (e.g., Coie & Cillessen 1993; Laursen 1993).

Conflict management is closely tied to friendship relations in childhood and adolescence. Conflicts are instrumental in initiating and maintaining friendships, and to a lesser extent in terminating them. Children manage conflicts and adopt peacemaking strategies in order to meet the expectations of themselves and their friends, further their understanding of the obligations and responsibilities of friendship, and maintain these relationships

through time. Friendship experiences vary from child to child, and these variations have considerable developmental significance.

#### *Age Trends*

Recently, Laursen et al. (1998b) used a meta-analytic approach to take a general look at developmental differences in peer conflict management. The analysis was based on 25 studies dealing with dyadic conflict among peers classified as acquaintances (e.g., classmates, dormitory roommates), friends, romantic partners, and siblings.

The meta-analysis showed that, overall, peers managed conflict more often with negotiation than with coercion or disengagement. Significant developmental contrasts emerged, however. Children (age 2–10) commonly employed coercion, whereas adolescents (age 11–18) frequently employed negotiation as well as coercion. Conversely, young adults (age 19–25) more often resorted to either negotiation or disengagement.

The meta-analysis of Laursen et al. did not consider the aftermath of peer conflict. Recent cross-cultural findings showed that young children transformed a significant percentage of distributive outcomes into integrative resolutions after a “cooling-off” period of a few minutes (Verbeek 1997; Butovskaya et al., Chapter 12; and see below). When such post-conflict reconciliation (cf. de Waal, Chapter 2) is considered, young children appear considerably more constructive in their approach to peer conflict than one would infer from the aggregated findings of Laursen et al.

#### *Conflict Management and Peer Status*

Much of the research on peer social status has focused on measures of popularity (*sociometric* status, e.g., Coie et al. 1982) and on measures of social rank (*dominance* status, e.g., Strayer 1976). Sociometric status is measured through peer nominations and dominance status through naturalistic

observations. Sociometric status, such as being “popular” or “rejected” among peers, is often seen as a reflection of individual traits (e.g., Coie & Dodge 1983; Dodge et al. 1990). There has been relatively little overlap between these two perspectives on peer status; researchers commonly focus on either sociometric or dominance status (but see La Freniere & Charlesworth 1983; Boulton & Smith 1990; Santos & Strayer 1997).

In contrast to sociometric status, which is based on peer perceptions, dominance status is a direct consequence of interactions with peers. As with sociometric status, there is some evidence for stability of dominance status over time (La Freniere & Charlesworth 1983; Strayer 1992), but there is little or no evidence for stability across settings. Interestingly, young children tend to have inflated views of the extent to which they are accepted by their peers (Patterson et al. 1990), and they commonly overestimate their own rank—and the rank of liked peers—in the dominance hierarchy (Boulton & Smith 1990).

Several studies have established a link between conflict management and sociometric status. For instance, Bryant (1992) found that popular children were viewed by their peers as more conciliatory compared with rejected peers. Rejected peers, in turn, were seen as more coercive in their approach to managing peer conflict. Studies of children’s responses to hypothetical conflict scenarios and to limited-resource conditions provide convergent evidence: conciliatory strategies were associated with popularity and coercive strategies with rejection by peers (French & Waas 1987; Putallaz & Sheppard 1990; Chung & Asher 1996).

Limited-resource paradigms have also shed light on the link between dominance status and conflict management. Charlesworth (1996; La Freniere & Charlesworth 1987) devised a situation wherein four same-aged children (age range: four to eight) were given access to an attractive cartoon picture

viewer. Conflict was inherent in this situation because in order for a child to see the movie in the viewer, the assistance of two other children was required, thereby relegating the fourth child to a bystander position. Children who ranked high in their classroom hierarchies ("alpha" children) spent considerably more time viewing the cartoon than lower-ranking children. Their success in obtaining the resource (in essence, a distributive resolution) was not strictly based on coercion, however, but rather involved a combination of coercive and cooperative strategies. More recently, Charlesworth observed Indian, Malayan, and South African children in the same situation and found that "alpha" children in each country behaved in a fashion similar to that of the U.S. children of the original study (Charlesworth 1996).

Commonly, when groups of children first meet (e.g., early in the new school year), conflicts, and assertive interactions not resulting in conflict, occur relatively frequently and contribute to the eventual establishment of a dominance hierarchy (Strayer 1992). Once dominance relations are established, rates of conflict and aggression decrease, and triadic support—opportunistic at first—mainly becomes an issue of friends supporting one another (Strayer & Noel 1986). Considering Charlesworth's (1983, 1996) findings, future research should investigate whether the use of a mixed strategy of coercion and cooperation by high-ranking children is indicative of established relations, or whether this "carrot and stick" approach is already apparent during the time that peer relations are first established.

Such an approach could also help to shed light on why it is that first impressions seem to matter in peer groups. Ladd et al. (1988), for instance, found that preschoolers who frequently argued with their peers early in the year were likely to be rejected throughout the entire year. In fact, children who argued early in the year but changed

their ways during the year were still rejected later in the year. In a similar vein Denham & Holt (1993) found that peer reputation established early in the year was a significantly stronger predictor of being liked later in the year than actual social behavior.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that peer status both affects and is affected by the use of specific conflict management strategies. A synthesis of sociometric and observational methods is needed to unravel the relative strength and directionality of these relationships.

#### *Conflict Management and Friendship Formation*

Once children find themselves in proximity with one another (e.g., on playgrounds, in schools), friendships emerge on the basis of shared interests and attitudes as well as the shared understanding that continued interaction between them is in their mutual interest. Observational studies show that, first, agreements must occur over time within a context of shared interests in order for acquaintances to become friends and, second, certain conflicts and certain modes of conflict management actually facilitate friendship formation. For example, the use of "soft" modes of conflict management (e.g., "weak demands" followed by agreement) are associated with "hitting it off" (Gottman 1983). Classroom studies confirm that children frequently initiate conflicts with their friends (usually through weak demands) that are more likely to lead to integrative than distributive resolutions (Rizzo 1989).

Overall, then, friendship formation among young children seems to be marked by a dialectic between agreement and disagreement, a condition that also characterizes friendship formation among older children (Renshaw & Asher 1983). An agreements/disagreements dialectic may be necessary in friendship formation because comparisons are intrinsic to social attraction. Agreements

carry limited information about exchange possibilities expect in contrast to disagreements (Hartup 1992; see de Waal 1986 for a discussion of a similar binding mechanism in nonhuman primates).

#### *Conflict Management and Established Relationships*

Three- and four-year-old children manage conflicts with friends differently than conflicts with nonfriends. Four observational studies conducted during free play concur in demonstrating that conflicts between friends are managed in qualitatively different ways than conflicts with nonfriends. Although friends' and nonfriends' conflicts do not differ in frequency, length, or the situations that instigate them, conflicts between friends are less intense than those occurring between nonfriends, and, most important, conflict management differs (Hartup et al. 1988). Conflicts between friends are more likely to involve disengagement and negotiation, whereas conflicts between nonfriends are more likely to consist of standing firm/subordination. Resolutions also differ: integrative resolutions are more common between friends than between nonfriends. Finally, with their friends, children are more likely to remain in proximity and engage in social interaction when the conflict is over. Vespo & Caplan (1993) confirmed these results using a slightly different approach, namely, by comparing friend and nonfriend dyads rather than by comparing the conflicts of friends and nonfriends.

Verbeek & Creveling (unpublished data) extended these findings and found a direct relation between the use of conciliatory termination strategies and subsequent interaction between the children. First, conciliation (invitations to cooperate, apologies, offers to share, and friendly physical contact) occurred more frequently during conflicts between friends than between nonfriends, mainly among girls. Most important, though, the results show a direct connection

between the use of conciliatory termination strategies and continued interaction following the conflict. Friends remain together, it seems, as a direct result of their use of conciliation, negotiation, and disengagement.

In a subsequent study, Verbeek (1997) demonstrated that remaining together following conflict is more common among friends (and acquaintances) than among nonfriends—partly because friends are more likely to be interacting prior to the conflict and partly because they use conciliatory strategies more readily. A second conflict outcome was examined, *post-conflict reunions*, that is, coming together in a peaceful manner in a post-conflict observation (Fig. 3.2). These reunions, which generally occurred within the first four minutes after a conflict-induced separation, did not differ according to the friendship relations existing between the children (cf. Butovskaya et al., Chapter 12). Friendship, then, seems to promote management strategies among young



FIGURE 3.2. An example of a peaceful post-conflict reunion between two former opponents after a brief conflict-induced separation. The boy is an interested bystander and did not mediate the reunion between the two preschool girls. Illustration by Eric P. Snowden from video observations by Peter Verbeek.

children that keep them together through a conflict episode but do not necessarily facilitate reunion once a conflict-induced separation has occurred.

Most observational studies of conflict among school-age children have been conducted in so-called *closed-field* rather than *open-field* situations, that is, children were observed in laboratory tasks for a fixed time with a designated partner rather than in free play or unstructured settings. Consequently, comparisons between studies with older and younger children are not easy to make. Nevertheless, when sharing tasks (Fonzi et al. 1997), distributive games (Matsumoto et al. 1986), or persuasion tasks (Jones 1985) are used, friends spend more time negotiating than nonfriends, make more proposals to one another, compromise more readily, and grant one another's appeals proportionally more often. Conflicts are sometimes more numerous and intense between friends than nonfriends in closed-field situations and in discussion/consensus tasks (cf. Nelson & Aboud 1985), but negotiated and conciliatory terminations are nevertheless favored more by friends than nonfriends.

When the laboratory task is competitive, friends compete more vigorously with one another than nonfriends (Fonzi et al. 1997), especially if they are boys (Berndt 1981); friends also experience more frequent and long-lasting conflicts (Hartup et al. 1993). Nevertheless, in managing conflicts in these situations, friends pay closer attention to the rules than nonfriends (Fonzi et al. 1997) and provide one another with more frequent assertions.

Friends and nonfriends have also been examined in cognitive tasks. In one instance (Fraysee 1995), six- and seven-year-old children working on conservation tasks with friends produced more self-justifications and criticisms than nonfriends did. Nevertheless, conflicts between friends involved more positive reactions than conflicts between

nonfriends, as well as more frequent searches for equitable solutions.

In another investigation (Azmitia & Montgomery 1993), 10-year-old children working on inductive reasoning problems with their friends were found to solve especially difficult problems more readily than nonfriends. The behaviors most closely linked to this outcome were monitoring of outcomes during the task and *transactive conflicts*, that is, dyadic exchanges in which each member of the dyad refers to the partner's reasoning or significantly clarifies one's own strategies. From these studies, as well as the social games described earlier, it becomes clear that friends are more active in their search for solutions, are more task-oriented, and make more active use of conflict to obtain solutions than nonfriends.

Overall, some two dozen published investigations contain data comparing friends and nonfriends in terms of conflict management. Questionnaire studies have been conducted as well as observational studies described here. Meta-analyses based on the entire literature with children ranging from preschool age through pre-adolescence (Newcomb & Bagwell 1995) confirm the pattern we describe: conflict frequency does not generally differ between friends and nonfriends, but modes of conflict management do.

Among the many gains that the greater use of conciliatory termination achieves for friends is the maintenance of their relationships with one another (Hartup et al. 1988; Laursen 1993; Verbeek 1997; Laursen et al. 1998b; see de Waal, Chapter 2, and Cords & Aureli, Chapter 9, for a discussion of similar findings in nonhuman primates). Having learned that common ground (mutual interests and attitudes) maximizes social rewards and having invested considerable energy in finding and initiating relationships with one's friends, children learn early on to select conciliatory behavior, negotiation, disengagement, and other

"soft" modes of conflict management to protect and preserve these relationships.

Although considerable attention has been given to the hypothesis that friends favor conciliatory strategies in order to maintain their interaction and relationships with their friends, other functions may be involved. By being affirmative and relatively noncoercive with one another in their social exchanges, friends become significant sources of consensual validation (Sullivan 1953) and a sense of well-being (Hartup & Stevens 1997). Friends may render especially insightful assistance in cognitive functioning and performance (Hartup 1996). Consequently, investigators should think of the dialectic between friendship and conflict management as related to broad adaptational consequences, not merely the maintenance of the affiliation for its own sake.

#### *Summary*

Children gain their first substantial experience with peers during the preschool years. At this age children manifest different conflict management strategies with parents and with peers. Individual differences in conflict management style become apparent and affect peer acceptance. Conciliatory children are generally liked and coercive children disliked among their peers, and first impressions tend to persist. Conflict management also affects the formation of close dyadic relationships: friendships arise out of frequent play in which successive episodes of conflict and bilateral resolutions are embedded. Once established, friendships are maintained in much the same way.

During middle childhood through early adolescence, peer conflict management reflects both established patterns and new developments. Successive agreement/disagreement episodes are instrumental in friendship formation among peers. Friends often compete more vigorously than non-friends, but they also work things out propor-

tionally more often than nonfriends. In fact, at this age conflict management among friends positively affects social as well as cognitive growth. On the flip side, antisocial children often have antisocial friends, and destructive patterns of conflict management may become the norm across relationships.

Cognitive growth affects conflict management in the context of the increasingly complex peer relations that characterize late adolescence. These developments set the stage for early adulthood, during which variable conflict resolutions tend to become the norm.

### *Triadic Events*

#### *Triadic Interactions within the Family*

In families, third parties often contribute to both the incidence and resolution of conflict. Some of these effects are indirect, in that the two principal parties to the conflict behave differently in the presence of the third party than they would under other conditions. For example, mother-son dyads have been found to manifest greater engagement, security, and consistency when the father was present than when mother and son were alone (Gjerde 1986). These differences suggest that in intact families fathers' presence may indirectly facilitate integrative resolutions to conflict.

In other instances, third parties directly affect conflict resolution. Vuchinich et al. (1988) studied conflict during familial dinner-table conversations. The authors observed that all family members frequently intervened in conflict between two other members. Third parties were about equally likely to attempt to end or to continue the conflict. Intervention strategies varied with gender and familial roles. Females were more likely to intervene than males. Fathers tended to use authority; mothers, mediational tactics; and children,

distraction. In about half of the interventions the third party attempted to form an alliance with one of the primary parties to the conflict. Third-party interventions usually prolonged conflicts but often led to resolution, perhaps because third parties tended to reciprocate nonconflictual behaviors, rather than conflictual ones. (See also Das, Chapter 13; Petit & Thierry, Box 13.1; and Watts et al., Chapter 14, for examples of triadic interactions in nonhuman primates.)

These findings leave open questions of the conditions under which third-party interventions have more or less positive implications for conflict resolution. A recent study by Perlman & Ross (1997) sheds some light on this. In this study parents of preschool-age children were observed to intervene in the most intense sibling fights, and parental intervention in these instances commonly resulted in integrative resolutions.

#### *Peer Intervention and Mediation*

As early as the preschool years peers support one another in conflicts, and such triadic support has been linked to group hierarchy and social status, as well as to friendship (Strayer & Noel 1986; Grammer 1992). When asked, preschool-age children are not always able to identify coalitions and alliances within their peer group (Strayer et al. 1980); however, once they reach middle childhood, children are quite capable of telling who supports whom in peer conflicts (Loots 1985).

We still know relatively little about the effects of peer intervention on resolution. Most of the available evidence associates peer intervention with distributive resolutions (e.g., Strayer & Noel 1986). A recent observational study of preschool conflict (Verbeek 1997) showed, however, that although the initiator and recipient of triadic conflict more often than not failed to reconcile their differences, friendly post-conflict reunions between conflict recipients and supporters were

not uncommon. In fact, such post-conflict peacemaking was especially likely when the supporter and the recipient interacted prior to the conflict. The strategies of the supporters in this study are intriguing as they combine coercion (in support of the initiator) with post-conflict peacemaking (with the recipient). Further research should focus on the cognitive and social-motivational correlates of these triadic strategies in young children and expand this line of research to older children and adolescents.

Little is known about peer mediation, that is, impartial intervention aimed at integrative resolution. Questions such as whether the rate of occurrence changes with age, and whether peer mediation increases the likelihood of integrative resolution, remain largely unanswered. There is some evidence to suggest that peer mediation may be associated with cultural values and expectations. Butovskaya et al. (Chapter 12) report that among Kalmyk and Russian children mediation of peer conflict is perceived as both desirable and honorable. Moreover, naturalistic observations of peer conflict showed that peer mediation occurred significantly more often among Kalmyk and Russian children than among Swedish and U.S. children in two comparable studies (see also Petit & Thierry, Box 13.1, for a discussion of impartial intervention among nonhuman primates).

#### *Teacher Mediation of Peer Conflict*

Debates about whether or not teachers should mediate peer conflict of children, and what form such mediation should take, continue to divide teachers and parents alike. The long-standing public interest in teacher mediation of children's conflict has not been adequately matched by research; well-designed studies on this topic remain in short supply.

That teacher mediation not always results in the desired outcome is illustrated by a recent study

on conflict management in preschoolers in which it was found that only 8 percent of former opponents continued to associate after being told by teachers "to make peace," compared with 35 percent after an independently resolved dispute (Verbeek & Creveling unpublished data). Adult mediation thus appeared more of a hindrance than a facilitation for peaceful post-conflict interaction.

The limited body of systematic research on teacher mediation of children's peer conflict suggests that in order to be effective teacher mediation must match the causal domain (e.g., moral vs. social) and must be age- and skill-appropriate. Studies by Nucci (1984) and Killen et al. (1994) on teacher mediation of peer conflict have shown that children as young as preschool age are already quite capable of perceiving the relative merit of adult mediation in that they prefer domain-appropriate over domain-inappropriate teacher explanations during mediation.

Bayer et al. (1995) showed that teacher mediation is likely to be most effective when it is targeted within the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky 1978), that is, within the limits constituted by children's age-dependent ability to negotiate resolution independently and the outcome they may achieve with the expert assistance of an adult. Malloy & McMurray's (1996) recent study on peer conflict in an integrated preschool classroom suggests that teachers need to utilize different mediation strategies for typically developing children and children with disabilities according to their levels of aggression, communication, perceptual motor ability, and cognitive understanding. Finally, and notwithstanding Malloy & McMurray's findings, Lieber (1994) presents evidence for the fact that even children with a variety of disabilities are often able to manage their conflicts without adult intervention and reiterates that adult mediation strategies should be aimed at helping children manage their conflicts

rather than taking over conflict management from them (cf. Perlman & Ross 1997).

## *Socioeconomic and Cultural Influences*

### *Socioeconomic Influences*

On any given night three-quarters of a million people in the United States, and an estimated three million in the European Union, are homeless, and many of the documented homeless are children, including the very young (UNICEF 1998). Whereas poverty and homelessness among youth were once primarily associated with developing nations, recent statistics show that both are on the rise in Western societies. We still know little about the effects of poverty and homelessness on peer conflict management, but a handful of studies suggest that homeless youth, in particular, may be at a developmental disadvantage compared with their middle-class counterparts.

Several U.S. studies show that homeless children's lack of status and material possessions mediates their rejection by classmates (Gewirtzman & Fodor 1987; Horowitz et al. 1988). Peer conflict may be more frequent among homeless children than in poor, inner-city children with a home (Molnar et al. 1991). Homeless adolescents cited peer conflict as the worst problem facing them on a daily basis (Horowitz et al. 1994). The homeless adolescents in this study frequently appealed to their mothers and teachers for assistance in managing conflict with peers. This is in stark contrast to adolescents from intact, middle-class homes who commonly manage peer conflict without adult intervention.

In summary, homeless adolescents' rejection by their peers, anxiety about frequent peer conflict, and insecurity about how to manage it may have a compounded detrimental effect on their social

development and may put them at risk for future social maladjustment and psychopathology (cf. Coie et al. 1992; Coie & Cillessen 1993).

### *Cultural Influences*

Progress toward a better understanding of peer conflict management is hampered by the scant supply of comparative evidence (but see Butovskaya et al., Chapter 12). The relative shortage of both within-culture and between-cultures comparisons limits our ability to make inferences with respect to the universality of developmental patterns observed among primarily Western middle-class youth. Moreover, attempts to isolate the influences of cultural values and expectations on peer conflict management are often limited by an inherent confound between culture and socioeconomic status (see above).

Some of the available evidence suggests that the cultural expectations and values associated with different modes of subsistence may affect how children learn to manage conflict with peers. For instance, a within-culture comparison of Mexican children from three distinct ecocultural niches—a commerce-oriented small town, an industrialized urban city, and a small agricultural rural town—produced significant differences in peer conflict management preferences (Kagan et al. 1981). Children from the small commercial town were more competitive in their approach to peer conflict than children from the other two settings. This was illustrated by their clear preference for continued conflict (67 percent of total responses) over disengagement (13 percent). Interestingly, the children from the industrialized urban and the agricultural rural town did not differ in their preferences: both groups showed only a slight preference for continued conflict over disengagement. This latter pattern seems more in line with the conflict management strategies of urban Western middle-class children we mentioned earlier. Sim-

ilar findings come from studies conducted in southern Mexico (Fry 1988). Peer aggression was significantly more prominent among children from a competitive and violent Zapotec community than among children from a neighboring Zapotec community described as generally peaceful. Taken together, these findings suggest that there is a link between niche-specific adult patterns of interpersonal conflict and children's conflict management with peers. These findings also suggest that a simple urban-rural dichotomy may be insufficient to explain the effects of town ecology on peer aggression and conflict management.

Contemporary Western society is characterized by increasing ethnic diversity. Ogbu (1993) proposed that there are "primary" and "secondary" cultural differences among the various ethnic groups in Western societies. Primary cultural differences arise from the fact that members of two populations had their own ways of behaving and thinking before they came in continuous contact with each other. Secondary cultural differences arise in part as coping mechanisms used by minorities to deal with the problems they face in their relationships with members of the dominant group and the societal institutions controlled by the latter.

Studies conducted in the early 1970s suggest that children of a Mexican American cultural background tend to favor integrative resolutions more than Anglo-American children their age (Madsen & Shapira 1970; Kagan & Madsen 1971; McClintock 1974). More comparisons of peer conflict management among Mexican American and Anglo-American children living in the same suburb of a large southern California city confirm these earlier results (Khoram 1994). That is, Anglo-American children reported using power assertion as a conflict termination strategy significantly more often than their Mexican American counterparts. Moreover, the Anglo-American

children perceived peer conflict to end in distributive outcomes more than the Mexican American children.

When we adopt Ogbu's (1993) theoretical framework, we are left with the question of whether these fairly robust differences between Mexican American and Anglo-American children are best explained as being "primary" or "secondary" in origin. Considering the evidence of within-culture differences in peer conflict management in the Mexican American children's ancestral country, the case for primacy appears weak. Alternatively, constructive conflict management may be part and parcel of the way Mexican American children cope with their minority status. Future research should focus on the relational significance of the conflict management style of Mexican American children, with regard to the maintenance of peer relations within as well as outside their own ethnic groups.

In summary, within-culture and between-cultures comparisons suggest that peer conflict management is not independent from niche-specific adult patterns of competition and cooperation. Future research in this general area should focus on the link between modes of subsistence (including distribution of resources) and adult patterns of interpersonal conflict management. In addition, we need to learn more about the mechanisms of cross-generational transmission of niche-specific patterns of conflict management. For instance, we need to determine whether transmission takes place through observational learning,

concerted efforts by adults (i.e., instructional learning), or both.

### Conclusion

Two kinds of relationships figure prominently in children's lives: "vertical" attachments to adults and "horizontal" relationships with peers. Conflict is inherent in these relationships, and managing conflict with familiar partners provides important socializing experiences.

Certain kinds of conflict management strategies support and maintain children's relationships in and outside the home. Moreover, relationship experience, in turn, contributes to the development of skill in effectively managing conflicts, and effective conflict management is correlated with a variety of developmental indicators.

Adult mediation is most effective when it is explicit, as well as age- and domain-appropriate. Moreover, adult mediators who consider the specific nature of the opponents' relationship can be expected to be most effective.

Socioeconomic and cultural factors affect conflict management style and as such affect children's relationships and development. Especially telling are findings that suggest that homelessness may deprive youth of the opportunity to establish normal relationships and acquire the proper skills to manage interpersonal conflict. Clearly, societies should take steps to ensure that all children have equal opportunity to go through the formative experience of bilateral conflict management.

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