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Escalation and Its Development

Development of the Cold War • Transformations That Occur During
Escalation • A Domestic Escalation • Escalation Models • *The Contender-Defender
Model* • *The Conflict Spiral Model* • *Relationship Between the Contender-Defender
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The term *escalation* brings the realm of international relations most prominently to mind. Hence, we start with an example from this realm, the development of the Cold War. However, escalation is not limited to this realm and can occur at all levels of society. Accordingly, we will present examples from several other realms as well.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLD WAR

The Cold War was a vast political conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, which began to develop immediately after 1945 and persisted until the late 1980s. In its time, this harsh, often frightening conflict was the dominant feature on the international landscape, and it affected the lives of a tremendous number of people around the globe. It never led to a full-scale war between the superpowers, though war came close at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis (to be described in Chapter 9). However, most of the wars in this period were outgrowths of the Cold

War, including the Korean and Vietnam Wars and the Soviet military action in Afghanistan. Today the Soviet Union is gone, and the rivalry between these regions of the world has largely disappeared. But the Cold War has left a continuing legacy in many of our institutions and much of our literature. Here is the story of how the Cold War developed.

The United States and the Soviet Union were allies during the Second World War, which ended in 1945 with high hopes for continued cooperation. But the Soviets emerged from the war with deep suspicion of the West. This led them to seek control of the nations adjoining their territory, making it difficult to maintain East-West cooperation. The Soviets built a communist satellite system in Eastern Europe, supported communist guerrillas in Greece, and applied political pressure to Turkey. In 1947 the United States responded to these actions in three ways: It gave military aid to Greece and Turkey. It created the Marshall Plan, designed to revitalize the economy of Western Europe and weaken Communist parties in Western European countries. And (in conjunction with Britain and later with France) it began the slow process of unifying West Germany and rebuilding its economy, as a further bulwark against Soviet expansion.

The latter move was viewed with considerable alarm by the Soviet Union, which had been at war with Germany twice in the preceding thirty years. The Soviets responded at first with protests. Then, in 1948, they tried sporadically interrupting communications between Berlin (which was under joint control but was an enclave surrounded by the Russian controlled portion of Germany) and West Germany. Finally, after the West introduced a unified currency in West Germany, the Soviets installed a full blockade of Berlin, claiming that they were repairing the routes to the city. The United States and its allies responded by launching a successful airlift between Berlin and West Germany. They also began negotiations that led to the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a military alliance involving the United States and most of the Western European nations. This latter development led eventually to the rearmament of West Germany, which caused considerable further alarm in the Soviet Union.

The Cold War continued until the late 1980s, but we interrupt the story at this point because we have said enough to give a dramatic example of conflict escalation.

TRANSFORMATIONS THAT OCCUR DURING ESCALATION

There are two related meanings of the term *escalation*. It may mean that one of the participants in conflict is using heavier tactics than before—is putting greater pressure on the other participant. Or it may mean that there is an increase in the intensity of a conflict *as a whole*. These meanings

are related, since escalation by one participant usually leads to escalation by the other and hence an intensification of the conflict as a whole. We use the term in both senses in this book, but mainly in the latter sense.

As conflicts escalate, they go through certain incremental transformations. Although these transformations occur separately on each side, they affect the conflict as a whole because they are usually mirrored by the other side. As a result of these transformations, the conflict is intensified in ways that are sometimes exceedingly difficult to undo. The aim of this chapter and the next is to understand the nature of these transformations and some of the processes by which they take place.

At least five types of transformations commonly occur during escalation. All may not be found in a single conflict, but all are very common. The five transformations are as follows:

1. *Light->heavy*. As we observed in Chapter 4, Party's efforts to get its way in a contentious exchange typically begin with light influence attempts: ingratiation overtures or persuasive arguments. In many cases, these gentle tactics are supplanted by their heavier counterparts: threats, coercive commitments, and so on. Eventually even violence may erupt. The events of 1948 illustrate this kind of transformation. The Soviet Union moved from protest to disrupting communication and eventually to blockading a city. The United States and its allies also moved decisively from strengthening a new ally to the formation of a full military alliance.
2. *Small—>large*. As conflict escalates, there is a tendency for issues to proliferate (McEwen & Milburn, 1993). There is also a tendency for the parties to become increasingly absorbed in the struggle and to commit additional resources to it in an effort to prevail. Both tendencies may be seen in the Cold War crisis. On the Soviet side, the initial general suspicion of the West mushroomed into a large number of specific complaints: the program to weaken Communist parties, the rebuilding of West Germany, the introduction of a separate West German currency, and finally the formation of a hostile military alliance. From the viewpoint of the United States, new issues appeared at every turn: the introduction of a communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia, the support of guerrillas in Greece, the Berlin blockade. Both sides rapidly increased the resources allocated to the conflict, and the conflict developed into a national obsession on both sides.
3. *Specific ->general*. In escalating conflict, specific issues tend to give way to general issues (Coleman, 1957), and the overall relationship between the parties deteriorates. Over the painful history of an escalating exchange, small, concrete concerns tend to be supplanted by grandiose and all-encompassing positions and by a general intolerance of the other side.

These changes were very clear in the United States during the development of the Cold War. The concern about specific incidents that was seen in 1945 and 1946 changed rapidly into a general indictment of the Soviet Union and of communism as a whole. The Soviets were seen as new incarnations of Hitlerite Germany, a totally untrustworthy "evil empire" bent on conquering the world. This led to such excesses in the United States as McCarthyism, a refusal for many years to recognize the People's Republic of China, and participation in the Vietnam War. The relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated so badly that at times there was practically no communication at all.

4. *Doing well*—>*winning*—>*hurting Other*. In the early stages of many conflicts, Party is simply out to do as well as it can for itself, without regard for how well or how poorly Other is doing. This outlook has been described by Deutsch (1958) as an "individualistic orientation," an outlook characterized by self-interest that is quite independent of Other's fate. As conflict escalates, however, Party's simple interest in doing well is supplanted by a clearly competitive objective. Now doing well means outdoing Other. Finally, as escalation continues and Party's costs begin to mount, its goals tend to shift again. The objective now is to hurt Other and, if Party is experiencing cost, to hurt Other more than Party is hurting (Glasl, 1982). For every drop of blood that Party has shed, a far more terrible bloodletting must be forced on Other. This is competition in the extreme.¹

Accompanying these motivational changes are changes in Party's feelings toward Other. Positive feelings quickly dissipate as conflict escalates, while mild negative feelings—such as irritation—take their place. As escalation continues, these mild feelings turn into much stronger ones—such as anger, hostility, and eventually intense hatred. Feelings like this support, and are supported by, the changes in objectives just described.

Such transformations were apparent in Soviet-American relations after 1945. What began as a desire to reverse specific policies was transmogrified into a broad competition, in which each party had strong negative feelings about the other and sought to defeat the other in every corner of the globe. The importance of this competition in the United States was reflected in the widespread and politically explosive view that China had been "lost" as a result of

¹ Fisher & Keashly (1990) add a fourth stage in which the parties aim to destroy each other. Translated into the terms of the dual concern model encountered in Chapter 3, this progression of goals produces a *negative* other-concern, which is not shown in Figure 3.1.

its 1949 revolution. In the thinking of many on both sides, the logical solution to the problem was to weaken the other side or even, for a few people, to destroy it.

5. *Few*—>*many*. Conflicts that begin with the agitation of a small number of participants often grow, in the face of continued conflict, into collective efforts. An illustration of this is the development, during the Cold War, of two large military alliances: NATO and its Eastern counterpart, the Warsaw Pact. This transformation may be due, in part, to tactical thinking by Party. If Other won't do as Party wants—and if Party is unable to get its way by threatening, promising, or in some other way manipulating Other—then it is in Party's best interest to find others who are willing to band together with it. What Party cannot accomplish on its own it may well be able to achieve with the increased support and muscle of its associates. This transformation may also be due to changes in the thinking of formerly neutral third parties. Alarmed by the demands Other has placed on Party or the tactics Other has used, some of these of these third parties may throw their support to Party; while other third parties, equally alarmed by Party's demands and tactics may gravitate into Other's camp. The result is community polarization, a condition that will be discussed more fully in Chapters 6 and 8.

A DOMESTIC ESCALATION

The transformations just described are not limited to the international arena. Indeed, they are found just as often in domestic settings. Consider this example (Peterson, 1983) involving a young married couple, as recounted by the wife:

We were in the car on the way to visit my parents. We had had a tough time getting ready for the trip and were both tired. Paul was in the back of the station wagon reading. I was driving. We were on the Turnpike, and I asked him to move to the side. I wanted to pass and I couldn't see through him. He told me to look out the side mirror or turn around and look. I'm accustomed to using the rear view mirror and I didn't feel I should have to change my driving habits when he could move to the side a little so I could see. A little later I said, "Will you move?" ... He just sat and glared. Twice more I asked him to move and finally he blew up and told me to pull over so he could drive. Then he told me he'd show me how he could pass without looking in either mirror by looking around. Paul kept on with some more nasty remarks. (p. 360)

This escalation ended a few minutes later with an apology from the husband, in reply to his wife's suggestion that he had overreacted. Thus,

it was brief and by no means momentous. Nevertheless, three of the transformations we mentioned earlier occurred. The conflict went from *light to heavy*, with the husband first glaring, then showing anger, and finally becoming insulting. It went from *small to large*, with the wife reiterating her demands to the point that they overwhelmed the husband, and both of them become fixated on the quarrel. It went from *doing well to hurting Other*, with the husband first simply declining to move and eventually shifting to efforts to make his wife suffer. We are not told the nature of the husband's "nasty" remarks, but if they were a general indictment of his wife's driving skills, it would mean that a transformation from *specific to general* had also occurred.²

ESCALATION MODELS

To understand escalation, we must know what processes occur within and between Party and Other as their conflict intensifies. There are three broad models³ of escalation (Pruitt & Gahagan, 1974): the *contender-defender* model, the *conflict spiral* model, and the *structural change* model. These models provide three accounts of what is happening when escalation takes place. All three have some value, accurately describing the developments in some kinds of escalation. None can be discarded in favor of another. We deal with the contender-defender and the conflict spiral models in this chapter, then turn to the structural change model in Chapter 6, which also deals with deteriorating relationships.

² For another domestic illustration of escalation, recall the Chapter 1 story of Ben and his father. There, light tactics were supplanted by heavier ones, the number of issues proliferated (starting with the car, then moving on to various other concerns), motivation shifted, and the number of parties to the conflict increased to the point of including the entire family. While the anecdote does not provide information about precisely what was said in the escalating exchange, one can imagine Dad shifting from a focus on the car to a focus on his son's traits of laziness and selfishness—in which case the shift in focus from specific to general issues would be present as well.

³ A model is an abstract pattern of thought from which explanations or predictions of particular events can be derived. It is quite common for alternative models to be available for explaining or predicting the same event, and more than one of these models may be correct. For instance, suppose we are trying to explain how a child has learned that 7 times 7 equals 49. If we derive an explanation from the reinforcement model of learning, we might conclude that the child acquired this knowledge because he or she was praised for correctly stating "Seven times seven is forty-nine." If we use instead a social learning model, we might conclude that the knowledge was formed because the child imitated people he or she respected, who were saying "Seven times seven is forty-nine." People often try to choose *between* two explanations of this kind, but it is frequently the case that *both* explanations are correct. The equation could first be acquired by imitation and then become a permanent part of memory

*The Contender-Defender Model*⁴

The contender-defender model draws a distinction between Party (the contender) and Other (the defender). Party is viewed as having a *goal of creating change* that places it in conflict with Other. Party's goal may be to take something from Other, to alter reality at Other's expense, or to stop Other's annoying behavior. Party ordinarily starts with mild contentious tactics, because this is the least risky approach. But if these do not work, Party moves on to heavier tactics, continuing to escalate until Other gives in or the cost of continued escalation is greater than the value of the goal sought. Other may be passive in such a sequence or may escalate in response to Party's escalation. But if Other escalates, its reasons for doing so are strictly defensive, whereas Party's are not.

Many past campaigns of conquest have involved escalation of this kind, including the efforts by Cortez and Pizarro (contenders) to defeat the Aztecs and Incas (defenders) so as to steal their gold, and Napoleon's campaign against Russia. This model also helps understand one of the stages in the development of the Cold War. This is the point at which the Soviet Union adopted the goal of blocking the unification of West Germany, a severe source of annoyance to them. At first the Soviets (the contender) employed the mild tactic of protest. When this did not work, they moved to a heavier tactic of sporadically interrupting communications between Berlin and West Germany. When this was unsuccessful, and the West (the defender) introduced a unified West German currency, the Soviets employed an extremely heavy tactic, a full blockade of Berlin.⁵

Our driving (domestic escalation) story also describes a contender-defender sequence. The husband is the contender. Annoyed by persistent demands from his wife, he moves from mild persuasive arguments, to angry nonverbal displays, to insulting remarks. However, we must be careful about how we characterize this incident as it is the wife who is telling the story, which may be incomplete (see below),

The contender-defender model also fits the results of an experiment on individual and group response to persistent annoyance (Mikolic et al., 1997). Persistent annoyance was produced by Other (a confederate of the researchers) withholding supplies that Party (the participant) needed for the task it was doing. Party was allowed to call Other at any time, and seven contentious tactics were identified in a content analysis of these calls. The participants (the contenders) used these tactics in a standard, escalatory sequence. First they requested the supplies, then demanded them, then complained about Other's behavior, then got angry with Other, then

⁴ The contender-defender model was called the "aggressor-defender model" in earlier editions.

⁵ While this series of incidents involved unilateral escalation by the Soviet Union, the overall process that produced the Cold War was circular in nature and better fits the conflict spiral model. This point will be elaborated below.

threatened Other, then repeatedly harassed Other, and finally insulted Other. Few participants went all the way to the top of this sequence, but most went part way up in the order just listed. Interestingly, groups, on the whole, escalated considerably further than did individuals.

School Shootings The contender-defender model helps us understand the school shootings that have plagued the United States in recent years. A common pattern found in many shootings is that the shooters had been subjected to persistent annoyance, in the form of taunting and bullying by some of their fellow students. Ultimately, the taunted individuals (the contenders) resorted to lethal violence against their adversaries and often against other schoolmates and teachers, an extreme form of escalation. Nothing can justify this violence, but understanding that it is usually a matter of revenge may help to prevent future tragedies of this kind.⁶

Consider fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal of Paducah, Kentucky. He was reported to have been teased and picked on by his schoolmates because of his small size. On December 1, 1997, he burst into a morning prayer group meeting at his school, killing three students and wounding five. Similarly, Evan Ramsey, 16, of Bethel, Alaska, was said to have been harassed throughout his school years for his slight frame and shy manner. He was called "Screech," after a nerdy character in the TV program, *Saved by the Bell*. On February 19, 1997, he went into a crowded gathering area of his school and opened fire, eventually killing one student and the principal and wounding two other students.⁷

The escalation in these and other similar cases differs from others we have discussed (e.g., the behavior of the husband in the driving story) in that it moves suddenly to an extreme reaction rather than through gradations of hostile behavior. The future killers probably avoided more moderate tactics because they had discovered that these produced even more teasing and bullying. Instead they suppressed their desire to retaliate until it became an overwhelming force in their lives. At that point, they had a sense of "I can't take it anymore; enough is enough."

What psychological forces are at work in such cases? The taunting and bullying experienced by the future killers almost always occurred in the full view of other people. Such public humiliation is a threat to Party's

⁶ The most frequent motive behind school shootings is revenge for past annoyance, according to a study conducted by the U.S. Secret Service that examined the cases of 41 youths involved in 37 school shootings, from 1974 to 2000 (Vossekuil et al., 2000).

⁷ The demeaning experiences of these future killers appear to be the outgrowth of a prevailing sense in many American schools that it is right for dominant groups to tease and taunt deviants. Thus after the Columbine shootings, a Columbine football player was reported to say, "Columbine is a good clean place except for those rejects.... Sure we teased them. But what do you expect with kids who come to school with weird hairdos and horns on their hats? ... If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease 'em" (Aronson, 2000, pp. 71-72).

image, in its own and other people's eyes, and can evoke an overwhelming sense of *shame*. Research shows that feelings of shame often produce a desire for revenge (Scheff, 1994). James Gilligan (1996), a psychiatrist who has worked with many violent criminals, asserts: "I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the both parties' experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed, and that did not represent the attempt to prevent or undo this Toss of face—no matter how severe the punishment, even if it includes death" (p. 110).

Furthermore, there may have been an element of *ego depletion* in these cases, a reduction in the capacity for self-control resulting from too much prior suppression of the desire to retaliate. In a study of this process (Finkel & Campbell, 2001), participants watched emotionally charged film clips. While doing so, they were asked to either suppress their emotional reactions to the clips (high ego depletion) or not (low ego depletion). Afterwards, they were asked to indicate how they would react to offensive behavior from their romantic partner. As predicted, those who had suppressed their emotional reactions indicated that they would react more punitively than those who had not. Prior emotional suppression had led to a reduction in self-control.⁸

Of course, taunting and bullying are common in schools (Nansel et al., 2001), and violent revenge is a rare occurrence. What sets these killers apart from the ordinary victims of public humiliation? Here theory is weak and we cannot begin to give a definitive answer, but two points can be made. One is that the killers either operated as groups or had social support from other rejected students, and we know from the experiment mentioned earlier (Mikolic et al., 1997) that groups escalate further than individuals. Most of the individual killers shared their shooting plan with other humiliated peers (Vossekuil et al., 2000) and got encouragement and sometimes help from them. Some friends even urged an escalation of the plan. Again, take the case of Evan Ramsey. He told two of his friends that he wanted to bring a gun to school so that he could scare his tormentors by brandishing it. His friends urged him to shoot so as to be sure to get people's attention. Ramsey put three people on his hit list, but these friends suggested eleven others. Ramsey claimed that he did not plan to shoot the principal, but he did so at the urging of one of his friends who disliked the principal (Dedman, 2000). The other point is that all these killers had access to guns, a weapon that was vastly more lethal than any other available in their environment.

⁸ We do not mean to imply that the school killers acted impulsively in a spur-of-the-moment explosion of anger. Most of them made a plan for revenge and carefully selected their weapons and initial targets (Vossekuil et al., 2000). Rather, the point is that ego depletion removed the moral and future-oriented controls that would otherwise have moderated their plans. The concept of ego depletion was developed by Baumeister and his colleagues (see Baumeister et al., 1999).

Perspective on the Contender-Defender Model Though the contender-defender model fits some cases of escalation like the school shootings, it is given too much weight in everyday thinking. Indeed, this is the only model that most people use in trying to understand escalation. The problem with this model is that it postulates a *unidirectional* causal sequence, with one party always taking the lead in escalation, whereas most cases of escalation involve a *circular* process. Party reacts to Other's contentious behavior, followed by Other reacting to Party's contentious behavior, followed by Party reacting to Other's contentious behavior, and so on. To understand such sequences, we need the conflict spiral model.

The popularity of the contender-defender model is probably due to the fact that it satisfies the natural urge to look for somebody to blame for unpleasant events. One side (which is usually labeled the "aggressor") is viewed as taking the lead in heating up the conflict, while the other (which is labeled the "defender") is viewed as legitimately trying to counter the first side's outrageous behavior. For example, in the Cold War most Americans viewed the Soviet Union as the ultimate source of the escalation and hence as the "aggressor." In reality, both sides were contributing about equally to the conflict, and the conflict spiral model was a better fit.⁹

The Conflict Spiral Model

The conflict spiral model holds that escalation results from a vicious circle of action and reaction. Party's contentious tactics encourage a contentious retaliatory or defensive reaction from Other, which provokes further contentious behavior from Party, completing the circle and starting it on its next iteration. The conflict spiral model is a bilateral reaction model, because each party is reacting to the other party's prior actions.¹⁰

In a conflict spiral, the motivation on both sides is partly a matter of revenge—to punish Other for the suffering it has produced. This motivation

is also partly a matter of defense or deterrence—to protect against Other's preparations, teach Other a lesson, and make Other suffer enough that it will stop its annoying behavior.

Conflict spirals are often hard to stop once they get started because each side feels that failing to retaliate will be seen as a sign of weakness, inviting further annoying behavior from the other side. Each side feels that its reputation for resolute self-defense is on the line. In addition, neither side is willing to make conciliatory moves that might break the cycle. One reason for this is that Other is not trusted to reciprocate such moves; requirement is not expected from a party that has gone as far as Other has gone. A second reason is the fear that making a conciliatory move will reward Other and hence encourage more annoying behavior. A third reason is that Other is typically seen as the "aggressor" and hence blamed for the conflict spiral. This implies that Other (rather than Party) has the responsibility to make the first conciliatory move.

Tactics move from light to heavy in most conflict spirals, because (up to a point) each reaction is more severe and intense than the action that provoked it. Why should this be? There are three main reasons. One is that conflict spirals produce the transformation from small to large mentioned earlier. Each retaliatory or defensive reaction in the spiral provides a new issue for the target of this action. Hence, each party's list of the other's transgressions grows longer and longer as the spiral continues, provoking a heavier and heavier reaction. The second reason is that each side's own losses in a conflict usually look larger than the other side's losses (Baumeister et al., 1990). Hence, what looks to each side like a measured response to the other's provocation looks to the other like undue escalation, deserving a response in kind. The third reason is that people often overlook the fact that they are in a conflict spiral and view themselves as responding to persistent annoyance from Other. They start with mild contentious tactics because these involve the least risk. But if these tactics are unsuccessful, they adopt heavier tactics in what they view as a rational effort to find a level of pressure that will persuade Other to desist. The irony of this is that Other is reacting in the same way to *their* level of escalation. Hence, they would be better off de-escalating rather than escalating.

The conflict spiral model provides insight into the broader Cold War escalation, which involved a vicious circle.¹¹ In response to Soviet moves in Eastern Europe and in Greece and Turkey, the United States and its allies began to establish a West German state. In response to this action, the Soviet Union instituted a blockade of Berlin. In response to that blockade, the United States and its allies formed NATO and began to arm West Germany. And so on.

⁹ Parties involved in conflict usually view the other side as the "aggressor," because this makes them feel better about themselves or their group. Thus, most Soviet citizens had a mirror image of the United States as unilaterally responsible for the conflict (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Frank, 1982; White, 1984). Today, Israelis blame the Palestinians and Palestinians blame the Israelis for destructive actions that are mainly part of a conflict spiral.

¹⁰ The conflict spiral model is found in the writings of many theorists, including North et al. (1964), Osgood (1962, 1966), and Richardson (1967). The distinction between the conflict spiral model and the contender-defender model is hardest to grasp in the case of escalation in response to persistent annoyance. In this case, Party (the contender) is reacting to Other's behavior and Other may escalate in response to Party's escalation. What makes this a case of contender-defender rather than conflict spiral is that Party does not escalate in response to Other's escalation but only in response to the persistent annoyance from Other. Hence there is no spiral of action, reaction, and *further* reaction.

¹¹ The events that were mentioned earlier in which the Soviet Union adopted increasingly heavy tactics in an effort to block the unification of West Germany can be thought of as a contender-defender episode within this larger conflict spiral.

In our driving story *as told by the wife*, only the husband escalated. But this may well be a self-serving distortion of what really happened. It is possible that her "will you move" was said in an angry tone, followed by something like "D**n it, I can't see through you." If so, her husband may have been reacting to her escalations as she was to his, and the process may have actually been a conflict spiral.

A third example of a conflict spiral can be seen in the violent struggle between Israel and the Palestinians that erupted in 2000 and continuously escalated through the point at which this chapter was written (April 2002). Every week, there were new violent actions from each side that provoked increasingly more violent retribution from the other. After trying milder tactics, the Palestinians began to send suicide bombers in ever increasing numbers, while the Israelis resorted to progressively more repressive military actions. Each side viewed itself as engaged in unilateral "defensive" escalation against an implacable "aggressor," with its own illegitimate agenda. Hence for each side, the only reasonable course of action was to escalate still further so as to "knock some sense into the other" and cow the other into stopping its aggression. The result was a tragedy of epic proportions.¹²

The conflict spiral between Israel and the Palestinians was exacerbated by a strong belief on both sides that they had winning weapons: suicide bombers on the part of the Palestinians and conventional military force on the part of Israel. It was hard, at that time, to tell objectively which of these weapons was stronger, hence, the optimism on both sides.

In addition to explaining the development of escalation, the conflict spiral model helps understand the *perpetuation* of high levels of escalation—that is, the fact that heavy tactics, once used, often continue to be employed. Consider a standard fistfight. If I hit you, you may well hit me back, which leads me to hit you again, and so on. At first, the blows become heavier and heavier and the conflict escalates. Then, because of limitations in human strength, the blows reach an asymptote beyond which they cannot grow heavier. Each of us is retaliating at about the level of provocation received. A conflict spiral is still going on, but it is now producing a highly escalated steady state rather than further escalation. The perpetuation of escalation will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 8.

¹² The word "tragedy" is used here in the sense of a classical Greek tragedy in which an individual takes actions, for what appear to be good and sufficient reasons, that produce tragic consequences for that individual. In escalating conflict spirals, both parties are in that same self-destructive boat.

Relationship between the Contender-Defender and Conflict Spiral Models

Combinations of contender-defender dynamics and conflict spiral dynamics are often found in escalating conflict. For example, contender-defender sequences are often part of larger conflict spirals, as in the Soviet Union's reaction to the plan to unify West Germany (see footnote 11). In such cases, the goal that impels the contender is persistent annoyance from the defender.

A further example of this phenomenon is the Nazi German effort to conquer Europe in the late 1930s and 1940s, a unilateral escalatory action by any definition of the term. Most people do not realize that this effort was in large part a reaction to the humiliation of Germany after the First World War—the reparations Germany had to pay, the resulting inflation. Hence, the contender-defender sequence of the Second World War can be viewed as embedded in a larger conflict spiral that began before the First World War.

Another kind of combination is where a conflict spiral is embedded in a larger contender-defender episode, in which Party is employing escalating tactics in an effort to influence Other. An example of this is the violent escalation between Israel and the Palestinians discussed earlier, which originated (in the year 2000) in an effort by Palestinian youth groups and militants (the Second Intifada) to persuade Israel to give up its West Bank and Gaza settlements and remove the Israeli army that guards these settlements. At first they threw rocks at Israeli soldiers and then began to shoot at Israeli soldiers and settlers.¹³ Take away the conflict spiral, and you would still have had some serious assaults from the Palestinian side because of their resentment of the Israeli occupation—though by no means as many.

S U M M A R Y A N D C O N C L U S I O N S

Escalation—the use of progressively heavier contentious tactics—is by no means an inevitable outcome of conflict, but it is an important one because of the great human cost it often produces. Escalation is commonly accompanied by several other transformations: issues proliferate, parties become increasingly committed to the struggle, specific issues give way

¹³ Some would say that the escalation began with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank or with Ariel Sharon's walk on Jerusalem's Temple Mount (Haram ash-Sharif) rather than with the Palestinian rock throwing. However, we mark this as the beginning of the round of violence that began in the year 2000, defining violence as efforts to physically harm people on the other side.

to general ones, the desire to succeed turns into a desire to win, which turns into a desire to hurt Other, positive feelings give way to negative feelings, and both sides grow by recruiting formerly neutral individuals and groups.

Two models of escalation are discussed in this chapter: the contender-defender model traces escalation to Party's (the contender's) effort to take something from Other (the defender), alter reality at Other's expense, or stop Other's annoying behavior. If milder tactics fail, Party moves to heavier ones in an effort to prevail. In response to this offensive, Other may remain passive or escalate defensively. The conflict spiral model traces escalation to a vicious circle of action and reaction—the two sides escalate in response to each other. Escalation is often best explained by invoking both models, viewing the progressively heavier tactics as either a contender-defender episode embedded in a broader conflict spiral or a conflict spiral that is part of a larger contender-defender dynamic.

In Chapter 6, we turn to a third and more complicated escalation model, the structural change model.

6

The Structural Change Model

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Psychological Changes • Emotional Changes • Hostile Attitudes, Perceptions, and Goals • Changes in Groups • The Crisis at UB • Nature, Source, and Impact of Group Changes • Changes in Communities • Summary and Conclusions

The structural change model,¹ to which we turn in this chapter, provides further insight into the development of escalation. This model describes changes (i.e., processes) that occur when escalation takes place and that push the escalation forward. These changes can also cause escalation to persist and recur. Some of these changes are *psychological states* (e.g., hostile attitudes) that develop within individual disputants or group decision makers. Others are changes in the *way groups function* (e.g., the development of militant leadership). Still others are changes in the *communities* surrounding the disputing parties (e.g., community polarization). All are called "structural" changes because they are changes in one or another feature of the situation affecting the parties' choice of tactics.

Two versions of the structural change model can be constructed, one building on the contender-defender model and the other on the conflict spiral model. The two versions are similar in the sorts of changes they describe, so only the latter

¹ This model is implied by the writings of Burton (1962), Coleman (1957), Pruitt & Olczak (1995), and Schumpeter (1955, first published in 1919), among others.

will be presented here.² This version is shown schematically in Figure 6.1. Here a conflict spiral is seen, in which heavy tactics used by Party produce structural changes in Other (segment A), which encourage a harsh reaction from Other (segment B), producing structural changes in Party (segment C), which encourage further heavy tactics from Party (segment D), and so on around and around. We call the process seen in this figure a *cycle of escalation*.

This version of the structural change model embodies Deutsch's "crude law" of conflict development (Deutsch, 2000a). In the terms used in our book, the crude law says that processes that produce heavy contentious tactics are also produced by those tactics.³ These processes include all of the structural changes discussed in this chapter. For example, if we insert "hostile attitudes" in the boxes marked "structural changes" in Figure 6.1, we see that hostile attitudes both produce and are produced by heavy contentious tactics.

The value of the structural change model is that it helps us derive hypotheses about the conditions under which conflicts will escalate and under which escalation will persist and recur. This is because we know a lot about the conditions that allow and encourage the changes described in the model, in other words, the conditions that strengthen the causal sequences shown in segments A and C of Figure 6.1. We also know something about the conditions that encourage expression of these changes—that strengthen the causal sequences shown in segments B and D. By the logic of Figure 6.1, all of these conditions should make conflict spirals more likely to go forward and persist, and hence should encourage conflicts to escalate and stay escalated. Most of the discussion of these conditions will be presented in the two chapters following this one.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES

Emotional Changes

Some psychological changes involve emotions or emotionally related perceptions. Emotions can have a powerful effect on behavior. They can build up to the point where they overcome caution and produce heavily escalated behavior. Nevertheless, they are usually temporary states, re-

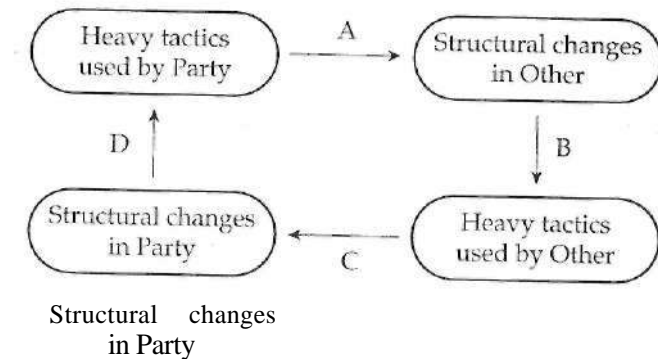


FIGURE 6.1
Structural change model. The circle of arrows represents a cycle of escalation.

lated to the events of the moment and persisting only so long as the conflict spiral persists. Once the conflict spiral abates, emotions tend to disappear. We will discuss four such states here: blame, anger, fear, and image threats.

Blame and Anger Blaming Other was mentioned as an antecedent of contentious behavior in Chapter 3. Here we are treating blame as a *variable* and saying that greater blame leads to more heavily escalated actions. Blame encourages escalation for two reasons: One is that blame encourages anger (Averill, 1983), which produces a desire to hurt Other. The second is that blame makes it seem necessary to punish Other with the hope of teaching it a lesson.

There are a number of perceptions that encourage blame when Other takes actions that harm Party's interests. Blame will be greater if it appears that Other could foresee that its actions would be harmful (Dyck & Rule, 1978). This makes the harm seem voluntary rather than accidental. Also, actions that seem freely taken are likely to evoke more blame than those that result from heavy environmental pressures (Geen, 1990). Even the latter actions may evoke some blame if Other is supposed to be responsible for resisting such pressures. Actions that break social norms (Mallick & McCandless, 1966) or are atypical of the way other parties behave are also viewed as especially blameworthy (Ferguson & Rule, 1983). Other must have a compelling excuse to avoid blame in such circumstances.

The implication of these points is that conflict is especially likely to escalate when Party sees Other's contentious behavior as illegitimate and not attributable to chance or extenuating circumstances. Under these conditions, Party is particularly likely to become angry at or see a need to

² After reading this chapter, the reader may want to work out the details of a contender-defender version of the structural change model.

³ The original statement of this law was considerably broader. Deutsch (2000a) states his "crude law of social relations" as follows, "The characteristic processes and effects elicited by a given type of social relationship also tend to elicit that type of social relationship" (p. 29).

THE STRUCTURAL CHANGE MODEL

discipline Other, producing punitive behavior that will provoke Other in turn and hence start or continue a conflict spiral.

Fear Sometimes Other's harsh actions seem threatening and evoke *fear* instead of, or in addition to, blame and anger. Fear produces a different kind of conflict spiral than that produced by blame and anger. Blame and anger are prominent in *retaliatory spirals*, where each party punishes the other for actions it finds aversive. Examples are shouting matches, fist-fights, and the like. Fear, on the other hand, is prominent in *defensive spirals*, in which each party is trying to protect itself from a threat it finds in the other's self-protective actions. An example is an arms race, in which two nations steadily increase their stockpile of arms, each doing so in response to an increase in the other nation's arms (Richardson, 1967). Escalation is often a combination of both retaliatory and defensive spirals, the Cold War and the story of Ben and Dad (in Chapter 1) being cases in point.

Image Threats Threats to Party's image—the way Party appears to self or others—are an important source of escalation. Escalation is particularly likely when there are threats to Party's image of adequacy—of having power, status, forcefulness, autonomy, or integrity (Coleman, 1997; Felson, 1982). Such threats produce both anger and fear.⁴

Toch (1970) gives an example of a conflict spiral that appears to have involved threats to both parties' images of strength, status, and forcefulness. The incident took place in a state prison.

We were watching these cats play cards, and we were standing behind this dude. He was one of these big iron lifters, you know. About ninety feet wide, you know, he was one of those. And he turned around and told us, "Don't stand behind me, punk, when I'm playing," you know. And I just looked at my partner and he looked at me, you know, . . . and he turned around again and said, you know, "I told you not to stand behind me." And he said you know, "Bless you, man." And the dude got up, man, so I hit him on one side and the other dude hit him, and we were both on him, man. And we beat him to a pulp. . . . And after that I felt like a king, man. I felt like, you know, I'm the man; you're not going to mess with me. (pp. 164-165)

Image threats of this kind are as important to nations as to individuals. Nations are often immensely concerned about their reputation for having power and being ready to use it. Many wars have been fought to produce such an image, an example being American involvement in the Vietnam War. Vietnam had no strategic importance to the United States,

⁴ Such image threats were mentioned earlier as contributing to many of the school killings. Fear of image loss, discussed earlier, is a related concept.

but American officials were concerned about the challenge to their country's image posed by the communist guerilla movement there. They feared that the United States would be seen as weak-willed if it did not fight this movement, inviting communist aggression in other parts of the globe. This was part of a broader belief in interlocking commitments summarized in the statement, "If we aren't willing to fight them anywhere, we will have to fight them everywhere."

It is easy to belittle image-related concerns, to view them as senseless or even childish. But these concerns are a rational (though often shortsighted) reaction to being in an unregulated "jungle," such as the international arena, the "Wild West" during American expansion into that region, center city ghettos, and many state prisons. Environments of this kind lack adequate third party enforcement of norms against exploitation and assault. Hence, people feel they must defend themselves by developing an image of toughness—a reputation for strength and readiness to fight. There are other, less violent ways to avoid physical threats and attacks, but most people do not know or trust them. The usual motto, in Leo Durocher's words, is "Nice guys finish last."

The problem with this motto and with image-related concerns is that they often get people into serious trouble. In trying to look tough, people enrage or frighten others into a comparable reaction, starting a conflict spiral.⁵ Paradoxically, people often end up as targets of the very assault they are trying to deter (Glasl, 1982). This is the security dilemma that was mentioned in Chapter 2.

Hostile Attitudes, Perceptions, and Goals

We turn now to another class of psychological states: hostile attitudes, perceptions, and goals, and two particularly potent kinds of perception: dehumanization and deindividuation. Like blame, anger, fear, and image threat, these states encourage the use of heavy contentious tactics. Hence, they can also be placed in the boxes marked "Structural changes" in Figure 6.1. But they have a quality of persistence that is absent in emotional states. They tend to outlast the conflict in which they were developed and affect the *relationship* between the parties, either (a) encouraging new escalation when another conflict arises or (b) causing the parties to perceive new conflicts where none exist.

It is common for hostile attitudes and perceptions to develop in conflict. Other comes to be distrusted, in the sense of being seen as indifferent or even opposed to Party's welfare. Party tends to attribute uncomplimentary traits to Other, such as being self-centered, morally unfit, or (in

⁵ In the resulting conflict spirals, power-related image concerns become stronger and stronger, a phenomenon described by Winter (1987).

extreme cases) a diabolical enemy. This causes a phenomenon noted in Chapter 5, a transformation of issues from specific to general; instead of dealing with a particular threat from Other, Party must now deal with the general issue of how to resist an immoral enemy. It becomes hard to empathize with Other because of dehumanization or deindividuation. And there is a tendency to break off contact—to be unwilling to communicate. Zero-sum thinking often develops—it's *either* victory for Other *or* victory for Party. These changes typically occur on both sides of the dispute, because of the dynamics of the conflict spiral.

Such psychological changes help to account for the escalation that led to the Cold War, and for the flinty persistence of this escalation. Profound distrust, enemy images, and an inability to empathize took root in the United States during the early period of the Cold War and persisted until the early 1990s. Zero-sum thinking was extremely common, producing an inordinate fear of any communist advance. This fear gripped every American president from Truman onward; none wanted to be in office when another country fell to communism. Most Americans became unable to empathize with the genuine Soviet security needs that underlay a large proportion of their actions. Most communication with the Soviet Union was broken off in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and it remained at a low level until the period of de-escalation under President Gorbachev.

What are Attitudes and Perceptions? An *attitude* is a positive or negative feeling toward or evaluation of some person or object. A *perception* is a belief about, or way of viewing, some person or object. Attitudes and perceptions tend to be consistent in valence. In other words, if Party has negative (positive) attitudes toward Other, Party also tends to have predominantly negative (positive) perceptions of Other.⁶

The following kinds of perceptions are particularly characteristic of escalated conflict: Other tends to be seen as deficient in moral virtue—as dishonest, unfriendly, or warlike. Other tends to be seen as different from Party in basic values, and most particularly to be selfish and inhumane (Struch & Schwartz, 1989). Other also tends to be distrusted; Party believes Other to be hostile to Party's welfare, and sometimes as having unlimited goals of defeating or even destroying Party. In addition, Other may be seen as lacking in ability or achievement (Blake & Mouton, 1962), though this kind of perceptual distortion is less likely because of the greater availability of sound evidence about these characteristics (Brewer, 1979). In contrast, Party usually sees itself as more moral than Other and often as a victim of Other's aggression (Hampson, 1997; White, 1984).

When groups are in conflict, these perceptions sometimes take the form of stereotypes coloring Party's perceptions of all members of the other group. Alternatively, Party may entertain what White (1984) has called the "evil-ruler enemy image." This is the perception that ordinary members of the other group feel neutral or even positive toward us, but their leaders are hideous monsters. If there is hostility on the other side, it is because ordinary people are being misled by their leaders. During the Cold War, American views of the Soviet Union and Soviet views of America reflected such images. The evil-ruler enemy image permits a decidedly negative view of Other while realistically acknowledging that not all members of any group can be evil.

Because they are part of a cycle of escalation, attitudes, and the perceptions that accompany them, tend to be similar on both sides of a controversy. This is known as the "mirror image" phenomenon (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Frank, 1982; White, 1984). For example, the profound distrust felt by most Americans toward the Soviet Union had its counterpart in a somewhat less intense Soviet image of the United States. There is a similar mirror image in Israeli-Palestinian relations today; both sides view the other side as an implacable enemy. Unfortunately, the existence of a mirror image often goes unrecognized. Party tends to distrust Other without realizing that Other also distrusts Party.

Effects of Hostile Attitudes and Perceptions Hostile attitudes and perceptions of Other encourage escalation and discourage the settlement of conflict in at least seven ways.

First, hostile attitudes and perceptions make it easier to blame Other for Party's unpleasant experiences. Because people look for culprits to explain such experiences and because the evidence about whom to hold responsible is often ambiguous, a disliked and distrusted Other tends to be blamed—while a liked Other is given the benefit of the doubt. Since blame often leads to the adoption of harsh, contentious tactics, this implies that hostile attitudes tend to encourage escalation.

A finding by Blumenthal et al. (1972) illustrates the impact of attitudes on blame. During a period of political turmoil in the United States, in the summer of 1969, people were found to blame the conflict on groups whose views they did not like. Liberals blamed the police, whereas conservatives blamed the demonstrators. Both tended to use the term "violence" to describe the behavior of groups they disliked and the term "justified force" to describe the behavior of groups whose views they favored. People were also more sympathetic to the use of force against the groups they blamed.

A second, related way in which hostile attitudes and perceptions lead to escalation is when Other is distrusted and its ambiguous actions are seen as *threatening* (Pruitt, 1965). Other is given little benefit of the doubt

⁶ There is an extensive social psychological literature on attitudes and perceptions. See Bar-Tal (2000), Erwin (2001), and Petty & Cacioppo (1996).

or credit for good intentions. This encourages fear and defensive escalation. The tendency to misinterpret Other's behavior is one reason why escalation is so difficult to escape. Other, growing tired of escalation, often tries to escape it by making goodwill gestures.⁷ If Other is distrusted, as is likely to be the case after heavy escalation, such gestures will often be misinterpreted, and the escalation will grind on.

A third way hostile views of Other encourage escalation is by diminishing *inhibitions against retaliation* when Party has been provoked. Party is reluctant to aggress against an Other who is liked and respected, even when Other can clearly be blamed for unpleasant experiences. But Party is quite willing to aggress against an Other who is not liked or respected. The finding that southern white students (many of whom can be assumed to have been prejudiced) retaliated more vigorously when insulted by an African American than by a white (Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1981) supports these generalizations.

A fourth way in which hostile attitudes encourage escalation is by *blocking association and interfering with communication*. People tend to avoid those toward whom they are hostile. The point is well put by Coleman (1957): "As controversy develops, associations . . . wither between persons on opposing sides" (p. 11). This contributes to misunderstandings and hence to the proliferation of conflictful issues. It also makes it difficult to reach a peaceful settlement of the controversy. This occurred during the Cold War in the period before the Cuban Missile Crisis and also characterized relations between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) before the secret Oslo negotiations in 1992. In the latter case, communication with the PLO was actually illegal in Israel (Pruitt et al., 1997).

It is not altogether clear why this happens. Why stop meeting and talking when Party becomes hostile toward Other? A possible reason is that Party is afraid that associating with Other will be falsely interpreted as accepting Other's position or tactics. This phenomenon may also have deeper emotional roots. According to balance theory (Heider, 1958), hostile attitudes toward any object psychologically imply a hostile relationship with that object and, hence, a desire to put psychological distance between oneself and that object.

A fifth mechanism is that hostile attitudes and perceptions tend to reduce *empathy* with Other (White, 1984). Other seems so different from Party that it is hard for Party to put itself in Other's shoes. Furthermore, there is an easy explanation that makes empathy seem unnecessary: Other's actions stem from evil motives. Absence of empathy is like distrust and the absence of communication, in that it fosters misunderstandings. It also encourages escalation by blocking insight into the conflict spiral. Awareness that Other's hostile behavior is a reaction to Party's

own hostile behavior often causes Party to limit its escalation. But if Party lacks empathy into Other's motives, Party is unaware of its own role in encouraging Other to aggress and is likely to escalate unthinkingly.

Sixth, hostile attitudes and perceptions foster *zero-sum thinking*, which tends to make problem solving seem like an unworkable alternative. Positions become rigid, and creativity tends to disappear. This makes conflicts hard to resolve and encourages a sense that contentious behavior is the only way to succeed. Escalation is likely to be the result.

Seventh, and finally, when hostile perceptions grow really severe, Other comes to be viewed as a *diabolical enemy* (White, 1984) and the conflict is seen as a war between light and darkness. We are the chosen people; they are the "evil empire" (to quote President Ronald Reagan's Cold War description of the Soviet Union) or the "axis of evil" (which was used by President George W. Bush to describe Iraq, Iran, and North Korea). In such circumstances, Party is ready to blame Other for all that goes wrong and to believe the wildest stories about Other's perfidy.⁸ Communication often takes a nosedive, empathy is especially weak, and problem solving is extraordinarily hard to sustain. Heavily escalated tactics tend to become the rule; and new controversies regularly develop, confirming Party's view of Other.

Hostile Goals As a result of the changes just described, hostile and competitive goals often emerge—to look better than, punish, discredit, defeat, or even destroy Other. This is the transformation from doing well to hurting Other mentioned in Chapter 5. This escalation of goals leads to an escalation of tactics. Hostile goals, like hostile attitudes and perceptions, often have a lasting quality that cause them to persist after the conflict in which they were generated is over.

The desire for revenge, a hostile goal, is frequently implicated in the escalation of conflict (Kim & Smith, 1993; Morrill & Thomas, 1992). A conflict even over minor matters, when infused with vengeful feelings and desire, can escalate quickly and violently, as seen in many feuds. Take the notorious case of the feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys, two rural American families who lived along the border between Kentucky and West Virginia. Although the precise trigger for this feud, which lasted for twelve years, from 1878 to 1890, remains in dispute (Evans, 2001), it appears that it started when Randolph McCoy realized that one of his pigs was missing. He became outraged and immediately suspected the Hatfields. Soon, he confronted Floyd Hatfield about his suspicions, and

⁸ Charles Lane (1992), Berlin bureau chief of *Newsweek*, reported the following observation from Belgrade, in former Yugoslavia: "My favorite outrageous Belgrade TV. report concerned the Serb babies whom Muslims fed to the lions at the Sarajevo Zoo. I was amused, until I heard the story repeated verbatim by a 55-year-old woman standing in line outside the Yugoslav bank. 'That's why the Serbs had to kill the animals,' she explained."

this confrontation quickly escalated into a cycle of reciprocal killings. The question of what happened to the pig was forgotten, and each side concentrated on the goal of destroying the other (Rice, 1982).

Several features of revenge encourage escalation. First, revenge tends to breed revenge, which means that conflict spirals are often impelled by this motive. Such spirals can take place on the world stage as well as in rural America. For example, suicide bombings by Palestinian militants provoke retaliatory actions from the Israelis, which in turn bring about another round of suicide bombings. Each side tries to avenge its sufferings at the hands of the other side, and these vengeful actions only harden the other side's resolve to press forward with counter-revenge. Thus, the cycle of bloodletting continues, deepening mutual hatred.⁹

A second feature of revenge that fuels escalation is that the urge for revenge is usually intense and powerful—so much so that it can outweigh almost any other concern (Marongiu & Newman, 1987). Milovan Djilas, a founder of the Yugoslav communist party, writes in his autobiography, "Revenge is an overpowering and consuming fire. It flares up and burns away every other thought and emotion. . . . Vengeance . . . was the glow in our eyes, the flame in our cheeks, the pounding in our temples, the word that had turned to stone in our throats on our hearing that our blood had been shed" (cited in Elster, 1990, p. 871). This intensity means that people who are motivated by vengeance often resort to extreme forms of contentious tactics, as can be seen in many school shootings (Vossekuil et al., 2000), feuds (Kuschel, 1988), terrorist attacks (Mylroie, 2000), sabotage (Greenberg, 1996), workplace violence (Folger & Skarlicki, 1998), and genocide (Scheff, 1994).

The intensity of vengeful urges also explains why certain conflict episodes seem to defy common sense. Weaker parties usually avoid aggressing against stronger parties for fear of getting hurt. But in the grip of a vengeful impulse, they may take retaliatory action regardless of its consequences and suffer grievous harm or even death as a result (Kim et al., 1998). Such is the fate of the suicide bomber.

Third, revenge tends to be excessive; it often returns greater harm than that received (Fellman, 1998).¹⁰ Consider the story of a man who sought revenge against his estranged wife. Had he wanted to directly harm her, there was ample opportunity to do so. But, his goal was to inflict on her the greatest pain a mother can experience—by taking the lives

of four of her children (three from her first marriage and one from her marriage with him). While she was out for a morning walk, he quietly slipped into her house, systematically killing all four children and also himself (Boxall 2002). This real-life revenge story is a carbon copy of the ancient play, *Medea*, by Euripides. The tragic heroine, Medea, murders her own children to exact revenge on Jason, her husband, who has left her for a younger woman.

Why is revenge prone to excess? One reason is that people who are provoked tend to feel that they are victims, which produces a powerful sense of injustice. This provides a rationalization for taking harsh action against the party who is annoying them (Miller, 2001). Another reason is that people tend to magnify their own suffering while minimizing the suffering of those against whom they retaliate (Baumeister et al., 1990).¹¹ As a result, they see themselves as retaliating in a just and equitable manner, while in fact they are overreacting.

A fourth feature of vengeance that feeds escalation involves the persistent nature of memories of past victimization and the motives they generate (Frijda, 1993). Even when vengeful actions are suppressed, the urges underlying them can continue to fester. Indeed, vengeful urges can grow even stronger over time. Consider the case of Curtis Thompson. In 2002, he broke into Janet and James Geisenhagen's home and shot them to death allegedly in retaliation for a lawsuit brought by Janet Geisenhagen *fifteen years earlier*, which Thompson had actually won (Hughes, 2002).

At a group level, there are also many examples that illustrate the long duration of vengefulness. For example, the Bosnian Serbs still remember the humiliation that their ancestors suffered at the hands of the army of the Turkish Sultan during the Battle of Kosovo 600 years ago. Although the desire for vengeance was not a direct cause of the 1992-1995 armed conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it certainly contributed to Serbian violence against the Bosnian Muslims.

Dehumanization and Deindividuation *Dehumanization*—the perception that Other is less than human—has been shown to make it easier to aggress against Other (Bandura, 1990; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Struch & Schwartz, 1989). This is probably because dehumanization reduces empathy with Other and puts Other outside one's moral community and hence not protected by the social norms against aggression (Opatow, 2000).

Research suggests that Other is dehumanized when it is seen as rejecting values that are important to Party (Schwartz & Struch, 1989). Calling people names ("nigger," "idiot") also has a dehumanizing effect. Name-calling strengthens the impression that Other is morally inadequate and dissimilar to Party. Some names—such as the epithet "pig,"

⁹ Note that the *fear* of revenge can discourage escalation by making potential harm-doers think twice before they act. Thus Bies et al. (1997) have found that this fear serves as an informal social control device that prevents many organizational conflicts from escalating. However, once revenge has occurred, it is often followed by counter-revenge, which pushes parties in the opposite direction.

¹⁰ In this regard, the well-known maxim "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" can be considered not as an endorsement of revenge but as a prescription that has been evolved to re-

which was hurled at the police during the riots that followed in the wake of the Rodney King beating—make Other seem particularly subhuman and thus particularly easy to assault.

People are *deindividuated* when they are perceived as members of a category or group rather than as individuals. This perception erodes inhibitions against acting aggressively in much the same way as dehumanization, by reducing empathy and diminishing the strength of norms against aggression. Deindividuation was probably at work in an experiment by Milgram (1992). Participants in the role of "teacher" gave more painful shocks to others in the role of "learner" when the latter were at a distance or out of sight than when they were close at hand. Deindividuation of the enemy may be what makes it easier for fliers to drop bombs on unseen targets than for foot soldiers to shoot an enemy they can see.

Deindividuation is countered by receipt of information that makes Other seem unique. For example, guards in Nazi prison camps are said to have treated prisoners more leniently when they knew their names (Zimbardo, 1970).¹² Another way to discover that outgroup members are individuals is to have friendly relations with them over a period of time. It follows that residential settings that foster interracial friendships should diminish white prejudice against African Americans, an effect that has been demonstrated in two survey studies (Deutsch & Collins, 1951; Hamilton & Bishop, 1976). Before he led a protest demonstration, Gandhi would sometimes ask for hospitality from the local English governor and thus make friends with him. This was a way of individuating himself and his movement in the eyes of the authorities, thereby reducing the aggressiveness of the tactics used by the government.

Similar reasoning suggests that aggressive or discriminatory impulses should lead Party to deindividuate Other, by a process akin to rationalization. In this way, Party will feel more comfortable about its own hostile behavior. Evidence favoring this prediction emerges from a study by Worchel and Andreoli (1978). It was found that subjects who were angry with, or were expected to shock, another person were especially likely to forget individuating information about that person (such as his or her name) and to remember deindividuating information (such as his or her race).

This finding implies that deindividuation is another way station in the circle of conflict escalation. Party deindividuates Other in order to rationalize its own initial contentious moves. This then makes it easier to take more severe measures against Other, contributing to escalation.

In addition to viewing Other as deindividuated, it is possible for Party to see *itself* in this way—in other words, to lose awareness of its own dis-

¹² During the Spanish Civil War, George Orwell was unable to shoot an enemy soldier who was running away while holding up his trousers with both hands. "I had come here to shoot at 'Fascists'; but a man who is holding up his trousers isn't a 'Fascist'; he is visibly a fellow creature, similar to yourself, and you don't feel like shooting at him" (1968, p. 254, cited in

tinct identity. This also facilitates aggression. Among the sources of self-deindividuation are acting in concert with others,¹³ wearing nondistinctive clothing, emotional arousal, and lack of sleep. In a study of the effect of clothing on aggression, Zimbardo (1970) found that college women playing the role of punitive teachers were especially likely to give shocks when they were wearing a hood. Such apparel reduces Party's distinctiveness and inhibitions. Military and police uniforms probably have a similar effect.

CHANGES IN GROUPS

Psychological changes occur in all escalated conflicts, whether the actors are individuals or groups. But when groups (e.g., families, departments, organizations, nations) are involved, structural changes may also occur *in the group*. Hostile attitudes, perceptions and goals are accentuated by group discussion and tend to become group norms. Group goals of defeating the enemy tend to develop, and subgroups are established to implement these goals. Increased cohesiveness, resulting from having an outside enemy, contributes to the force of these norms and to the dedication of group members to the newly found goals and the means of implementing them. New, more militant leadership often emerges, contributing further to the group's orientation toward struggle. Doves are replaced by hawks. If one of the parties is an unorganized set of individuals, conflict sometimes encourages the development of a new group—precipitated out of the mix of strong individual emotions—which then takes up the cudgel against the adversary. As mentioned in Chapter 2, we call such a new group a *conflict group* and the process by which it develops, *group mobilization*.¹⁴

All of these changes can result from escalation as well as contribute to it. Hence, any of these changes can be placed in the boxes marked

¹³ Research indicates that the bigger the group Party is a member of, the more Party is likely to lose self-awareness and engage in aggressive behavior. The phenomenon of deindividuation may partly explain the beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers. It is reported that many other officers, besides the four who were actually involved in hitting Rodney King, watched the beating as it took place.

¹⁴ New conflict groups do not necessarily become involved in heavy escalation. Their activities are often limited to decorous tactics such as petition and efforts to influence elections. But escalation is also possible, with the aggrieved group becoming militant and taking heavier and heavier actions, accompanied by stronger feelings, more extreme demands, increasing cohesiveness, more pressure for uniformity, and increasingly militant leadership.

At the end of an escalated controversy, militant conflict groups often go on to assume a legitimate place in the community. To do so, their leaders (whether the old ones or a new set) must take the role of advocates of their group's interest in a peaceful political process. Thus in South Africa, the militant African National Congress (ANC) became a political party that put up candidates for election. The American labor movement, violent and revolutionary at first, eventually became a staid part of the political establishment. Indeed, Lyons (2002) has argued, in the context of internal war, that escalated intergroup conflicts cannot be permanently solved unless such a transition takes place.

"Structural changes" in Figure 6.1. Like changes in attitudes, perceptions and goals, group changes of this kind tend to persist and affect the relationship between the parties.

Group changes were important in the escalation of the Cold War. In the United States, hostile norms became so strong that people who had a good word for the Soviet Union were made to feel uncomfortable and were sometimes hauled up before congressional committees. The country even flirted for a time in the 1950s with highly militant leadership, in the person of Senator Joseph McCarthy, a virulent anticommunist with a large political following. Fortunately for the nation, some of these collective excesses were overcome by the 1960s.

The Crisis at UB

Before embarking on a detailed discussion of these group changes, we will describe a conflict that occurred at the State University of New York at Buffalo (or UB as it is known locally), where one of the authors (DGP) formerly taught. This narrative (based on a chronology provided by Pruitt & Gahagan, 1974), offers a striking illustration of a conflict spiral involving all three kinds of structural changes—particularly changes in groups.

The years from 1964 to 1969 saw the growth of a national student movement, aroused about such issues as racial discrimination and U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and greatly distrustful of the adult world. This movement touched many campuses, including UB. As it began the 1969-1970 school year, UB had a large number of students who were concerned about such issues and a sizable contingent of campus radicals who were ready to provide any emerging student action with the necessary leadership.

The crisis began on a cold winter night in late February with the appearance of city police on campus at the time of a demonstration by African American athletes against the physical education department (the African American athletes played no further part in the demonstrations after this incident). The next night, forty to fifty white students, including many of the campus radicals, proceeded to the acting president's office to demand an explanation for the police appearance. The acting president, who was in a meeting about the African American athletes, refused to talk with the students, whereupon some of them threw rocks at his windows. The campus police arrived in riot gear, and the acting president instructed them to arrest the window breakers. Moving to the student union, the police apprehended two of the radicals, beating one of them in front of an excited crowd of student onlookers. Some members of this crowd then chased the police officers across the campus, and one officer was badly injured when a metal trash barrel was thrown at him. Someone called for city police reinforcements, who confronted a crowd of

During the next two days, the student government and the radical student leadership organized rallies to decide upon a student response to these incidents. The thousands of students who attended these rallies clearly rejected the student government proposal for communication with the administration and endorsed a plan developed by the radical leadership to organize a strike against class attendance. A set of nine demands was endorsed, including the barring of city police from campus, the resignation of the acting president, and the abolition of ROTC and of research supported by the Defense Department. During the first night, enraged students fire-bombed the library. By the end of the second evening, it had become clear that the student government was no longer respected by the bulk of the politically active students. As a result, this government collapsed and was replaced by a radically led Strike Committee, which even took over the student government office suite.

The Strike Committee, consisting of about 400 active members, put together a well-organized campaign to discourage students from going to class. The strike was only partly successful, with class attendance being curtailed by about 30 to 40 percent. The Strike Committee then moved to heavier tactics, occupying the administration building and turning on its fire hoses. In an effort to defend itself, the administration suspended a group of radical leaders and eventually summoned the Buffalo police back onto the campus. Early on a Sunday morning, eleven days into the crisis, 400 Buffalo police officers quietly moved into position. The student response was initially a series of symbolic events, such as a mock funeral for the university. Eventually an ultimatum was issued to the administration, and a "war council" was held to decide on appropriate action. The night of the war council, a large group of students began taunting and throwing objects at the police, who were massed in front of the administration building, presumably to defend it. The police finally broke ranks and charged into the crowd with clubs swinging, injuring and arresting a number of students.

The next day, forty-five faculty members held a sit-in at the acting president's office. The police removed them from the building and arrested them. No more student demonstrations were held after this time; but, angered by the arrest of their fellows, the faculty senate passed a motion of no confidence in the administration.

The rest of the semester witnessed a moderately successful effort to reunite the campus. As part of this effort, a committee made up of student, faculty, and administration representatives was organized to discuss the demands made by the Strike Committee and related matters. This committee made a number of recommendations that were adopted as campus policy, including the abolition of ROTC.¹⁵

¹⁵ The reader can no doubt detect in the UB conflict a set of relatively predictable moves and countermoves by the students and faculty, on the one hand, and the administration and police, on the other. Those who want to understand the pattern of this pas de deux should read *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control* by Bowers & Ochs (1971V)

Nature, Source, and Impact of Group Changes

When small groups, organizations, or nations become involved in contentious conflict, these collectives (groups, as we call them) tend to change in at least six ways that contribute to the cycle of escalation.

First, *group polarization* takes place. The average group member on each side becomes increasingly hostile toward the other side. This is partly because extremists on each side do battle with each other, producing egregious incidents that inflame more moderate group members and lead them to join the extremists. The crisis at UB illustrates this process. The initial battle was between campus radicals and a campus police force in riot gear. This confrontation alarmed people on both sides, who joined in the fray creating more incidents and more recruitment to the extremes. Eventually the campus became polarized into two hostile camps: most of the students and faculty on one side and most of the administration on the other.

Group polarization also occurs because of ordinary group discussion. Research shows that when group members share any view (any attitude or perception) and discuss it with one another, that view becomes stronger (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969; Pruitt, 1971). Two main mechanisms account for this phenomenon (Isenberg, 1986). One is that group members hear one another's views and the arguments underlying them. Finding that others agree with them, they feel that their views are validated, and they also learn new arguments favoring them. The other is that a sort of competition develops among the group members, in which each person strives to hold an opinion that is at least as extreme in the direction favored by the group as that advocated by the average group member. As a result of both mechanisms, many members shift their opinions further in the direction initially favored by the group. If there is conflict going on, this means discussions among group members make them progressively more hostile toward the other side and increasingly more motivated to take action.

The development of *contentious group goals* is a second common outcome of conflict. Examples are Party's ambition to defeat or even destroy Other. Such goals arise from the experience of conflict and further fan the flames. In addition, groups are capable of pursuing their goals in ways that are not available to individuals, because the activities of a number of individuals can be coordinated. A division of labor among group members adds to this capability, permitting highly complicated contentious routines such as the recruitment and training of an army. Hence, groups are particularly effective at conflict escalation if their members are so inclined. One group goal that resulted in a significant escalation during the UB crisis was the decision by the Strike Committee to try to close down all classes.

A third kind of change is the development of *runaway norms* supporting a contentious approach to the controversy (Raven & Rubin, 1983). A norm is any attitude, perception, goal, or behavior pattern that is seen as

"right thinking" by most members of the group. Norms are taught to new group members and imposed on old members who appear to question them. Most of the psychological changes mentioned earlier in this chapter—including negative attitudes, distrust, zero-sum thinking, and a reluctance to communicate with Other—can become the subject of norms. When this happens, they gain strength and stability. They become group traditions rather than the property of separate individuals. Hence, they are more likely to contribute to escalation. This happened in the United States in the early stages of the Cold War. The aforementioned pressures on Americans to join the anti-communist crusade during the Cold War are a case in point.

A fourth kind of change that can contribute to escalation is the development of *group identity and group cohesiveness* (solidarity). Groups are cohesive to the extent that their members find them attractive.

Cohesiveness affects group behavior in three important ways. It encourages conformity to group norms (Festinger et al., 1950). This conformity is due to enhanced communication within the group (Back, 1951); member fear of being ostracized (Festinger, 1950); and social pressure, which is especially strong in cohesive groups (Schachter, 1951). Cohesive groups are also capable of especially vigorous action in pursuit of their goals. And there is reason to believe that members of cohesive groups are particularly convinced of the Tightness of their cause and the effectiveness of their intended actions (Janis, 1972; Kriesberg, 1998). The UB Strike Committee was a highly cohesive group that exhibited all of these characteristics.

For all these reasons, we can expect group cohesiveness to augment or multiply the effect of the psychological states discussed earlier in this chapter. If the attitudes toward an outgroup are generally negative, they should be particularly strong in a cohesive group. If the other group is distrusted or is seen as a threat, cohesiveness should strengthen these perceptions. If the goal of defeating Other is adopted and contentious tactics for achieving this goal are developed, a cohesive group will mount a particularly vigorous campaign in this direction.

Contentious conflict has been repeatedly shown to enhance group cohesiveness (Dion, 1979; Ryen & Kahn, 1975; Worchel & Norvell, 1980). It follows that enhanced cohesiveness is still another mechanism in the cycle of escalation, resulting from prior escalation and contributing to its continuation. In making this point, we do not intend to say that cohesiveness per se encourages antagonism or escalation. Research evidence (Dion, 1973) does not support such a position. The point is rather that contentious conflict encourages cohesiveness, and cohesive groups are particularly militant when involved in contentious conflict.

A fifth type of change that often occurs in groups engaged in heavy conflict is that *militant leaders* take over (Sherif et al., 1961). Most groups have leaders. Some are formally designated as such; others are highly

influential people without titles. Leaders usually gain their positions because they resonate with the dominant sentiments of group members and are good at the activities to which the group is dedicated (Hollander, 1978). This is as true of groups in conflict as of groups engaged in any other kind of activity. If conflict involves negotiation, people with bargaining skills are likely to come to the fore. But if it involves heavy contentious activity, leadership is more likely to fall into the hands of militants, who can mirror the anger of the membership and build a fighting force. Such individuals have particularly strong negative attitudes and perceptions of the adversary and are especially rigid in the demands they make. Accordingly, once they take over, they tend to reinforce and augment the group's commitment to extreme tactics.

Leadership changes of this kind occurred on both sides in the UB crisis. The controversy began to heat up when the campus police clubbed several demonstrators in the student union. At first, officers of the student government tried to exercise leadership over the campus, promising to negotiate with the university administration. But the students were so angry at the administration that they shunted these officers aside in favor of a group of radicals who had not previously exerted much influence. Similar changes occurred in the university administration. A vice president who wanted to mediate the controversy was excluded from decision making, while other officers who advocated sterner measures became very influential.

In addition to devising tactics for dealing with the opponent, leaders of groups that are in conflict often try to strengthen their members' dedication to the struggle by tarnishing the image of the adversary (Bowers & Ochs, 1971). An example is President George Bush's comparison of Saddam Hussein with Hitler during the Persian Gulf crisis.

The sixth type of collective change that occurs in escalating conflict is the development of *militant subgroups*. Such a subgroup is sometimes part of a well-established organization, for example, a new department to deal with the emerging conflict. At other times, it is an entirely new outfit, as seen in the development of the Strike Committee at UB.

CHANGES IN COMMUNITIES

When two individuals or groups come into heavy conflict with each other, it is often hard for other community members to remain neutral. They tend to support or join one side or the other, a phenomenon called *community polarization*. Community polarization is another participant in the cycle of escalation—it is produced by earlier escalation and contributes to later escalation.

Community polarization is produced by escalation in two ways. First, neutral community members are recruited by participants in the

controversy, who demand that nonparticipants decide whether they are "with us or against us." Second, the use of escalated tactics is often annoying or frightening to the broader community. It is hard to remain indifferent when people are yelling at each other, damaging each other's property, or hurting each other. There is a tendency to cast blame in such circumstances and to support the side to which one is closer or the side that seems less blameworthy.

Community polarization contributes to further escalation for two reasons. One is that new supporters and recruits give added strength to the individuals or groups on either side. They provide manpower, materials, and money, and they enhance the group's confidence in the validity of its position and its likelihood of winning, making it easier to justify the use of heavy contentious tactics. The other reason is that polarization divides a community into two opposing camps. The bonds within each camp become stronger while those between camps deteriorate (Coleman, 1957). This causes a destruction of crosscutting group memberships¹⁶ and a disappearance of neutral third parties who would otherwise urge moderation and mediate the controversy.

Community polarization underlies the transformation from few to many. It occurred during the Cold War in that most nations felt forced to choose sides between the United States and the Soviet Union. It also occurred in the UB crisis, with many members of the wider Buffalo community choosing sides between the students and the administration (most of them embraced the side of the administration). In 2001, the entire world became polarized, with most governments supporting the United States in its war against the Taliban government of Afghanistan and many people in the Arab world supporting the Taliban. It is notable that one of the combatants, the United States, began its campaign with President George W. Bush announcing that the world would have to choose up sides: "You are either with us or against us."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has introduced a third conflict model, the structural change model, which builds on the conflict spiral model. We have described a set of changes in the individuals and groups involved in conflict and the communities to which they belong. These changes are way stations in the cycle of escalation: they result from prior escalation *and* contribute to further escalation. A cycle of escalation might, for example, start with Party's receipt of what it considers to be an insult from Other. If this makes Party angry and fearful about its image of adequacy, these emotional changes

¹⁶ Crosscutting group memberships are discussed in Chapter 7.

could produce a return insult from Party. This might then produce similar emotional changes in Other, encouraging still another insult. The cycle would then be complete, but it could be followed by further cycles, causing the conflict to become increasingly escalated.

Psychological changes take place in individuals, but they can also affect the behavior of groups when they are widespread among group members. In addition to emotional changes (blame, anger, fear, and perceived threat to one's image), psychological changes include dehumanization, deindividuation, and the development of hostile attitudes, perceptions and goals. Dehumanization and deindividuation are similar in that they erode inhibitions that would otherwise prevent aggression. Party can become deindividuated in its own eyes, which also erodes inhibitions. Development of a goal of seeking revenge is a particularly potent structural change, which can produce heavily escalated behavior long after an annoyance has been experienced.

Structural changes can also occur in groups. Group changes include the development of hostile group goals, the emergence of runaway norms, enhanced group identity and cohesiveness, and the emergence of militant subgroups and leaders. Groups can also polarize, with their members moved from moderation to militancy, as can the communities surrounding the conflicting parties. All of these changes result from prior escalation and contribute to further escalation.

Emotional changes are products of the moments and tend to disappear quickly once a conflict episode is over. But the other kinds of structural changes tend to persist as residues that injure the relationship between the parties. These residues make it hard for escalation to dissipate once it gets started and tend to encourage renewed conflict and escalation at a later time.

Having laid out the mechanisms that produce escalation, in this chapter and the one before it, we turn, in Chapter 7, to the conditions that allow conflict to escalate and those that stabilize the situation so that the parties draw back from escalation and the structural changes producing it.

7

Conditions That Encourage and Discourage Escalation

A Light Escalation • A Heavy Escalation • Basic Antecedents of Escalation • *Conflict Size* • *Instability* • Features of the Situation • Features of the Parties • *Personality Differences and Childhood Experiences* • *Age and Gender Differences* • *Conflict Models Employed by the Parties* • *Cultural Differences* • *Features of Groups* • *Prior Escalation and Structural Change* • Features of the Relationships Between Parties • *Social Bonds* • Features of the Broader Community • *Outside Support* • *Conflict-Limiting Norms* • *Conflict-Limiting Institutions* * *Community Structure: Crosscutting vs. Overlapping Bonds* • *Stability Through Threats* • *Balance of Power Theory* • *The Balance of Terror* * *Problems with Basing Stability on Threats* • Summary and Conclusions

Jn Chapter 1, we defined conflict as perceived divergence of interest, involving two or more parties who believe that their aspirations are incompatible—that if one of them succeeds, the other must fail. We pointed out that mild conflict is often benign, encouraging the parties to develop new ways of meshing their interests and producing needed social change. But heavy conflict can be destructive, and this is where escalation comes in. Escalation is what gives conflict its bad name. Though a little escalation may be part of a constructive process, heavy escalation is usually a problem for the parties involved and for the surrounding community.

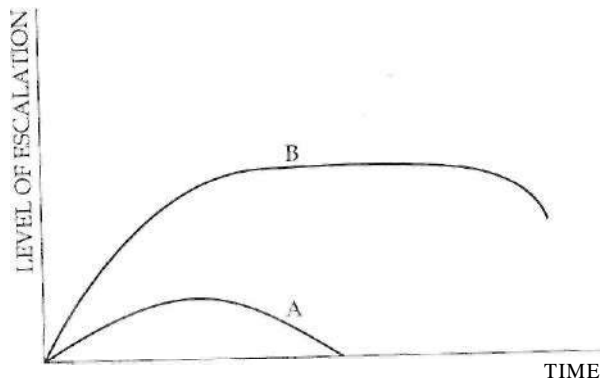


FIGURE 7.1

Course of escalation in two contrasting conflicts. Curve A represents a case of light escalation, and Curve B a case of heavy escalation.

To understand the difference between light and heavy escalation, compare the curves in Figure 7.1, which trace the course of escalation over time in two contrasting conflicts. Curve A represents a case of light escalation. Tactics and the feelings associated with them become harsher for a period of time. But they are limited in intensity and duration, and the situation quickly returns to normal. A good example of such a conflict is the husband-wife spat about driving the car, described in Chapter 5. The two parties argued briefly and then resolved their quarrel.

Curve B represents a case of heavy escalation. Tactics and feelings rapidly become more intense, moving to a higher level and lasting longer. The Cold War and the UB crisis fit the pattern shown in curve B.

This chapter and the next concern the processes and conditions that determine whether a conflict will escalate in accordance with curve A or curve B. Note that these curves differ in two ways: One is that conflict escalates *more rapidly to a higher level* in B than in A. That is the topic of the present chapter, which concerns the determinants of whether light or heavy escalation takes place. The other is that conflict *remains* escalated for a longer period of time in B than in A. That is the topic of the next chapter, which concerns the persistence of escalation.

A LIGHT ESCALATION

Another escalation that fits curve A can be seen in a story told by a college

I was studying for a chemistry exam with a group of people in my room. It was about 11:00 P.M., and we needed a break. We started goofing off by playing music and telling jokes. At this time one of my friends left my room for a while, and when he returned, he found the door locked. As a group we started laughing at him, telling him that we were not going to let him in. All of a sudden, he started kicking the door from the outside—until the door was broken down. The lock and the door had been destroyed. And I was starting to get pissed off. I ran up to his room and proceeded to kick his door down. He followed me up to his room and didn't do anything, but watched me kicking his door. After a few good kicks, I stopped because I realized I was being foolish. But it felt good to release my tensions. He started laughing and said if I kicked his door in, both of us would have had to pay for damaged locks. He said "sorry," and that was that. Afterwards, we acted as if nothing ever happened.

A HEAVY ESCALATION

Curve B is illustrated by an event, dubbed the "Rink Rage" case, in which the father of a young hockey player killed the father of another player. What started as a minor quarrel quickly escalated into a shouting match, then a shoving match, and finally a deadly fistfight. In the end, one man was dead, another was convicted of involuntary manslaughter, children were traumatized by witnessing the beating, and the lives of two families were shattered.

According to newspaper accounts (Daniel, 2002), Michael Costin of Lynnfield, Massachusetts, was supervising a noncontact hockey game involving his three sons and two of their friends. Costin asked Thomas Junta's son, then 10 1/2, and some of his friends, all from Reading, Massachusetts, to join the game. The game turned rough, resulting in children fighting. Noticing that Costin was doing nothing to stop the fight, Junta allegedly yelled at Costin to control the situation. Costin reportedly replied, "That's hockey!" and they exchanged some words. Junta claimed that as his son was getting off the ice, one of the Lynnfield players elbowed him in the side of the face. He took his son and his friends to the locker room, urging them to get ready to leave the place. Then Costin appeared, and the two men resumed arguing, swearing, and screaming. Soon, they scuffled, but some adults pulled them apart. An employee of the ice rink asked Junta to leave the facility. Junta did so but returned a few minutes later. He allegedly came back because he was concerned about his son's safety. There were conflicting witness testimonies about who first threw a punch. Some said that it was Costin who threw it and that Junta reacted to it with three punches. Others testified that the 270-pound Junta marched back to the rink and pinned the 150-pound Costin on the floor with his knee, repeatedly punching him, while horrified children were looking on. Junta claimed he did so in self-defense. Costin never regained consciousness and died a day later of massive head injuries.

BASIC ANTECEDENTS OF ESCALATION

Unlike the dormitory door case, the rink rage case went through several iterations of a conflict spiral, getting more and more severe until a tragedy happened. Such a runaway escalation has two kinds of antecedents: large conflict size and instability.

Conflict Size

As indicated in Chapter 2, conflicts look large when there are lofty, rigid aspirations on both sides and alternatives that provide little benefit to the parties. In such circumstances, yielding is unthinkable and problem solving seems hopeless. Hence, contending looks like the only way to succeed. It seems necessary to put pressure on Other; and the larger the perceived size of the conflict, the heavier the contentious tactics that seem to be needed. If contentious action is in fact taken, it will often provoke a similar response from Other, starting a conflict spiral.

Conflict size was part of the problem in the rink rage case. The two men had different views about how hockey should be played, and their positions were so rigid that a seemingly unbridgeable gap developed between them. Part of this rigidity probably resulted from image threats of the kind discussed in Chapter 6. Neither man could back down because it would be an acknowledgment of weakness. Concerns about image threats are common in conflicts between men, especially when they are observed by a masculine audience (Felson, 1982), as in this case.

However, none of this seems sufficient to explain the extreme violence that occurred in this incident. Men often get into scrapes with each other, yet few of them are killed as a result. It follows that we must look to sources of *instability* for a full explanation of what happened.

Instability

Most of this chapter will focus on instability, those aspects of the situation that encourage Party to act harshly when it perceives a divergence of interest or is confronted with contentious behavior from Other. Situations are said to be highly unstable if minimal divergence of interest or provocation can push one or both parties into heavily escalated action. The opposite of instability is *stability*, which describes situations in which conflict does not easily escalate—where the pattern usually looks like curve A in Figure 7.1. Stability is a relative matter. Even the most stable of situations will escalate if conflict or provocation is large enough; and in extremely unstable situations, a whisker of conflict is enough to set escalation going.

There are three basic types of instability. One is a *tendency to overreact to annoyance or threat*. For example, people who are in an aroused or tense

state of mind are especially likely to get angry in the face of provocation. Perhaps one (or both) of the men in the rink rage case was in such a state at the time of their encounter—due to a difficult work situation or domestic problems—making him overreact to the other's contentious actions. This tendency to overreact is often due to a party being prone to one or another of the structural changes discussed in Chapter 6.

A second basic type of instability is *reduced inhibitions against aggressive behavior*.¹ We know, for example, that bonds of common group membership, friendship, or interdependence between Party and Other tend to inhibit—that is, restrain Party from—the use of heavy contentious tactics. Such bonds are sources of stability, as they probably were in the dormitory door case, which involved two friends. But if such bonds are absent or diminished, Party may use harsh tactics when conflict arises. In the rink rage case, there is no reason to believe that the two men knew each other, so there were no bonds between them.

A third basic type of instability is *reduced capacity for conflict management*. Situations tend to be stable when the parties are willing and able to talk about their differences, or third parties are available to keep order. In the rink rage case, the two men were so angry at each other that rational discussion was impossible. At one point in the conflict, third parties exerted control by pulling the men apart and asking Junta to leave. But adequate third party intervention was not available in the final episode when Costin was killed.

All three of these basic types of instability encourage harsh reactions to provocation. Such reactions are the building blocks of the conflict spiral (cycle of escalation) shown in Figure 6.1 (the reader should turn back to this figure). If the conditions encourage Party to respond harshly to provocation from Other (by energizing path C and /or D in this figure), the cycle of escalation will turn more rapidly and generate faster and more extensive escalation. If the conditions also encourage Other to respond harshly to Party's provocations (by energizing path A and/or B), the cycle will become a veritable flywheel. Party will react harshly to provocations *from* Other, producing provocations *or* Other, which will start the cycle around again. Such escalation may become almost boundless if harsh responses are directed not only at Other but also at those identified with Other—family, associates, or ethnic group members—as exemplified by escalation of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians over the last few years.

This chapter will examine a set of conditions that encourage stability or instability, under four headings—those pertaining to the *situation*, the *parties*, their *relationship*, and the *community* that surrounds them. All of these conditions operate by activating or deactivating one or more of the

¹ Inhibitions are cognitive constraints against certain kinds of actions.

basic types of escalation just discussed. At the end of the chapter, there will also be a special section on stability through threats.

FEATURES OF THE SITUATION

Research on aggression (see Berkowitz, 1993; Geen, 1990) has helped understand those aspects of the situation that encourage harsh reactions to provocation from Other. Two kinds of conditions can be distinguished: those that affect the extent to which *anger develops* in response to Other's provocation, and those that affect the extent to which this *anger is expressed* in behavior.² Looking back at Figure 6.1, the first kind of condition can be viewed as influencing path C (or its counterpart, path A); the second kind, as influencing path D (or its counterpart, path B).

Autonomic arousal promotes a tendency to overreact. People get angrier when they are provoked, provided that they attribute this arousal to the provocation. This implies that conflict is more likely to escalate when Party has exercised recently, although not so recently as to be aware of the source of the arousal (Zillmann et al., 1974). Folklore to the contrary, a fast game of basketball is more likely to exacerbate conflict than to cure it. Escalation is also more likely when Party is in a sexually excited state (Zillmann, 1971), or when there is considerable noise (Geen, 1978) or atmospheric pollution (Rotton & Frey, 1985).

The effect of autonomic arousal on anger tends to persist well after the arousal is gone (Bryant & Zillmann, 1979). For example, if Party exercises just before Other provokes it, Party's likelihood of aggressing against Other several months later will be strengthened. What probably happens is that the original anger, augmented by exercise, becomes translated into some form of negative attitude or goal that persists as a residue.

An overreaction to provocation is also more likely when Party has been *recently angered in some other situation*. Pent-up anger can turn Party into a coiled spring, poised to displace its anger onto Other. For example, Berkowitz, Cochran, and Embree (1981) found that participants who were forced to hold their hand in very cold water were more aggressive toward fellow participants than those who held their hand in moderately cold water.

Pleasurable experiences, in contrast, tend to block an aggressive response to provocation. Humor (Baron, 1978), mildly erotic stimuli (Baron & Bell, 1977), and soft, sweet music (Konecni, 1975) tend to diminish aggressive expression, presumably by putting Party in a good mood. It is

² We embrace the common-sense view that anger is one source of aggression. This view is accepted by some theorists (e.g., Allred, 1999; Zillmann, 1979) but not by others (Berkowitz, 1993).

not altogether clear whether such experiences interfere with the development of anger or with the expression of anger in the form of an aggressive response.³

Drinking alcohol is probably the best-known antecedent of escalation. Barroom brawls are legendary, and alcohol is believed to have contributed to 64 percent of the homicide cases in Philadelphia between 1948 and 1953 (Wolfgang & Strohm, 1956). The effect of alcohol is to concentrate attention on the most salient stimuli in the situation (i.e., the provocation), making Party oblivious to the wider social context and the future impact of its actions (Steele & Josephs, 1990; Taylor & Leonard, 1983). This presumably produces an escalative effect in two ways: (1) by making the provocation seem larger; and (2) by reducing social and cognitive inhibitions, thus increasing the likelihood that Party's anger will be released.

Time pressure—the necessity of a quick response—also tends to produce an overly aggressive reaction to provocation and thus encourages escalation (Ohbuchi, 1995; Yovetitch & Rusbult, 1994). The probable reason for this is similar to that for the impact of alcohol. When faced with provocation, people first pay attention to the provocation itself and only later to broader issues that are likely to inhibit aggressive responding, such as the importance of the relationship with the provoker or the opinions of third parties who frown on overreaction (Pruitt, 1997). If there is time pressure, people will often not get to the second stage of this process.

Another anger-releasing experience is exposure to an *aggressive model*, somebody engaging in aggression (Baron & Kepner, 1970; Wheeler & Caggiula, 1966). Seeing aggressive behavior on television has a similar effect, especially if the portrayal is realistic (Geen, 1975) and the model is engaged in retaliatory aggression (Geen & Stonner, 1973). A possible explanation for these effects is that the expression of anger is ordinarily under strong normative control. People have learned that society frowns on aggression. Hence, they tend to feel guilty or afraid of criticism about aggression and normally hold their anger in. But when an aggressive model appears, it places a temporary seal of social approval on aggression. The old norm—and the inhibitions it produces—suddenly seems less binding. If the model can do it, why not I? This allows the pent-up anger to be expressed.

Aggression is also sometimes inhibited by *competing activities*. For example, moderate heat provokes aggression; but severe heat provokes flight if the situation allows it, a response that is incompatible with aggression

³ A case can be made for either of these interpretations. However, the fact that humor and small gifts also reduce contentious behavior in negotiation (Carnevale & Isen, 1986; O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981) suggests the latter interpretation—that the effect is on the response production side. Anger is not usually prominent in negotiation; hence, the effect of pleasurable experience on negotiation behavior is not likely to be mediated by anger.

(Bell & Baron, 1976). Similarly, a favorite way to stop children from angry crying is to divert them with a pleasurable competing activity.

We can summarize the points made in this section by examining their practical implications. For example, suppose you were traveling with a male companion who constantly got into arguments and fights along the way. What could you do to prevent further outbreaks and escalation? You could try to remove him from any situation in which conflict was brewing. In addition, you could try to keep his arousal level low by avoiding noise, pollution, or heavy physical exertion. You could avoid provoking him yourself to make him less of a coiled spring with others. You could keep him out of bars and away from violent movies and television shows. You could also take a nonviolent, problem-solving approach to the situation yourself, so as to provide him with a model of conciliatory behavior. Finally, you could try to keep him busy with all manner of pleasurable activities, so as to put him in a good mood and encourage responses incompatible with escalation.

The preferred target for Party's expression of anger is the Other who is blamed for the aversive experience. However, it is not always possible to indulge this preference. The source of annoyance may be well protected, there may be extenuating circumstances that reduce its culpability, or it may be impossible to identify the source. Under these circumstances, Party's desire to punish is sometimes *displaced* onto another offending target. If one cannot hit an enraging boss, one overreacts to trivial frustration and yells at the spouse or kicks the cat.

Evidence of displacement may be seen in a study by Hovland and Sears (1940), who found an inverse correlation between the price of cotton in the South and the number of African Americans lynched over a 49-year period. The lower the price of cotton, the greater the number of lynchings. What presumably happened is that white farmers were frustrated by the decline in the cotton market but could not legitimately aggress against the cotton merchants who were paying them less. They took it out on a handy displacement object, an African American who had stepped out of line in some way. Other evidence of displacement can be seen in the finding that people who have been abused as children tend to become aggressive as adults (McCord, 1986). The abuse makes them angry inside and they take it out on people they encounter in later life.⁴

FEATURES OF THE PARTIES

When individuals are involved in conflict, differences in personality, age, or gender may be important. The behavior of individual participants may

also be affected by the conflict models⁵ they use for analyzing their dispute. Culture also produces differences in the way people handle conflict. Such variables are also important for understanding intergroup conflict provided the groups are homogeneous in the types of people involved. In addition, there are stable intergroup differences that affect the way conflict is handled by groups.

Personality Differences and Childhood Experiences

Research on aggression suggests that conflict spirals are particularly likely to occur when certain kinds of personalities are involved. There is evidence of consistent individual differences in aggressive response to provocation (Geen, 1990). Some people are particularly *irritable*, reacting with anger to minor provocation (Berkowitz, 1993). Among these are the hard-driving, success-oriented "Type A" individuals, who tend to overreact when others get in their way (Carver & Glass, 1978). Other people are especially *impulsive*, reacting too fast for inhibitions to take hold and easily expressing their anger when aroused (Hynan & Grush, 1986). Still others are extremely vigilant for *threats to their image* of strength or adequacy (Toch, 1969). For example, people who tend to have high but unstable self-esteem are easily provoked and often respond aggressively in an effort to repair their image (Baumeister et al., 1996). All three types of people are especially likely to get into escalative sequences, and they often end up hurting themselves and others.

Other personality traits contribute to stability in interpersonal relations. For example, people who are high *in need for social approval* or feel *guilty about aggression* tend to underreact when provoked (Dengerink, 1976). These findings suggest that aggressive responding, and hence the likelihood of escalation, is reduced in those who are highly motivated to adhere to social norms. In addition, there is evidence that *empathy* with others produces inhibitions against retaliating when provoked (Rusbult et al., 1991). Empathic people are sensitive to the needs of others, leading them to think twice about harming others' interests even when it seems justified. Hence, they are probably less likely to get involved in escalation.

The personality traits just discussed are due, at least in part, to childhood experiences. Rewarding children for aggressive responding can make them more likely to become involved in conflict spirals as adults (Berkowitz, 1993). Rejection and harsh treatment by adults can also have this effect. This may be due to displacement; the abuse makes children feel angry inside and they take it out on people they encounter in later

See Marcus et al. (2000) for a meta-analytical review on displaced aggression.

⁵ The term "model" in this context refers to a pattern of thought used in developing explanations rather than to a human being who is taking a particular kind of action.

life. Rejection is especially likely to produce an aggressive child when it is accompanied by inadequate monitoring and inconsistent discipline (McCord, 1986). In addition, children who are brought up by parents who fight each other tend to become aggressive (McCord, 1986).

Could personality help understand the rink rage tragedy? There is some evidence on this issue. Both Costin and Junta had a troubled past ("A just verdict," 2002), including some history of assaulting other people. This suggests that they had built-in tendencies to overreact to challenges from others or lacked normal inhibitions against aggressive responding.

Age and Gender Differences

In the United States, young men (between the ages of 20 and 30) are especially likely to become involved in murder, both as perpetrators and victims (Berkowitz, 1993). This suggests that they are especially prone to severe escalation. Buss (1999) interprets similar data as implying that "the proportion of young males in a population may be the best, or one of the best, predictors of violent aggression" (p. 293). This helps understand the September 11 attack on the United States. The Arab world from which the terrorists came "is going through a massive youth bulge, with more than half of most countries' populations under the age of 25" (Zakaria, 2001, p. 32).

Other research supports the gender aspect of Buss's conclusion. Men, on the whole, are more physically and verbally aggressive than women (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Felson, 1982; Ohbuchi & Tedeschi, 1997). However, these conclusions apparently do not apply to reactions to persistent, illegitimate annoyance, where women have been found to protest more vigorously than men (Da Gloria & De Ridder, 1979; Mikolic et al., 1997).

Escalation Models Employed by the Parties

In Chapters 5 and 6, we presented three escalation models—contender-defender, conflict spiral, and structural change—as aids to a scholarly analysis of conflict. But they can also be seen as models of participant thought—concepts that help parties interpret what is happening in a conflict. Each model has implications with respect to the extent to which conflict will escalate.

A firm belief in the *contender-defender* interpretation often serves to exacerbate a conflict spiral. Party acknowledges that it is escalating but fails to see that this is a reaction to Other's escalation, which is a reaction to its own prior escalation. Instead, it views its behavior as a legitimate response to Other's persistent annoyance and redoubles its efforts to get Other to stop what it is doing. Other is the basic source of the problem and Party is only reacting. If Other also interprets the conflict by means

of the contender-defender model, it is likely to redouble its efforts as well, spawning a new round of contentious activity.

A belief that Party is in, or is in danger of entering, a *conflict spiral* can have the opposite effect of dampening or preventing that spiral in order to avoid escalation (Richardson, 1967). This kind of analysis is likely to lead Party to tone down its reactions to Other's aggressive actions, and to be conciliatory in the hope that Other will reciprocate (Tetlock, 1983). Party will behave like a dove, in contrast to the hawks, who make a contender-defender analysis.

Neither doves nor hawks have a monopoly over the truth. If the doves are right that they are in a conflict spiral, they can escape the conflict by de-escalating. For example, in 1977 President Sadat of Egypt, concluding that his country was involved in a conflict spiral with Israel, made a gesture of goodwill in the form of a personal journey to Jerusalem. This started a de-escalative spiral in relations between these countries that resulted in the eventual resumption of diplomatic relations.

But if the hawks are right, a soft, conciliatory stance may encourage the adversary to redouble its efforts to force Party to yield. For example, after surrounding Indian outposts in 1961, Chinese forces withdrew in an effort to signal a desire to be conciliatory. Unfortunately, Indian leaders "interpreted the Chinese withdrawal as a sign of timidity [and] became even bolder in their efforts to occupy as much of the disputed territory, east and west, as was possible" (Lebow et al., 1984).

Because both hawks and doves may have the right answer at times, it is wise for groups (including organizations and nations) to cultivate both kinds of bird among their members and to allow them to engage in what is usually an endless debate. However, it should be borne in mind that the hawkish analysis is the more common one, strengthened by a self-serving tendency for Party to think that Other must be the "aggressor" because Party's side cannot possibly be in the wrong. Hence, cultivating doves is often the more elusive and challenging enterprise.

A *structural change* analysis of the conflict Party is experiencing implies a third set of tactics. For example, Party may try to avoid structural changes in its own constituency that will contribute to further escalation. Thus a leader who fears that a permanent defense establishment will become a strong advocate for hawkish policies may insist that a temporary establishment be formed to meet a current threat. A structural change analysis also implies the importance of *timing* in reversing or repudiating actions that are taken by Party and resented by Other (Pruitt & Gahagan, 1974). For example, it seems reasonable to assume that the UB campus crisis would have dissipated quickly if the administration had publicly apologized for the initial violence by the campus police, made restitution to the students who were assaulted, and arranged to drop the charges against those who were initially arrested. Such actions would probably

have prevented the formation of the Strike Committee. Timing was important because once the Strike Committee had developed, and numerous students had taken leadership positions in it, the campus was consigned to an extended period of heavy conflict.

Cultural Differences

In *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*, Nisbett and Cohen (1996) assert that cultures that emphasize honor—a concern for the public image of status and toughness—encourage harsh reaction to provocation. These authors have demonstrated that the culture of honor largely accounts for the far higher homicide rates among southern white males than those among their northern counterparts in the United States. This regional difference occurs only for homicides stemming from an argument or quarrel, where honor is at great stake, not for those stemming from, for example, robbery or burglary. Also, although southerners differ little from northerners with regard to their support for violence in general, they express more support than northerners do for the use of violence in honor-related matters, such as protecting oneself or one's family from affronts. What is more, when insulted, southerners show more anger, experience more hormonal changes indicative of stress (increase in their Cortisol level) and of aggressive readiness (increase in their testosterone level), and act more aggressively against another person than do northerners.

Why has the culture of honor emerged more in the South than in the North? According to Nisbett and Cohen, it has to do with a security dilemma arising from the herding of cattle, which was the original economy of this region. Cattle are a highly portable form of property that is an easy target for thievery. Since law enforcement was weak at first, individuals needed to cultivate a reputation for being ready to retaliate violently when threatened in any way. To this end, even trivial slights could not go unanswered, because tolerating them might invite further affronts and lead eventually to the loss of the herd. The dilemma inheres in the fact that rational individual efforts to burnish the image of toughness in self-defense lead to an irrational outcome for society as a whole. With everybody on a hair trigger, many fatal fights will occur that could otherwise be avoided. One kind of evidence for this theory is that the culture of honor is universally present in herding societies (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

Although the conditions that produced the culture of honor—herding and weak law enforcement—no longer exist in the South, this culture has a staying power in that region. People are expected to avenge slights to their honor even if doing so no longer gains economic benefits.

Similar cultures of honor exist in many impoverished, inner-city black communities. There, violence is a main means of handling conflict, particularly conflict involving affronts. Young men's fights often begin with

an incident in which one of them perceives he has been "dissed" (disrespected). Anderson (1999) calls this culture "the code of the streets."

This inner-city culture also derives, in part, from the security dilemma. Crime is rampant in these neighborhoods, and police are not very effective. Hence, people must defend themselves by developing a reputation for toughness. In addition, there are few means available to gain status and regard except through building such a reputation. People, particularly young men (and increasingly young women as well), earn respect by responding to even the slightest affront to their honor (for example, maintaining eye contact too long) with harsh, sometimes lethal violence. Being respected is the core value in this street culture; hence, many young men aspire to be "the baddest dude on the street."

Features of Groups

Conflict between groups is more likely to escalate than conflict between individuals. The mere existence of an ingroup and an outgroup leads the outgroup to become the object of negative perceptions and discrimination (Crocker et al., 1987; Tajfel, 1970) and produces more vigorous competition for scarce resources (Komorita & Lapworth, 1982). Furthermore, groups, when annoyed, have been found to protest more adamantly and retaliate more harshly than individuals (Jaffe & Yinon, 1983; Mikolic et al., 1997; Rabbie & Lodewijkx, 1995). Groups also behave less cooperatively in the prisoner's dilemma (Schopler & Insko, 1992). There are a number of explanations for these effects, most prominently, *social identity theory*, which was mentioned in Chapter 2. This theory holds that groups are more contentious than individuals because the self-respect of their members is tied to believing that their own group is better than other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986).

In Chapter 6, we discussed a number of structural changes that occur in groups during escalation and tend to encourage further escalation. The most important of these are the establishment of subgroups that are dedicated to the struggle, the ascendancy of militant leaders, and the development of contentious group norms and goals. Escalation is more likely when there are conditions that allow these changes to take place, such as the capacity for communication among group members and the availability of militant leadership.

Prior Escalation and Structural Change

Most of the structural changes discussed in Chapter 6, once they are in place, tend to persist. These include hostile attitudes and perceptions, hostile individual and group goals, militant subgroups and leaders, and community polarization. Severe conflicts usually eventually taper off, with

issues at least partially solved or forgotten and heavy tactics diminished or in abeyance. But if structural changes have taken place, these make the situation more vulnerable to a new conflict if it arises (Coleman, 1957). Hostile attitudes and perceptions—distrust, dehumanization, hatred, and the like—once established, make it easier for Party to misinterpret or overreact to a new challenge from Other. Militant leaders, once in place, can easily spring into action when a new issue arises. And a community, once polarized, has difficulty resolving new conflicts along its fault lines.

What this means is that prior escalation, and the structural changes it produces, can be a source of future instability. When new conflicts arise, these changes tend to make escalation more likely and more severe.

FEATURES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PARTIES

Social Bonds

As mentioned in Chapter 3, social bonds tend to encourage yielding and problem solving. They also reduce the use of contentious tactics, especially those of the harsher variety. Hence, social bonds are a source of stability in relationships—they reduce the likelihood of escalation. The bonds in question include positive attitudes, respect, trust, friendship, kinship, perceived similarity, common group membership, common ethnic and cultural identity, and future dependence. As an example of the inhibiting effect of friendship on social conflict, Ransford (1968) found that African Americans who had socialized with whites were less willing to endorse the use of violence in pursuit of racial justice than were those who had not. The impact of kinship is demonstrated by the finding that close kin seldom murder each other (Daly & Wilson, 1998).⁶ Evidence that common group membership protects parties from escalation comes from (a) an experiment by Kramer and Brewer (1984) in which two groups were less likely to compete for common resources when their members saw themselves as coming from the same geographical community rather than two different communities, and (b) a qualitative study of community conflict by Coleman (1957), which suggested that identification with one's community tends to moderate the tactics used for pursuing disagreements with other community members.

The opposite side of this coin is that the absence of bonds is a source of instability. This is particularly true for perceived dissimilarity, membership in different groups, ideological disparity, and cultural divergence, since

⁶ This finding holds up throughout the animal kingdom; closer relatives tend to receive more help and are less often targets of aggression (Buss, 1999; Pfennig & Sherman, 1995).

people who are different from oneself are often viewed with suspicion and sometimes with alarm. Thus Struch and Schwartz (1989) have found that aggression is more likely between Israeli groups whose members look or act very different and therefore cannot easily move from one group to the other. Huntington (1996) has argued, on the basis of a great deal of case material, that escalation is particularly likely between groups that differ in culture and religion. He uses the term "fault lines" to describe regions of the world where such groups come into contact and argues that conflicts will be particularly severe and long-lasting in such regions. One example is the Middle East, where Israelis (mainly westernized Jews) and Arabs (mainly Muslim) have fought each other for generations.

The stabilizing impact of bonding is often masked by the fact that people who are more securely bonded to each other usually interact more and feel less constrained by the canons of politeness. Hence, they are likely to experience more episodes of conflict and to argue more vigorously, at least for a while. Still, if conflict persists, they are more likely to engage in problem solving and less likely to employ harsh contentious tactics. This paradox was observed in a laboratory study of cohesiveness (solidarity) in dyads (Back, 1951). When a difference of opinion arose, more cohesive dyads argued more vigorously but also eventually reached fuller agreement. This is a pattern that is often found in successful marriages.

Dependence Dependence is the most complicated source of bonding and hence deserves separate discussion. Party is dependent on Other to the extent that Other has control over certain of Party's outcomes and can reward Party for desired behavior and/or punish Party for undesired behavior. Dependence, unlike most other kinds of bonds, is often unidirectional. Party can be dependent on Other without Other being dependent on Party.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, dependence usually encourages yielding and problem solving and discourages the use of heavy contentious tactics (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984a, b; Heide & Miner, 1992). The more Other can help or harm Party, the more careful Party must be not to annoy Other by pressing petty claims or employing harsh tactics. Hence, dependence ordinarily contributes to stability, especially if it is positive and bilateral (each can reward the other). An example is the high level of cooperation and absence of escalated conflict in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Second World War, when they were dependent on each other for support in the common battle against Germany and her allies. This relationship deteriorated drastically as soon as the common battle was over, producing the Cold War.

Dependence is a two-edged sword, because it can produce escalation rather than stability if Other fails to cooperate. For example, if Party depends on Other for rides to work and it is costly for Other to provide them, their interests are divergent. If Other is haphazard in providing this service

and Party cannot find another source of rides, Party is likely to employ contentious tactics in an effort to improve Other's performance. The more dependent Party is on Other, the harsher the tactics Party will employ in order to teach Other an enduring lesson. This is why friends and family members so often get into escalated conflict, despite their bonds of affection and common group membership. Such people are highly interdependent and have a lot of potential divergence of interest.

The Destruction of Bonds When conflict escalates, bonds tend to disintegrate. Relationships are severed; love turns to hate, and people shift their dependencies to other, less difficult partners. Structural changes of this kind are often long-lasting. As a result, conflict spirals persist and new conflicts between the parties are more likely to escalate. In short, prior escalation destroys interparty bonds, enhancing the likelihood of further escalation.

Evidence of this comes from studies of conflict management in marriage. Distressed marriages, where the partners have hostile attitudes and negative perceptions of each other, are prone to *negative reciprocity*—responding to the partner's criticism with return criticism (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Rusbult et al., 1991). This means that each new conflict, however trivial, is likely to escalate into a heavy, new argument.

FEATURES OF THE BROADER COMMUNITY

The stability or instability of a relationship between two parties is very much a function of the broader community of which they are a part. Some features of communities (e.g., outside support to the disputants) contribute to instability and underlie the development of escalation. Others (e.g., conflict-limiting norms and crosscutting) contribute to stability and tend to diminish or prevent escalation.

Outside Support

Conflict tends to be waged more vigorously, and in a more escalated fashion, when the parties have outside support, that is, supporters in the community. For example, a conflict between two neighboring families was exacerbated by outside support. It started as a simple argument over use of a common driveway. Then friends on each side urged an uncompromising stance, and an escalation ensued. Finally, a teenage boy from one family threw a firecracker at children from the other family, who had the boy arrested and sent to jail. The conflict was resolved in a community

mediation session, during which both families vowed to ignore their friends' opinions about the conflict.⁷

Outside support sometimes takes the form of *audiences*—people who are observing a dispute taking place. Audiences are usually unhappy about conflict and try to stop it, as in the rink rage example. But this is not always the case. Some audiences are amused by conflict and urge the participants to escalate, even to the point of threatening their images by calling them cowards if they do not fight. Such encouragement, which is most often found when men observe a conflict between other men, may have been present during the fight in the state prison described in Chapter 6. Heavy escalation is a frequent result of such encouragement (Brown, 1968).

Outside support can also contribute to escalation in intergroup and international conflict. For example, the heavily escalated conflict between Palestinians and Israelis that started in 2000 can be attributed in part to moral and material support, from the Arab world on the one hand and the United States on the other.

A related phenomenon is the impact of broad social movements on local community dissent. A case in point is the radical student movement of the late 1960s, which arose on campuses around the globe and inspired the campus radicals who started the crisis at UB that was described in Chapter 6. Some people thought that off-campus student leaders were pulling the strings at UB, but this was not the case. Rather, the international student movement provided moral support and examples that could be imitated. Indeed, the student demonstrations that spread rapidly between 1968 and 1970 often seemed to contain an element of "keeping up with the Joneses." The news that students had started a demonstration in one location encouraged the belief that it was possible and desirable elsewhere. Pride in one's own local movement depended in part on having a demonstration comparable to those on other campuses.

It follows that communities are less stable when there exists a national or international movement consisting of dissident groups in other communities (Coleman, 1957). Once such a movement gets started, it is hard to put the genie back in the bottle. Each militant action serves as an example to other communities, which then serve as examples to still others in a chain reaction. An example is the overthrow of one communist regime after another in Eastern Europe in 1990.

Conflict-Limiting Norms

Community norms often contribute to stability, prohibiting the use of harsh contentious tactics and prescribing problem solving or adjudication

Community mediation will be discussed as part of a larger section on mediation in Chapter 11.

as the proper approach to conflict between group members. "Don't let the sun set on your anger" and "Love thy neighbor as thyself" are but a few examples of maxims that may serve as guiding norms in the regulation of conflict.⁸

Like all norms, conflict-limiting norms are especially effective with parties who are well socialized and those who feel that the community has their interests at heart. They are effective with other types of parties to the extent that the community has the capacity for enforcement—that is, for learning about and punishing norm violation. Escalation is more likely when societies lack these elements, a point that is further developed in the next section.

Conflict-Limiting Institutions

Most communities also provide forums and third party services for helping their *members resolve* conflict peacefully. Such institutions contribute to stability by giving people a nonviolent and face-saving way to resolve their disputes (Glasl, 1982). Examples include legislative bodies, courts, and services that provide mediation and arbitration.

Stability—that is, lack of escalation—within communities depends on the availability and effectiveness of these institutions. For these institutions to be effective, they must be seen as fair and powerful. If they are absent or seem unfair or weak, vigilante action is likely to develop. People will "take the law into their own hands," employing harsh contentious tactics in an effort to settle conflicts in their own favor, thereby escalating these conflicts. The Hatfield-McCoy conflict, which was described in Chapter 6, involved vigilante actions that produced severe escalation. These two families lived in a mountainous area at a distance from an effective police force; hence they saw the need for direct action against each other, producing a deadly feud that lasted for twelve years. The Rodney King riots, which were described at the beginning of Chapter 1, can also be seen as vigilante action, resulting from perceived unfairness on the part of the police, who were seen as opponents rather than protectors.

The most important source of perceived fairness is *voice*—having a say in the decision process. Thus people see trials, police actions, and job performance reviews as fair to the extent that the authority seems to have heard and given consideration to their perspective. The relationship of voice to escalation is seen in interviews with African American residents of Los Angeles after the Watts riots of 1965. Those who felt that it was not possible for the average citizen to influence government decisions were

⁸ Norms such as these must be distinguished from substantive norms and norms about who makes what decisions. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the latter two types of norms tend to diminish the likelihood of conflict arising at all rather than the likelihood of escalation.

especially likely to endorse the use of violence in pursuit of racial justice (Ransford, 1968). Other sources of perceived fairness are a belief that the authority is unbiased, consistent, and careful in its decision making (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1990).

When communities are severely divided, the perceived fairness of their institutions often rests on whether the various groups within the community are represented in running them. Hence, power-sharing arrangements can be a route to stability (Hampson, 1996; Zartman, 1995).

In addition to being seen as fair, conflict-limiting institutions must have enough power—enough of a monopoly on force—that they can enforce decisions on those who are reluctant to follow them. Otherwise, conflicts are likely to escalate. In recent years, the world has witnessed many examples of escalated ethnic conflicts that have arisen when central governments become weak or discredited. For example, the internal wars in Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia were partly due to the discrediting of the Communist Party and the breakdown of the central government in the former Yugoslavia (Bloomfield, 1997).

Community Structure: Crosscutting vs. Overlapping Bonds

By "community structure" is meant the distribution of bonds across the members of a community. Bonds of friendship, kinship, ethnic identity, type of work, and so on, link some community members and divide others.

The stability of a community depends on the extent to which the bonds between its members are crosscutting, as opposed to overlapping (Coleman, 1957). In a community with a heavily *overlapping* structure, most kinds of bonds link the same people together. In other words, there are two or more groups that differ from each other in almost every respect. Catholics may be mainly recent emigrants from Italy, holding laboring jobs, and living in a particular geographical region; while Protestants may be mainly old Americans, holding white-collar jobs, and living in another region.⁹ If (as is probable) these groups also have no kinship and few friendship or business relations with each other, we are dealing with a severely overlapping and *highly unstable* structure. If conflict develops across the fault lines between these unrelated groups, the community is likely to polarize, producing heavy escalation.

In a community with a heavily *crosscutting* structure, almost everybody is linked with almost everybody else by at least one kind of bond. Thus some of each religious group are management and some are workers.

⁹ The term "overlapping" may not be altogether clear. In the example just given, religious, ethnic, social class, and geographical differences all overlap. This means that all of these dimensions sort the community members into the same two groups.

Some of both these groups are newcomers to the community and some are old guard. And friendships and business relationships have little to do with demographic characteristics. This is a *highly stable* structure, because a conflict between any two (or more) individuals or groups will be held in check by the bonds they have with each other, or their friends and associates have with each other.

Figure 7.2 shows schematic drawings of a heavily overlapping structure (Case 1) and a partially crosscutting structure (Case 2). We make the simplifying assumption that there are only two kinds of bonds: religion: Catholics (A) vs. Protestants (B), and social class: unionized workers (C) vs. managers who belong to trade and professional associations (D). In Case 1, these dimensions overlap and the community consists of two groups with no bonds between them: Catholic workers (A,C) and Protestant managers (B,D). In Case 2, social class crosscuts religion. Some Catholics are workers (A,C) while others are managers (A,D); and some Protestants are workers (B,C) while others are managers (B,D). Our theory assumes that Case 2 is more stable than Case 1.

Crosscutting provides stability in both dimensions of Case 2. Religious conflicts are held in check by crosscutting memberships in union and management, and labor conflicts are held in check by crosscutting memberships in religious organizations.

Crosscutting reduces the severity of community conflict for at least three reasons. One is that bonds between some community members cause them to exercise restraint—to refrain from polarization and escalation when divergence of interest arises or they annoy each other (Vanbeselaere, 1991). Thus if there is a Catholic-Protestant squabble, Catholic workers are inhibited from using heavy tactics against Protestant workers and Catholic managers against Protestant managers; and Protestant workers and managers will adopt a similar stance. A second reason is that members of crosscutting groups will try to exercise control over their fellow group members who do not belong to crosscutting groups. Thus on both sides of the religious divide, workers and managers will try to restrain shopkeepers and high school students (who are not part of crosscutting groups) from assaulting members of the opposing religious group. A third reason is that members of crosscutting groups can act as mediators to resolve the community's problems. Thus Catholic and Protestant union members can discuss the religious conflict because they are part of the same organization, as can Catholic and Protestant members of professional associations. Hence, crosscutting memberships provide a capacity for conflict management.

Varshney (2002) has studied crosscutting in Indian cities and found that cities with ethnically integrated organizations—trade unions, professional associations, political parties, business groups—were less likely to have heavy Hindu-Muslim rioting than those without such organizations. He found that when religious conflicts loomed, members of these organizations

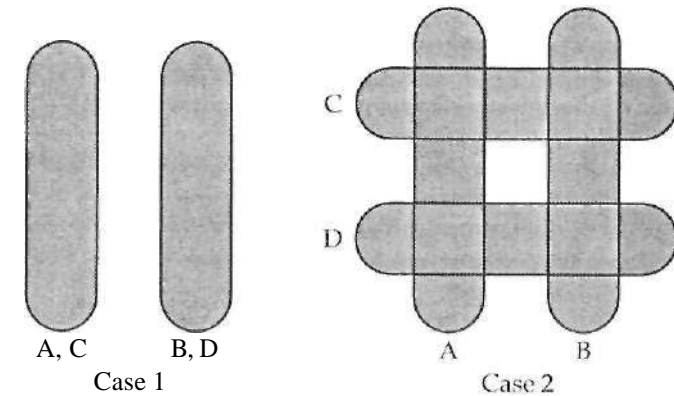


FIGURE 7.2

Case 1 represents a community with overlapping bonds; Case 2, a community with crosscutting bonds.

moved to try to manage them. For example, they worked to quell unfounded rumors of atrocities by one religious group against the other.

Gluckman (1955) gives two anthropological examples of crosscutting. He found that when a Nuer man moves away from his hometown, he becomes a mediator in quarrels between his relatives and residents of his new location. He probably has two motives for doing so. One is the fear of retribution from his new neighbors, causing him to urge caution on his kin. The other is that "he is likely to urge his kin to offer compensation, since he has many interests in the place where he resides" (p. 12). Gluckman also points out that marriage produces stability in those African societies in which the wife must move to her husband's village. Thereafter, she exerts a calming influence whenever there is conflict between her original village and that to which she has moved. Both examples illustrate crosscutting because the person who has moved becomes a member of both groups.

Closer to home, the United States today can be regarded as a heavily crosscutting system. For example, the rivalry between North and South, which once spawned a civil war, is now held in check by the fact that there are thousands of strong nationwide organizations, such as the Republican Party and the Roman Catholic Church. There is also heavy crosscutting between social classes and between most other societal divisions. In such a system, few subsets of people can form an unambivalent alliance against any other subset.

An historical exception to this description was the division between African Americans and whites in our society, because there were relatively

few bonds between these groups. The theory presented here would view the civil rights movement, with its effort to introduce African Americans into every institution of our society, as a massive program to develop crosscutting bonds and the stability that goes with them, whether or not this was intended by activists in that movement.

The Impact of Mild Conflict in Crosscutting Systems There is one other wrinkle to the theory of crosscutting group memberships—a paradoxical one. In a crosscutting situation, mild conflict between social groups can actually contribute to the overall stability of the community, making severe conflict less likely (Coleman, 1957). Imagine a community of Yankees and Italians in which some people from each ethnic group are managers (and belong to management associations and clubs) and others are laborers (and belong to unions). A little conflict between management and labor should make it more difficult for Yankee-Italian antagonisms to escalate, because Yankees and Italians have served together on both sides of the industrial battle line and recognize that they may need to do so again. Likewise, a little conflict between Yankees and Italians should diminish the intensity of future conflict between labor and management. Hence—and this is the crucial point—if there has been a little conflict in both sets of groupings, severe escalation is likely to be avoided in both. Almost everybody in the community recognizes almost everybody else as a past or potential future ally.¹⁰

An example of this can be seen in the United States Congress. Coalitions change from issue to issue in this body, so antagonisms usually do not run very deep. Members maintain decorous relations with one another and observe many informal conflict-limiting norms in order to be able to work together in future coalitions. Today it may be the farm states against the manufacturing states, tomorrow North against South, the next day those who want to maintain social programs against those who want to cut them. One never knows whose help may be needed in a future conflict, so it is foolish to let current differences get out of hand.¹¹

Crosscutting systems like those just described are highly resistant to escalation. But no system is completely escalation-proof. A really severe

¹⁰ In addition, mild controversy sometimes contributes to the development of institutions (such as representative committees and mediation services) that stand ready to resolve more serious future controversies. We will revisit such institutions in the discussion of conflict management systems in Chapter 11.

¹¹ Although crosscutting memberships reduce the likelihood of heavy contentious behavior between groups, they are not always beneficial to society as a whole. Society needs active competition between certain groups. For example, society must resist the development of interlocking directorates among corporations that produce the same kind of product, because of the need for competition between these corporations (Schoorman et al., 1981).

conflict of interest between two groups can break through any bonds, however secure, producing a runaway escalation and a set of antagonisms that may take years to repair.

Combating Polarization in Divided Communities There are four methods for combating polarization in divided communities like that in Case 1. One is to try to strengthen loyalty to the broader community. Flags and national anthems serve this function in the nation-state. The second is to install or strengthen a central authority that can threaten or use force to prevent escalation. The third is to foster antagonism with an outside enemy. An example is the Argentine occupation of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands in 1982, which appears to have been designed to unite a divided domestic polity around a patriotic issue.

The fourth and best way to combat polarization in a divided community is to encourage the development of bonds between individuals on both sides of the divide, thus moving in the direction of crosscutting. This method is used whenever ruling groups incorporate (co-opt) members of agitating factions into their decision making. Likert (1961) recommends the use of co-optation in organizations, urging that interdepartmental committees be formed involving representatives of conflicting departments. Membership in such committees will give these representatives a common group identity, and committee meetings will allow them to engage in problem solving about matters of common concern. Such representatives are called "linking pins." Royal families used a similar method in the past when they arranged for their sons and daughters to marry foreign princesses and princes in an effort to achieve peaceful relations with other countries.

Such procedures produce a cadre of people in each group who oppose the use of heavy contentious tactics and are ready to serve as mediators when conflict arises between the groups. If one linking pin on each side can contribute to community stability, two should be better and two hundred even better.

STABILITY THROUGH THREATS

The safeguards discussed so far—conflict-limiting norms and institutions, fear of escalation, social bonds, crosscutting group memberships—have tremendous force, accounting for the quiet way in which most conflicts are pursued and the high rate of peaceful conflict resolution ordinarily found in human affairs. However, these safeguards are not always present or strong enough to avert escalation.

Under such circumstances, parties often use *threats and punitive actions* to dissuade others from employing harsh tactics. Dramatic forms of threat and punishment can be seen in the apprehension and incarceration

of violent criminals or in the military preparations that are so common in the international arena.

Less obvious, but nevertheless of vast social significance, are the subtle threats and small penalties that all human interactions exhibit. All people have means of imposing costs on those around them. Children cry, workers move slowly, wives get angry, and husbands come home late. Most people are also adept at subtly signaling their discontent: the slow response to a statement, the lapse of attention, the lifted eyebrow, the frown, the sigh. These signals are tantamount to stating a full-blown threat, in that the recipients realize that punitive action will be forthcoming if they are not careful. In short, threats and penalties that are aimed at deterring others from taking bothersome actions are omnipresent in social relationships.¹²

Balance of Power Theory

Several theories of threat-induced stability have been developed for international affairs, where other sources of stability are often at their weakest. The oldest and most famous of these theories is *balance of power*. This theory can be adapted so that it is broadly applicable to the use of threats in all social situations.

In one interpretation of this theory, a balance of power exists when all nations in a system are deterred for military reasons from attacking all others. Assuming conventional (non-nuclear) weapons, deterrence is a function of the existence of natural and artificial barriers to attack, the military capability of the target of a potential attack, and the assistance it can recruit from other nations. These are effective deterrents either by making it impossible for aggression to succeed or by imposing unacceptable costs on an aggressor.

There are several mechanisms by which a balance of power can be achieved. Collective security, in which all other nations come to the rescue of a nation under attack, is often regarded as the ideal mechanism. Such a mechanism was built into the charter of the United Nations and was realized, to some extent, in the campaign against Iraq during the Gulf War. But collective security has been difficult to activate in most controversies, because some nations sympathize with one side and some with the other.

Barring effective collective security, nations that are faced with a strong opponent try to maintain or restore the balance of power by arming themselves and seeking allies. Some analysts argue that the most stable situation

is one in which all potential opponents are equal in military strength; others argue that the least aggressive nations must have a preponderance of military strength (Pruitt & Snyder, 1969). The existence of a balancer nation contributes to both kinds of stability. Balancers are nations that change alliances from time to time in order to side with the underdog. In earlier times, England played the role of balancer in the European system of nations.

Balance-of-power theory can be translated into other arenas of human interaction. For example, small groups, such as interdepartmental committees or families, usually try to deter overly aggressive members who attack others or try to dominate discussions. Collective security is common in such situations, with most other group members forming a temporary coalition against the aggressor.¹³ Barring this, smaller coalitions of like-minded individuals may form, and the members of each coalition support one another so that none can be overwhelmed. The situation will also be stable if a few people act as balancers, forever shifting to the defense of the underdog. The group leader frequently plays the role of balancer.

There are at least two problems with balance-of-power theory. One is that it is often difficult to identify and measure power; hence it is hard to know how much of what is needed to deter the adversary. Indeed "power" is one of the most difficult concepts to define and measure in the social sciences. This problem is particularly acute when different sorts of weapons are used on the two sides of a conflict, for example, conventional armaments on one side and guerrilla or terrorist forces on the other. Such conflicts often become highly escalated because both sides believe that they are winning for a long period of time. This is part of what prolonged the Vietnam War and has made the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so severe and difficult to resolve.

The other problem is that balance of power is ineffective if the military advantage lies heavily with whichever country attacks the other first. The greater the apparent advantage of striking first, the more likely is escalation, regardless of the distribution of military force. Such situations are unstable for two reasons: (1) because of the temptation to strike first; and (2) because of fear that another nation is about to strike first, which can motivate a preemptive first strike.

A highly unstable situation of this kind existed in 1914, when it was believed that the first European nation to mobilize could gain a major advantage over its neighbor by loading its troops onto trains and rushing them to the border for a massive assault. The result of this instability was the First World War. This war began when Russia, attempting to deter an Austrian attack on Serbia, mobilized troops along its southern border. Germany, perceiving that this mobilization put it at a military disadvantage,

Threats were extensively discussed in Chapter 4.

³ Recall that Mom and Sis took sides with Ben in the Chapter 1 story.

launched a preemptive attack against Russia's ally, France, striking through Belgium.

The Balance of Terror

The development of nuclear weapons has forced some changes in thinking about the balance of power in international affairs. These weapons are fantastically destructive and there is (so far) no real defense against them. The only way to protect oneself militarily is to threaten to retaliate in the hope of deterring the other side from using these weapons. Such retaliation is called a *second strike*. It follows that a critical issue for stability is second-strike credibility: how believable it is that an aggressor will be destroyed. When second-strike capability exists on both sides, we have a situation that is known as "mutually assured destruction."

According to *deterrence theory*, efforts to establish credibility must take somewhat different forms depending on whether the nation attacked has nuclear weapons or is the ally of a nuclear nation (Kahn, 1960). It is ordinarily assumed that nuclear nations under nuclear attack will retaliate in kind if they can. Hence, only second-strike *capability* is considered to be at issue—that is, whether the nation can retaliate after suffering a nuclear first strike. In contrast, in the deterrence of attack against a non-nuclear ally, *intentions* are the main issue. Will the nuclear nation run the risk of a devastating counterattack from the aggressor by actually retaliating? Willingness to come to the defense of an ally has always been an issue, even in strictly conventional contests; but it is more difficult to establish the credibility of intent in the age of nuclear weapons, because the cost of retaliation is so much greater.¹⁴

Second-strike capability is believed to depend on the security of the carriers (missiles and planes) of nuclear weapons and on their capacity to penetrate the adversary's defenses. The security of weapons carriers can be achieved in a variety of ways, including increasing their numbers, dispersing them, moving them frequently, concealing them, and shielding them. For example, several countries have nuclear weapons constantly on the move in submarines that are virtually impossible to locate and destroy.

Provided that its second-strike capability is secure, a nation can afford to have dramatically less nuclear capability than its adversary(ies) and still be secure. During the Cold War, the United States was way "ahead" of Russia in destructive capacity, but there is little evidence that the Russians

¹⁴ It can be argued that the credibility of Party's willingness to protect allies depends heavily on the strength of its bonds to these allies. Hence, trade, travel, and statements of friendship with allies may help to deter attacks against them.

were worried about an attack. Despite the military inequality (and, hence, the absence of a balance of power), mutually assured destruction existed and there was a stable "balance of terror."

Problems with Basing Stability on Threats

There are many problems with efforts to base security on threats, and hence with reliance on the balance of power or the balance of terror. Such approaches assume that it is possible to clearly communicate Party's resolve to a potential aggressor. Yet history reveals many failures in this regard (Lebow et al., 1984). They also assume that a would-be aggressor will be rational, able to predict accurately, and ready to avoid taking action if the risks are high or the probability of success is low.

It follows that threat-based deterrents are likely to fail and escalation to materialize in international relations, when the responsible decision makers: (1) are mentally or emotionally incapacitated, and so unable to use the information available to them; (2) regard the military future as so bleak or the military balance as changing so fast against them that they feel they have little to lose by aggressing; or (3) are impelled by foreign or domestic political interests of such gravity that they are willing to take large risks in a military adventure. Lebow, Jervis, and Stein (1984) cite the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and two Egyptian attacks on Israel as examples of the latter condition. What happened is that under the pressure of compelling political considerations, national leaders engaged in wishful thinking about the likelihood of winning a war.

The instability of threat-based systems can also be seen in domestic settings. Consider, for example, the impoverished section of Los Angeles portrayed in John Singleton's brilliant film, *Boyz n the Hood*. Intent on impressing local audiences and with little thought for the future, two young men get into a shoving and shouting match. The quarrel is continued by their friends and relatives—most prominently, by a man whose life and future are so empty that he seems unafraid of the consequences of violence. The local authorities are worse than useless, confining their activities to noisemaking and random assaults that keep everyone in a high state of autonomic arousal. Eventually a series of shootings takes place, eliminating most of the main characters in the movie.

Another problem with the use of threat-based deterrents is that they can actually encourage escalation. They involve "fighting fire with fire"; hence, they run the risk of contributing to a conflict spiral. This means that threat-based deterrents are capable of producing the very problem they are designed to avoid. There are three reasons for this. One is that Party's threats tend to challenge Other's image of independence and strength, producing resentment. This problem is particularly acute when

there is a moderate (as opposed to a large) difference in power between Party and Other, because the more powerful party often feels free to employ threats while the less powerful one refuses to acknowledge its inferiority and becomes resistant or belligerent (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). The problem is less acute when the threats are consistent with social norms and therefore at least moderately legitimate, as in the case of most threats of retaliation. Yet threats of this kind may still produce some resentment.

A second reason for escalation is that deterrent threats are often misinterpreted by Other (Jervis, 1976). An army mobilized to resist invasion may be misconstrued as an instrument of potential aggression. Missiles designed only for a second strike may be seen as a first-strike capability. A boys' gang organized to protect its members may seem to threaten another gang's "turf." Such perceptions produce defensive counter-reactions that tend to start (or continue) a conflict spiral.

The third reason for escalation is that even if it is clear that Party's preparations have defensive motives, Other may still be cautious lest Party *later* adopt aggressive motives. Hence, Other may feel the need to attack in order to diminish Party's capacity to do harm at a later time.

What can be done to avoid such interpretations and misinterpretations of defensive preparations? Party can carefully explain its behavior, trying to tie it, action by action, to Other's behavior so that Party is seen as essentially reactive. Furthermore, preparations that are clearly defensive and cannot be converted to offensive use should be favored, for example, building a wall or wearing a bulletproof vest. It may also be possible for Party to couple a carrot with the stick, offering a reward for cooperation as well as a punishment for aggression. This works because the carrot provides Other a nonaggressive avenue for goal achievement and makes it harder for Other to believe that Party is preparing for aggression. Efforts to diminish tensions in other realms are also advisable, so as to reduce the likelihood that Other will view Party's military efforts through the prism of anger and indignation (White, 1984).

Such procedures are sometimes effective, but threats are so often problematic that it seems preferable to avoid them altogether and to substitute other forms of conflict management, such as positive bonds, the building of social norms, and efforts to find solutions to the issues in dispute.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Events as dramatic as the Cold War, the UB crisis, and the travail of the rink rage fight are unusual. But moderate escalation is not uncommon; almost any conflict can become intensified. The likelihood that a conflict will escalate is partly a function of conflict size—the extent of perceived divergence of interest and the rigidity of the parties' aspirations. It is also a function of what we call "instability." Situations are highly unstable if even a

small conflict can launch a massive escalation; they are highly stable if only a very large conflict can have this impact.

Instability (and hence escalation) results if one or both of the parties is prone to overreact to annoyance, or has weak inhibitions against aggressive responding. At the individual level, conditions that encourage overreaction include autonomic arousal, being angry because of a prior incident (especially if has not been possible to identify or punish the source of this incident), belonging to a culture of honor, and having supporters or audiences that favor harsh reacting. People with irritable personalities also tend to overreact. Conditions that erode inhibitions against aggressive responding include exposure to aggressive models and impulsivity. Drinking alcohol and time pressure have both of these effects—encouraging overreaction and reducing inhibitions.

Stability is encouraged if both parties have strong inhibitions against aggressive responding or the situation encourages conflict management. Inhibitions against aggressive responding result from an understanding of the conflict spiral, empathy toward Other, having bonds (of friendship, kinship, common group membership, etc.) with Other, dependence on Other (if Other is generally accommodating), the existence of conflict limiting norms, being in the presence of peace-loving third parties, pressure from allies who are negatively affected by the conflict, and being a person who needs social approval. Conflict management is encouraged by bonds with Other that allow meaningful conversation, an understanding of the structural change model, and the easy availability of conflict limiting institutions such as police, courts, mediators, and the like.

Several of the conditions just listed also produce stability in intergroup relations. These include bonds and dependencies, pressure from allies, and the availability of conflict limiting norms and institutions. In addition, the likelihood of intergroup escalation is reduced by loyalty to the broader community and the existence of crosscutting bonds—friendships and organizational memberships that cut across two groups in conflict. As an example of the latter, escalated conflict between Indian Hindus and Moslems is less likely in a community that contains ethnically integrated trade unions, professional associations, political parties, and the like. This is because people in these crosscutting associations are inhibited from escalation and because they engage in conflict management so as to preserve their associations.

Prior escalation is a major source of instability, because the structural changes that are produced by escalation tend to erode many of the safeguards against future escalation, at both the individual and group levels.

In the absence of constraints and conditions that encourage conflict management, conflicting parties tend to fall back on threats and threat enforcement in an effort to protect themselves. Stability is achieved in such anarchic situations if the circumstances make it unwise or impossible for any party to mount or sustain an attack on any other. In international

relations, a balance of military capability or mutual assured destruction may have this impact. However, major problems can easily arise for parties and communities that rely on threat alone.

In Chapter 8, we continue our discussion of escalation by taking up a number of confirmatory mechanisms that cause structural changes to endure once established. These mechanisms underlie the tendency for escalation to persist and recur once established, and they help understand the deterioration of human relationships.

8

The Persistence of Escalation

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The Tail of Cerberus • Overview of Theory • The Persistence of Psychological Changes • *The Self-fulfilling Prophecy* • *Rationalization of Behavior* • *Selective Information Processing* • *Autistic Hostility* • *The Persistence of Hostile Goals* • The Persistence of Changes in Groups • The Persistence of Community Polarization • Overcommitment and Entrapment • *An Aside on the Dollar Auction* • *Characteristics of Entrapment* • *Combating Entrapment* • Summary and Conclusions

Escalation occurs when Party's contentious tactics become heavier, putting more pressure on Other and often inflicting greater suffering. Escalation is accompanied by a series of incremental transformations, discussed in Chapter 5, where we also described two conflict models that show how escalation develops: the contender-defender model and the conflict spiral model. In Chapter 6, we introduced a third conflict model: the structural change model. This model assumes a cycle of escalation: Party's heavy tactics produce structural changes that encourage reciprocal tactics from Other, provoking changes that encourage Party to employ further heavy tactics. We described the nature of these changes, as these occur in individuals, groups, and communities. Chapter 7 continued the story with a discussion of conditions under which conflict is likely to go into heavy escalation and conditions under which this outcome is unlikely.

Chapter 8 completes the discussion by examining why heavy escalation so often persists—as shown in the long right-hand tail of Figure 7.1B¹—and why it sometimes recurs when new conflicts arise between the same parties.

THE TAIL OF CERBERUS

According to Greek mythology, there stands near the entrance to Hades a three-headed dog named Cerberus. Cerberus has a scaly, spiked, powerful tail that allows the souls of the dead to pass into Hades with ease. Once a soul has passed the tail of Cerberus, however, the tail's spines and scales make it impossible to return. Many animal traps have similar properties, allowing the quarry to pass unimpeded into the trap, perhaps in search of bait, only to find that it is not possible to retreat. The treadles in parking garages, which allow cars to pass smoothly in but damage the tires of any car that tries to drive out, operate on the same principle.

So it is with heavy escalation. Once established, it is exceedingly difficult to eliminate. In this sense, escalation is like a rubber band. Up to a point, a rubber band may be stretched and, when released, still return to its original form and shape. Beyond that point, however, further stretching either breaks the rubber band or produces a change in its elasticity that prevents it from resuming its original dimensions. Like a rubber band stretched beyond its physical limits of tolerance, the relationship between individuals in an intensifying conflict may pass a psychological or collective threshold—a point of no return—that transforms the relationship into a new, conflict-intensified state.² Consider this simple example of the crossing of a threshold. Party and Other are having an argument one day, and the exchange begins to heat up rather precipitously. Party is assailing and yelling at Other, and vice versa. At some point during the angry exchange of words, Party announces that it has never really respected or valued Other. Eventually the argument subsides, as most arguments do, but the relationship is likely to have changed—and not for the better. The words Party has uttered, perhaps primarily to goad Other and not out of deep-seated conviction, may have changed Other's attitude toward Party in ways that do not easily permit recovery.

¹ The tail in Figure 7.1B stays elevated for most of its length but declines somewhat toward its end. The reason for showing it this way is that escalated conflicts eventually end, at some point, by one or another of the processes discussed in Chapter 9.

² A geometric model that makes predictions about the location of points of no return is found in Pruitt (1969).

OVERVIEW OF THEORY

Broadly speaking, the answer to why escalation persists lies in three kinds of process. One is the cycle of escalation already discussed (see Figure 6.1). This constitutes a vicious circle, which comes back around to reinforce itself (Allred, 1999). In the early stages of escalation, if the parties hit harder than they are hit, this cycle will heat things up. But at some point contentious behavior reaches an asymptote, and it can stay there—at least for a while—because of the cycle of escalation.

While it improves our understanding, the cycle of escalation is by no means a full explanation for the persistence of escalation. People usually tire of conflict after a while, gain insight into vicious circles, and find ways of escaping them if that is all there is.

Unfortunately, there are many other mechanisms—and more potent ones at that—which keep escalation going. This is the second kind of process. These mechanisms cause structural changes, once formed, to endure. They make it hard for disputants to climb down the escalation ladder once they have climbed up. They are the main mechanisms that produce what Azar (1990) calls "protracted conflicts" and Goertz and Diehl (1995) call "enduring rivalries." And they are what will mainly concern us in this chapter. We will present these mechanisms under three headings: the persistence of psychological changes, the persistence of changes in groups, and the persistence of community polarization. The chapter ends with a discussion of a third kind of process, entrapment in an escalating course of action.

THE PERSISTENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES

Some psychological changes—the development of emotions like anger and fear—are of a temporary nature and hence do not explain the persistence of escalation. But attitudes, perceptions, and goals are notoriously long-lived, for reasons that will now be explained. Most of our attention in this section will be focused on attitudes and perceptions. There will be a short discussion of the persistence of goals at the end of this section.

Hostile attitudes and perceptions tend to endure once established because they support each other. Negative beliefs validate negative feelings, and negative feelings make negative beliefs seem right (Pruitt & Olczak, 1995). In addition, there are six kinds of confirmatory mechanisms involving *self-reinforcement*. When these mechanisms are at work, negative views of Other have consequences that ultimately reinforce the views that gave rise to them. These mechanisms involve the self-fulfilling prophecy, rationalization of behavior, three kinds of selective information processing, and

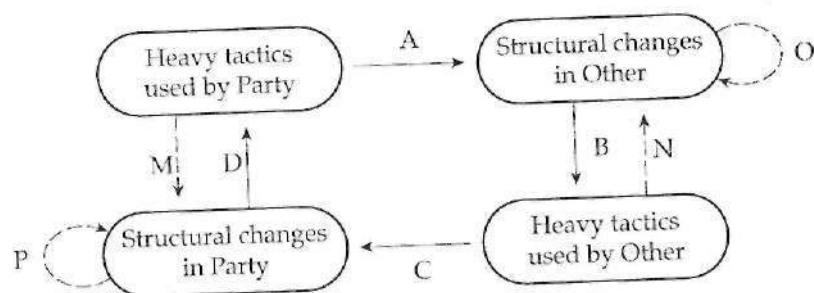


FIGURE 8.1

Augmented structural change model. The figure shows a cycle of escalation with some additional confirmatory pathways.

autistic hostility. Their impact is shown diagrammatically in Figure 8.1, which traces a cycle of escalation like that shown in Figure 6.1, with the addition of some confirmatory pathways. The elements of this figure will be explained as we go along.

The Self-fulfilling Prophecy

One mechanism of self-reinforcement involves the *self-fulfilling prophecy*, a phenomenon in which Party's beliefs and attitudes about Other make Party behave in ways that elicit behavior from Other that reinforces these beliefs. Consider the case of Ben and the family car, first mentioned in Chapter 1. Dad clearly perceives Ben as careless and inconsiderate, and presumably lets him know this from time to time. Dad's criticism, in turn, contributes to Ben behaving in ways that confirm Dad's perceptions, as when Ben spitefully fails to gas up the car.

The self-fulfilling prophecy is implicit in the cycle of escalation shown by the solid arrows in Figure 8.1. Starting at the lower left, if structural changes in Party involve the development of negative perceptions of Other, these encourage Party to behave in ways that are resented by Other (pathway D), evoking negative perceptions in Other (pathway A), which produce behavior (pathway B) that confirms Party's original views (pathway C). A similar circular process can confirm Other's negative views of Party.

Since the self-fulfilling prophecy is implicit in the cycle of escalation, it is not really different from the explanation of persistence that was given at the beginning of this chapter, concerning the vicious circle that comes back around to reinforce itself. However, it puts a different slant on this explanation and hence deserves separate attention.

The self-fulfilling prophecy is more than a hypothesis. It has been demonstrated experimentally, in both laboratory and natural settings (see

Jussim & Eccles, 1995; Olson et al., 1996). For example, in a classical study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), the researchers told elementary school teachers that some students in their classes were expected to be "late bloomers" intellectually during the school year. In reality, the researchers randomly drew the names of these students from the class lists. Thus, there was little difference in intellectual abilities between these students and their classmates—except the fact that their teachers now held positive expectations for the former. At the end of the school year, these "late bloomers" indeed achieved more intellectual gains than their counterparts did. Although the teachers appeared unaware of it, they had treated the students they believed were more capable in ways that fulfilled this expectation.

Rationalization of Behavior

A second mechanism that encourages the persistence of hostile attitudes and perceptions involves rationalization. Party's negative views lead to hostile actions against Other, which Party then rationalizes by reaffirming the views that gave rise to the actions. This causal sequence, shown by the dashed lines M and N in Figure 8.1, is more common than it sounds. Consider the case of Ben again. Suppose that Ben's negative attitude toward Dad causes him to fail to get gasoline. The reasons for his behavior are likely to be at a fairly unconscious level, so that he must ask himself, "Why am I not getting gas?" He will then have to construct a rationalization. For example, he may come to believe that Dad is hostile to his interests. This will further reinforce Ben's negative attitude. A real-life example of behavior that plausibly reinforces beliefs and attitudes is the Protestant marches that take place in Northern Ireland every summer during the "marching season." These commemorate earlier triumphs over the Catholics (Sandole, 2002). Those who march presumably strengthen their negative views of Catholics or their desire to dominate the Catholic community, thereby contributing to the continued conflict in that province.

What psychological processes operate in the rationalization effect? One involves self-perception. Self-perception theory (Bern, 1972) suggests that people infer their attitudes from their actions. Thus they end up developing hostile attitudes toward those they hurt (Glass, 1964).

Another process involves dissonance reduction. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) posits that inconsistencies between people's behavior and attitudes create an unpleasant arousal state known as dissonance. And this uncomfortable state motivates people to find ways to reduce it—for example, by making their attitudes consistent with their behavior.

Dissonance is especially strong when one's behavior compromises one's view of oneself (Cooper, 2001; Steele, 1988). Party is likely to see itself as a decent and reasonable person or group that would not harm

innocent people. This view of the self is inconsistent with its hostile actions against Other, causing acute dissonance. Hence, Party is highly motivated to reduce the dissonance by adopting the rationalization that it is compelled to act in hostile ways because of Other's unsavory qualities. Dissonance is thus reduced by maintaining or even strengthening the hostile views of Other that gave rise to Party's original behavior.

Selective Information Processing

Once Party has formed a negative impression of Other—once the image of Other as an undesirable, unsavory, untrustworthy, unpleasant character has been shaped—selective information processing leads Party to pay attention to, search for, interpret, retain, and recall information in ways that confirm the initial negative impression (Hopmann, 1996). Instead of gathering and evaluating data in scientific fashion, Party tends to locate information that supports these preconceptions. As a result, these preconceptions are reinforced or become even stronger. An adversary who was first seen as rigid may now be regarded as stubborn, and eventually as hopelessly intransigent.

Note that the structural changes supported by selective information processing are self-reinforcing in a way that is quite independent of anything Other may say or do. Selective information processing feeds on itself entirely, as represented by the circular loops O and P in Figure 8.1.

Although the term *selective information processing* has a negative ring (implying that Party develops a biased view of reality), the process is actually a hallmark of effective psychological functioning. The world is an immensely complex place, flooding everyone with far more social and nonsocial information than we can possibly hope to process. In response to this tendency toward "information overload," it is necessary to find ways to process information selectively, thereby reducing this input to manageable proportions.

Offsetting this virtue is the liability that stems from fitting impressions into a Procrustean bed—stripping away Other's rich individuality in the service of developing a manageable stereotype. Moreover, in the midst of escalating conflict, selective information processing is particularly dangerous. It can confirm and further strengthen Party's unfavorable views of Other. These negative views, with the aid of selective information processing, color Other's actions in the worst possible light. If Other moves its troops, Party assume that it is about to be attacked. If Other makes conciliatory overtures, Party fails to notice them or regards them as devious ploys (Hopmann, 1996). Selective information processing in escalating conflict sustains the existing level of escalation or may cause it to edge upward.

A paper by Cooper and Fazio (1979) helps understand the way in which selective information processing operates to maintain escalation.

These authors discuss three interrelated forms that selective information processing can take: self-serving evaluation of behavior, the "discovery" of evidence that supports Party's expectations, and attributional distortion. Let us consider each in turn.

Self-serving Evaluation of Behavior When there are strong views, an identical event can be judged quite differently depending on whether the source of the event is seen as a "good guy" or a "bad guy" (White, 1984). In an interesting study of student reactions to a Princeton-Dartmouth football game won by Princeton, Hastorf and Cantril (1954) found that the events of the game were judged very differently as a function of the viewer's allegiance. Princeton and Dartmouth students saw a film of the game and were asked to note all infractions. The Princeton students thought that the Dartmouth Indians had committed twice as many infractions as the Princeton Tigers, whereas the Dartmouth students saw no difference in the number of violations. In conflict it appears, reality is too often in the eye of the beholder.

Similarly powerful results have been obtained in other social psychology experiments. For example, during the Cold War, Oskamp (1965) presented American college students with two parallel lists of conciliatory and belligerent acts that had been undertaken by both the United States and the Soviet Union. The same acts (for example, "The government has provided military training and assistance to smaller nations") that were rated favorably when performed by the United States (the good guys) were rated extremely unfavorably when attributed to the Soviet Union (the bad guys). The tendency to evaluate behavior in self-serving ways is particularly pronounced when people evaluate their own conflict behavior. People consider their own conflict behaviors as more constructive and benign than those of the other side (De Dreu et al., 1995). This self-serving evaluation contributes to escalation by creating frustration and impairing problem-solving ability.

Evidence of selective evaluation is not confined to the experimental laboratory. Most Palestinians view suicide bombings as selfless acts of heroism, while most Israelis view them as outrageous and immoral.

The "Discovery" of Confirming Evidence It is one thing for Party to attend selectively to those aspects of Other's manner or behavior that conform to Party's own preconceptions. It is quite another matter to "stack the deck" by gathering information in a way that encourages Other to behave in accordance with these preconceptions.

Mark Snyder and his colleagues have conducted several experiments that, although not directly related to the dynamics of escalation, nevertheless shed light on the "discovery" of confirmatory evidence. In one of these studies, Snyder and Swann (1978) provided participants with hypotheses about other people and then allowed them to seek information about these people. Some participants were given the personality

profile of an introvert while others were given a description of what an extrovert is like. All participants were then asked to choose twelve questions to be posed to the targets in an effort to test whether they had that personality profile.

Snyder and Swann found that people who were testing an "introvert" hypothesis (even though this hypothesis did not specifically apply to the target, about whom nothing was yet known) chose to pose interview questions that seemed to assume that the target was *already known* to be an introvert: "In what situations do you wish you could be more outgoing?" "What things do you dislike about loud parties?" Those who were testing an "extrovert" hypothesis instead listed questions that presumed the target to be an extrovert: "What would you do if you wanted to liven up a party?" "In what situations are you most talkative?" When, in a subsequent session, the participants were actually permitted to pose the respective questions they had formulated, the response of their targets was such that the interviewers concluded that the targets matched the profile they had been given at the outset. It is clear from this that people selectively arrange for evidence to be available that confirms their hypotheses.

If this phenomenon is powerful in the world of everyday interaction, as Snyder and his colleagues have shown, we can expect it to be all the more powerful in heavy conflict where emotions run high, distrust and suspicion mount, and the desire to harm the other grows strong. In such situations, people tend to process information superficially or heuristically (Thompson & Nadler, 2000). As a result, they are unlikely, or unmotivated, to notice disconfirming evidence, which requires careful, systematic processing. Rather, they increase their reliance on evidence consistent with their hypotheses.

What happens if people are forced to attend to disconfirming evidence? Usually, they are quite capable of explaining it away. A young American school teacher (Wood, 1934) describes this process:

In my first contact with Greek students, a few happy cases of cheating in examinations occurred, and without my realizing what was happening, my attitude toward the Greeks as a people became biased by this. . . . A conflict existed, however, between the new attitude that I was forming toward the Greeks and my deep admiration for the ancient Greek culture. It was difficult to reconcile the two, but I found a way out. I looked up all the evidence that I could find to substantiate the claim that the modern Greeks are not the lineal descendants of the Greeks of the Classical Period and hence have no rightful pride in that glorious tradition. (p. 268)

Fortunately for humanity, there are ways of escaping the tendency to gather evidence that confirms one's views. This tendency diminishes when people are strongly motivated to develop accurate impressions (Neuberg, 1989) and when they are forewarned about the pitfalls of this phenomenon (Swann, 1987).

Attributional Distortion One of the basic tasks in social interaction is to make *attributions*—causal inferences—about why other people behave as they do. These attributions have a profound impact on subsequent emotional reactions to, and behavior toward, these people (Allred, 2000).

Errors often arise in attribution formation. One of these is *attributional* distortion, a phenomenon that has been demonstrated in a number of experimental studies (Hayden & Mischel, 1976; Regan et al., 1974) and in studies of troubled married couples (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985). Information about Other that supports Party's private hypotheses about Other tends to be attributed to *dispositional* causes, whereas information that is discrepant with Party's hypotheses tends to be attributed to *situational* causes. That is, information in keeping with Party's expectations is seen as reflecting Other's enduring and stable characteristics, whereas information that violates Party's expectations is attributed to temporary environmental pressures on Other.

The net effect of attributional distortion in escalating conflict is that there is virtually nothing that Other can do to dispel Party's negative expectations. If Other behaves in a nasty way, this is taken as a true indicator of Other's hostile intentions, or belligerent disposition. If Other turns the other cheek and displays friendly behavior, this is explained as a temporary fluke. An example is the thinking of John Foster Dulles, who was the American Secretary of State at the beginning of the Cold War and regarded the Soviet Union as an implacable enemy. When the Soviets behaved contentiously, Dulles saw this as evidence of their depravity; whereas when they adopted a conciliatory strategy, he concluded that they were weakening (Holsti, 1967). Either way, his attributions supported American escalation of the conflict.

Given these three forms of selective information processing—self-serving evaluation of behavior, the "discovery" of confirming evidence, and attributional distortion—it is small wonder that conflicts can more easily escalate than move back down the ladder. Once that genie emerges from the bottle, these three processes combine to make it exceedingly difficult to lure it back. As represented by the loops (O and P) of Figure 8.1, these are self-reinforcing processes. They feed on themselves in ways that lead escalation to persist.³

³ The same cognitive processes that operate in the service of conflict escalation sometimes also serve more positive ends. Two people who are wildly in love, for example, may be expected to see one another "through rose-colored glasses"—to continually find support for the hypothesis that the other is the most wonderful person in the world; to bias the explanations for their beloved's behavior in ways that discount negative information ("He was very grumpy this morning—must be the damp weather"); and to overstate the stability of positive information ("She just cracked another joke. What a wit she is!"). In other words, these processes are capable of reinforcing positive as well as negative impressions. Murray & Holmes (1997) have found support for this hypothesis in studies of romantic relationships.

Autistic Hostility

As we mentioned in Chapter 6, there is a tendency to stop interacting and communicating with people we do not like or respect. An extreme example is the perhaps apocryphal case of two brothers who ran a store. One accused the other of stealing \$1 from the cash register; the other denied it, whereupon the first brother stopped talking to the other. Thirty silent years later a stranger walked in, confessed to the theft (which had been preying on his conscience), and made restitution. Communication between the brothers was restored.

The problem with an interruption of communication is that it makes it impossible to resolve the issue that fostered the initial breach. The parties are consigned to maintain their prior views of each other, including the ones that brought communication to a screeching halt. In effect, these views have initiated a process that perpetuates itself. This is called the phenomenon of autistic hostility (Newcomb, 1947). It is another self-reinforcing process, again represented by the two semicircular loops, O and P, in Figure 8.1.

A communication vacuum often provides a greenhouse in which rumors flourish. Facts are embellished or distorted, and personal attacks can be the rule, moving conflict along an escalatory path. Consider the confrontation between African Americans and Hasidic Jews in the Crown Heights section of New York City during the summer months of 1991. It was ignited by an incident in which a Hasidic Jewish driver hit two African American children, killing one and critically injuring the other. Following the accident, unsubstantiated rumors circulated widely in the community. One was that a Hatzolah ("rescue" in Hebrew) ambulance arrived before a city ambulance and drove the Hasidic driver away, abandoning the two critically wounded children at the scene. This rumor, found to be untrue according to police records and eyewitness testimony, triggered the violent murder of a Jewish man by a group of young African Americans.

The development of rumors in the absence of communication between groups is also illustrated by a study mentioned in Chapter 7. Varshney (2002) found that rumors triggered violence between Hindus and Muslims in Indian cities that did not have organizations (trade unions, political parties) linking these two communities.

The Persistence of Hostile Goals

Mitchell (2000) has hypothesized that people who suffer for their goals tend to perpetuate them. This phenomenon can be derived from cognitive dissonance theory and has been demonstrated in several psychological experiments (Smith & Mackie, 2000). It can be used to explain the

persistence of many kinds of goals including the hostile ones that often underlie escalation.

One kind of hostile goal, the *desire for vengeance*, is notoriously persistent. Indeed, it often becomes "one's life instead of being a part of one's life" (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 105). What can account for that? One explanation rests on the assumption that unfulfilled vengeance often leads to *hatred*, which is a combination of anger and a belief that Other possesses evil traits—is inherently bad (Elster, 1999). Anger is ordinarily a transient emotion, but in combination with such a belief, it tends to persist as hatred.⁴

Another explanation for the persistence of vengeful desires is that people often engage in *dysphoric rumination* or brooding (Berkowitz, 1993). They rehearse, over and over in their mind, the details of an insult or deprivation suffered by themselves or their group. Rumination usually strengthens people's sense that they have been treated unjustly and that punishment should therefore result (Bushman, 2002). Rumination is usually involuntary, an uncontrolled intrusive stream of thoughts; but some people actively court it as a way of maintaining and bolstering their resolve for taking revenge when the opportunity arises (McCullough et al., 2001).

THE PERSISTENCE OF CHANGES IN GROUPS

Most of the processes that cause changes to persist at the individual level have the same impact at the group level. An example is the self-fulfilling prophecy, which is modeled by the cycle of escalation represented by the progression of solid arrows in Figure 8.1. Negative views of another group are likely to produce group behavior that encourages actions by the other group that make these views seem justified. For example, the newsman Dilip Hero (2002) has hypothesized that U.S. President George W. Bush's labeling of Iran as part of an "axis of evil" pushed that country into improving its relations with Iraq, another country also so labeled.

Dysphoric rumination, which was mentioned just above, can also occur at the group level. Through various means including songs, stories, novels and poems, and movies, group members engage in collective rumination on the wrongs and injustices suffered by their group at the hands of outgroup members. For example, Serbian schoolchildren were required to memorize a poem, "The Pit," that described atrocities committed by

⁴ See Ben-Ze'ev (2000) and Elster (1999) for more detailed discussions of hatred, particularly in its comparison to anger. See Naimark (2001) and Kaufman (2001) for the role of hatred in ethnic cleansing and Horowitz (2001) for the role of hatred in ethnic riots.

Croatian Ustasha (Neuffer, 2001): "I'm lying on the corpse: pile of cold meat/. . ./Flashes in my consciousness, when a woman screams./ I turned around in a fever, towards the scream/ I reached out: felt a slippery wound" (p. 19). Of course, collective rumination is heavily focused on one's own group's suffering, not on the other group's suffering inflicted by one's own group. As a result, it contributes to the persistence of escalation.⁵

In Chapter 6 we described six kinds of group changes that result from and contribute to the escalation of conflict: group polarization, runaway norms, contentious group goals, cohesiveness, militant leadership, and militant subgroups. There are confirmatory mechanisms that encourage several of these changes to persist. As was true of the psychological changes, these mechanisms involve self-reinforcement or self-perpetuation. In other words, group changes often encourage new developments that confirm or strengthen these changes.

Norms of all types tend to be self-perpetuating, including those that encourage competitive goals and aggressive behavior toward the outgroup. They often outlive the reasonable purpose for which they were first developed. This usually occurs because of *social pressure*, real and imagined. People who challenge a norm tend to be punished by the group. Others who doubt the validity of a norm remain silent for fear of being labeled deviates or, in the case of intergroup conflict, traitors. Still other group members then follow the norm because they do not realize that it is controversial. Processes like this may have perpetuated the culture of honor in America's South well beyond the time at which it was a rational response to the prospect of losing one's herd (see Chapter 7).

Contentious group goals also tend to be lasting. This is partly because they are supported by group norms and partly because the leaders who have articulated them typically hate to admit their mistakes (Mitchell, 1999, 2000).

Militant subgroups tend to become self-perpetuating because of *vested interests*. Group membership and participation in organized activities give some people status, others occupation and wealth, and still others a sense that life is meaningful. Such benefits are hard to surrender; hence, group members work hard to ensure that their group survives. If the *raison d'être* for a group is the conduct of contentious conflict, there are vested interests in the persistence of such conflict. This is another mechanism by which escalation tends to be self-perpetuating. The UB Strike Committee described in Chapter 6 is a case in point. This committee gave status and meaning to the lives of hundreds of students who would otherwise have been consigned to the routine of going to class and

preparing for tests. These students had a vested interest in the perpetuation of the Strike Committee and thus a vested interest in the continuation of the crisis. Once formed, the Strike Committee could not easily be disbanded, and it continued to challenge the university administration.

Similar events have occurred many times in history (Schumpeter, 1955, first published in 1919), and the danger is not necessarily far from home. In his farewell address to the United States, President Eisenhower warned about the development of a built-in lobby for international conflict centered in what he called the "military-industrial complex."

Vested interests extend as well to *leaders*, who are almost always motivated to maintain their leadership positions. If they have gained these positions because of their militancy or skill at waging conflict, they have a vested interest in the perpetuation of conflict. Hence, they have incentives for resisting conflict resolution and for starting new conflicts. This is another mechanism by which escalation tends to be self-perpetuating.

Vested interests may have been at work in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. According to Russett (1967), the Japanese leaders knew this attack was very risky. Indeed, in advocating the attack, one of them commented, "Sometimes it is necessary to close one's eyes and jump from the temple wall." But the alternative to the attack was apparently worse in their eyes. These leaders were military men who had gained high government positions in the late 1930s as a result of the great importance to the Japanese of the war they were waging in China and Indochina. In 1941 the United States began to block the shipment of oil from what is now Indonesia, which made it difficult to continue the war effort. Had the war effort stopped, these generals and admirals would almost surely have been demoted. Hence, they were willing to risk the future of their country in order to perpetuate the war effort and maintain their positions.

THE PERSISTENCE OF COMMUNITY POLARIZATION

We have already seen that escalating conflicts tend to polarize the communities around them. Formerly neutral parties gravitate or are pulled toward one side or the other. Fewer and fewer community members are left sitting on the fence or standing on the sidelines. Severely polarized communities become fractured into two large camps, with positive relations among the people in each camp and negative relations between the camps.

There are several mechanisms that cause community polarization, once established, to be perpetuated. Polarization means the destruction of crosscutting organizations (trade unions, professional associations, etc.) that are so important in putting a damper on escalation. It also means the disappearance of neutral third parties who would otherwise urge moderation and mediate the controversy. In addition, people lose loyalty to the

⁵ Coleman (2000) points out that collective rumination can be a method of *intergenerational* perpetuation of conflict.

community as a whole, and hence, feel less responsible to be tolerant toward other community members (Coleman, 1957). As a result of these developments, the controversy tends to persist, maintaining the pressure on third parties to take sides.

In addition, community members who have joined one camp often have difficulty reestablishing their credentials with the other camp. They have become outsiders, forever distrusted because they have fraternized with the enemy. This means that polarization tends to persist even when the conflicts that gave rise to it have been resolved. Like Humpty Dumpty after his fall, it is hard to put polarized communities back together again.

OVERCOMMITMENT AND ENTRAPMENT

There is one other explanation for the persistence of escalation. This is that *commitments to contentions behavior* tend to be self-reinforcing. One reason for this is the pervasive tendency for Party to rationalize its own behavior, which was mentioned earlier. Another reason is a process of overcommitment that has been studied in research on *entrapment*, a dysfunctional but pervasive human phenomenon.

An Aside on the Dollar Auction

In order to understand better the dynamics of overcommitment to an escalating course of action, consider a simple parlor game, first proposed by Shubik (1971) and extensively researched by Teger (1980). This game, known as the dollar auction, is played as follows: Several people are invited to participate in the auction of a dollar bill by calling out bids until a high bid has been reached. The high bidder is then awarded the dollar bill, in exchange for paying the amount that he or she bid. Thus, if the winning (high) bid were 15 cents, the winner would be awarded 85 cents (1 dollar minus 15 cents). The catch in this game is that the *second-highest bidder* is also required to pay the auctioneer the amount of his or her bid but does not receive a dollar bill in return. So, if the bidding for the dollar stopped with a high bid of 35 cents and a next-highest bid of 25 cents, the winner would receive a total of 65 cents and the next-highest bidder would have to pay the auctioneer 25 cents.

People typically start this game by calling out a small amount of money. And why not? If the dollar bill can be won with a bid of 10, 20, or 30 cents, why not give it a try? Perhaps no one else will elect to play the game. Unfortunately, other people typically reason in much the same way, and the result is that several people begin to bid. Eventually the bidding approaches \$1 (the objective value of the prize), and at this point two important things happen: the number of players typically decreases until

only the two highest bidders remain in contention, and the motivation of each remaining bidder shifts from an initial concern about maximizing gain (doing as well for oneself as possible) to a concern with minimizing losses instead. As the bidding passes \$1, the issue is no longer how much Party can win but how much it can keep from losing. Often the bidding goes much higher than \$1.

Why does Party not quit at this point? Largely, it appears, because it is aware of how much time and money it has already spent and is reluctant to give up on this "investment." Moreover, Party continues to hold out hope that Other will stop bidding, lick its wounds, and depart from the scene—leaving victory to Party. "If I persist just a bit longer," Party reasons, "I can still snatch victory from the jaws of defeat." The problem is that if both Party and Other reason this way, neither is apt to quit and the conflict will continue to escalate.

As the conflict grows with each bidding increment, yet another transformation—one described in Chapter 5—takes place. Party's concern with maximizing winnings, which was first replaced by a concern with minimizing losses, is now supplanted by a determination to make certain that Other loses at least as much as Party. "I may go down in flames," Party reasons, "but in doing so I will take Other down with me." It is in this last stage of the dollar auction that concerns about looking foolish come to the fore. In other words, Party becomes increasingly preoccupied with threats to its image.

This illustration of Shubik's dollar auction game suggests that people in escalating conflicts may *overcommit* themselves in ways that appear quite irrational to most external observers. Shubik has reported, for example, that a dollar bill is often auctioned off for as much as \$5 or \$6.⁶ Surely this is an illustration of commitment in the service of irrationality. How can this be explained? Why does Party sometimes commit itself and its resources above and beyond all reason? To develop a partial answer to this query, we must explore the topic of entrapment.

Characteristics of Entrapment

Entrapment is a process in which Party, pursuing a goal over a period of time, expends more of its time, energy, money, or other resources than seems justifiable by external standards. People can become entrapped in their interactions with the environment, for example, sinking ever more money into a failing old car. However, the situations of greatest interest in this book are *social* in nature, entailing a competitive relationship between

⁶ In a variation on this game, in which a \$100 bill was auctioned off before a large group of business people, one of our colleagues managed to sell the prize for \$3,000!

two or more individuals or groups. The dollar auction game is a quintessential illustration of an entrapping interpersonal conflict. At an intergroup level, consider the example of two sides persisting in a strike, partly because each has suffered so much already that to give up would be to have suffered in vain. The longer each side has clung to an intransigent position, the more compelled it will probably feel to justify this position through continued intransigence.

Finally, at the level of international decision making, one can analyze the role and extended involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War as an illustration of entrapment. In his book *The Best and the Brightest*, Halberstam (1969) explains U.S. involvement in very much these terms. The "doves" argued time and again that the United States had embarked on a fool's journey (and an unethical one) and that we should withdraw our forces from Southeast Asia immediately before another American (or Vietnamese) life was lost. But this is exactly why we should remain in Vietnam, retorted the "hawks," exactly why we *should* persist. To withdraw now, they argued, would be to have sacrificed countless lives in vain, on an escapade that would be regarded as meaningless. And anyway, victory in Vietnam and the security of an anticommunist regime in Southeast Asia seemed just a battle or two away. A similar analysis is possible of the aftermath of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Combating Entrapment

In one form or another, both in the psychologist's laboratory and in the field, entrapment has been the object of investigation by a number of researchers (see Brockner & Rubin, 1985). These studies suggest a few strategies that can combat entrapment:

- *Setting limits.* When Party specifies a limit to its involvement before beginning a quest for a goal, Party is less likely to become entrapped. Moreover, when Party publicly commits itself to such a limit, by announcing it to others, it is least likely to become entrapped.
- *Chunking.* A particular problem arises when the resource expended in an entrapping situation is time—for example, when Party is placed "on hold" by an automatic switchboard or somebody in the wrong office for its inquiry. The problem is that there are no natural points of decision about whether to continue that line of investment. Party is passively involved in the expenditure and is at the mercy of decisions made elsewhere. Party is particularly vulnerable to entrapment in such situations.

Entrapment can be avoided in such situations by encouraging Party to engage in periodic reappraisal of its commitment, a

process called *chunking*. Findings by Brockner et al. (1979) suggest that even the minimal provision of opportunities for chunking can help. Participants in an entrapping task were stopped every three minutes by the experimenter, who inquired whether they wished to continue or quit. Merely considering this question led them to quit the task after waiting less than half as long as those who were not interrupted.

- *Making costs salient.* The stopping points introduced by Brockner et al. (1979) not only allowed Party to chunk its involvement but also reminded Party of the costs associated with continued participation. In the presence of such reminders, entrapment is likely to decrease. This point was demonstrated in a study by Brockner et al. (1981) in which participants were given a "payoff chart" that depicted their investment costs at each of a number of possible stopping points. Those who did not have access to this chart—for whom costs were not salient—became significantly more entrapped than their counterparts. Other findings indicate that this effect is particularly striking when cost-salience information is introduced *early* in an entrapping task, before the pressures toward overcommitment come into play (Brockner et al., 1982).
- *Avoiding concern about Party's image.* In the last stages of the dollar auction, Party seems to persist largely in order to make sure that Other is forced to lose at least as much as Party does. It is in this last phase that Party becomes excessively concerned with the image of toughness that it projects to Other and to any observing audience. As conflict continues to intensify between individuals or groups, Party experiences a sense of threat that any conciliatory or friendly gesture will be taken to imply weakness and invite future exploitation.⁷ This fear of humiliation further pressures Party to persist in the entrapping situation. It follows that keeping in mind the dangers associated with this concern may help to avoid entrapment.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have explained why heavy escalation so often persists or recurs when new issues arise. There are three parts to this explanation. The first is that the cycle of escalation, like any vicious circle, tends to be self-perpetuating.

The second part of the explanation is that there are many mechanisms that cause structural changes to persist, once they are formed. Some are

⁷ Such image threats were discussed in Chapter 6. They are found in virtually all forms of escalating conflict.

psychological processes that reinforce hostile attitudes and perceptions. These include the self-fulfilling prophecy, rationalization of hostile behavior, autistic hostility, and three forms of selective information processing: self-serving evaluation of own and Other's behavior, selective gathering of information, and attributional distortion. Other mechanisms cause hostile goals to persist. The desire for revenge, for example, is kept alive by hatred and dysphoric rumination about past insults or deprivations.

All the mechanisms just mentioned encourage the persistence of escalation in intergroup as well as interpersonal conflict. In addition, hostile group norms tend to be perpetuated by social pressure. And militant subgroups and their leaders sometimes engineer the continuation of the conflict that has brought them to power, so that they can continue to dominate the wider group. They have "vested interests" in the continuation of that conflict.

Escalated conflicts also persist because communities once polarized are hard to reunite. Once crosscutting organizations are destroyed and potential mediators have taken sides, the political processes that guard against civil strife are gone, and the result is continued polarization.

The third part of the explanation concerns entrapment processes whereby individuals and groups become committed to self-destructive tactics. Commitments that were made with an initial modicum of restraint too often become traps that produce a needless waste of precious resources and even lives. Strategies to avoid entrapment include setting limits to continued involvement in a conflict, chunking time, making costs periodically salient, and avoiding concern about one's image of toughness.

In escalating conflict, it is clearly easier to squeeze the toothpaste out of the tube than to put it back in. Once started, heavy escalation tends to be self-reinforcing. Yet we know that conflicts do not continue to escalate forever. At some point (if the parties are still alive), the turmoil subsides and conflict begins to abate. Chapter 9 examines the transitional circumstances that make it possible for escalation to stop and for settlement of conflict to begin.

PART III

STALEMATE AND SETTLEMENT