Relational Identity Theory

A Systematic Approach for Transforming the

Emotional Dimension of Conflict

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Emotions are a vital dimension in conflicts among nation-states and communities affiliated by common ethnic, economic, or political interests. Yet the individuals most responsible for managing such conflicts—heads of state, CEOs, intellectual or religious leaders—are often blind to the psychological forces affecting their interests. During 20 years of international research, consulting, and teaching, I have developed a program for teaching thought leaders how to apply psychological principles to achieve their aims while also reducing negative outcomes such as violence, social upheaval, and economic displacement. In this article, I present relational identity theory (RIT), a theoretical and intellectual framework I have originated to help people understand and deal with key emotional dimensions of conflict management. I argue that national and communal bonds are essentially tribal in nature, and I describe how a tribe's unaddressed relational identity concerns make it susceptible to what I term the tribes effect, *a rigidification of its relational identity. I provide strategies based on RIT for mitigating the tribes effect and thus enhancing global security.*

Keywords: conflict resolution, negotiation, relational identity theory, emotion, tribes effect

The world exploded at Davos, Switzerland. There, at an annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, I facilitated an exercise I have developed called "Tribes."[1] Forty-five participants entered the workshop room—deputy heads of state, CEOs of Fortune 50 companies, venture capitalists, editors of major magazines, artists, academics, and directors of nongovernmental organizations. Each one was given a colored scarf and was ushered to one of six tables with a lamp and table cloth of the same color. I gave the participants 50 minutes to create "tribes" using a small number of challenging questions. I instructed each table, as a group, to define the key qualities of their tribe by answering questions such as "Does your tribe believe in capital punishment?" and "Does your tribe believe in abortion?" Each tribe was required to come to agreement on these qualities through consensus, not voting, and to subscribe only to beliefs with which they could live.

At the 50-minute mark, the room went dark, and in barged a wide-eyed, long-clawed alien, who said,

I am a creature from outer space. I have come to destroy Earth. I will give you one opportunity to save the world from utter destruction. You must choose one tribe as *the tribe* for everyone. You must all take on the attributes of that tribe. You cannot change or bargain over any attributes. If you cannot come to full agreement by the end of three rounds of negotiation . . . the world will be *destroyed*!

Then out floated the alien.

Round 1 was fairly amicable. The six tribes became familiar with each other's key characteristics. A few minutes in, the CEO of a Dubai-based magazine chain suggested defining the process. He asked, "*How* are we going to make our decision here?" But his question was drowned out by a magazine editor, who complained, "Why is no one listening to our tribe?" Round 2 became tenser. The lead negotiator for the Rainbow Tribe said, "We believe in all colors, all shapes, all ethnicities. So everyone: Join with us!" Two tribes joined the Rainbow Tribe. The other three refused. As a venture capitalist with crossed arms put it, "If

[1] Over the past 20 years I have developed and tailored the Tribes exercise, its setup, and its debriefing protocols to emphasize the role of emotions and identity in conflict management. In the early 1990s, the seeds of this exercise were planted through conflict resolution trainings I conducted for teachers, policymakers, and students in Eastern and Central Europe. "Tribes" was informed by a variety of experiential exercises I created for those trainings, including "The Bargots and Rooters," an exercise that helps students understand ethnocentrism, nationalism, and intertribal discrimination (Shapiro, 1995, 2004b). In the mid-1990s, a colleague shared with me a simulation on tribal conflict conducted, oddly enough, at a drug and alcohol workshop, and I also drew upon structural aspects of that exercise. In continuing to build on the Tribes exercise, I have benefited through feedback from Herbert Kelman, Roger Fisher, Steve Nisenbaum, Robert J. Lifton, Michael Miller, and innumerable participants from around the world who courageously put their hearts into it.

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Photo by Thomas J. Fitzsimmons

we are all equal, why don't you join *our* tribe?" The frustration in Round 3 was palpable. A representative from each tribe sat on a stool near the center of the room. By chance, these representatives included five men and one woman. The men talked over one another, and over the woman, who became so enraged that she stood on her stool, face flushed and finger pointing at the others, and yelled, "This is just another example of male competitive behavior! You all come to *my* group!" One tribe joined. The others refused.

Moments later the world exploded.

I have facilitated this exercise nearly 100 times with a great variety of participants: graduate students of law, business, psychology, and politics; government and business leaders; and key negotiators for conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East. The world has exploded all but a handful of times. This tribal dynamic appears so engrossing, and identities rigidify so rapidly, that participants quickly lose sight of their superordinate goal to save the world for the sake of exclusive tribal identities crafted in a mere 50 minutes.

My international work in applied psychology has led me to conclude that the Tribes exercise evokes emotional dynamics that are intrinsic to real-world conflict. Ironically, one of globalization's most prized tools—global communication—appears to facilitate not just social connections but also social divisions. As our world faces global crises around such issues as security, climate change, and world trade that will yield only to cooperation, identity-based retrenchment and protectionist behavior continue to undercut collaboration (e.g., see Bradsher, 2009).

This process was observed in miniature at Davos. Survival depended on integrative negotiation, yet the tribes clung to their invented identities, amplified their differences, and ended in deadlock and destruction. After the exercise, an internationally recognized rabbi admitted with great shame, "My parents and I were nearly victim to the Holocaust. I vowed 'never again.' But here I am, responding to the constraints of this exercise, without as much as a word of protest until it's too late." An academic said, "I set out to either show unifying leadership or to become a demagogue, breaking the rules of the game. But I failed to do either, and let down history and humanity." A deputy head of state summed up the emergent theme of the group's experience: "We live in a tribal world. If we cannot deal with emotions constructively, we are doomed."

The purpose of this article, then, is to propose ideas to improve the way groups deal with the emotional dimensions of real-world conflict. I review relevant literature and refer to my own laboratory and field work in conflict management, drawing on my consulting experience with world leaders, senior military officers, global organizations such as the International Criminal Court, key negotiators in the Middle East, and grassroots groups (see, e.g., Shapiro, 2004a). Currently, my role as chair of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution affords me access to closed-door conversations that shape public policy around conflict management. As a clinical psychologist, I view all of these grassroots and high-level field experiences as clinical data from which meaningful patterns of constructive conflict management can be distilled. In this article, I show where core assumptions are supported by empirical research and introduce hypotheses that can be tested in the future. I also reflect on my own experiences in the field and suggest practical approaches to improve the way people deal with intergroup conflict. These ideas build upon pioneering scholarly work in conflict management (e.g., Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991; Kelman, 2008), social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social constructivist theory of international relations (e.g., Wendt, 1992), and emotions theory (e.g., Lazarus, 1991).

Four Major Impediments to Conflict Management

Through my international work, I have observed four major impediments to addressing the emotional dimension of conflict. First, the prevailing approach to policymaking views disputants as rational actors interested predominantly in "the application of rational evaluation and realistic assessment of the options available to one's own group and to an opposing one" (Volkan, 1998, p. 17). This *rational actor model* relies on traditional political, military, and socioeconomic incentives and deterrents to engage states or typical nonstate actors. Policymakers using this approach thus tend to neglect key emotional and identity-based elements fueling intergroup conflict (Azar, 1990), which is particularly problematic given the widespread prevalence of identity-based conflicts (David, 2008). Although a political treaty may resolve political differences in conventional interstate warfare, identity-based divisions are not so easily rectified,

and lingering resentment can leave social conditions ripe for renewed violence (Shapiro & Liu, 2006).

Second, policymakers lack a robust social unit to identify the emotional lines of loyalty in intergroup conflict. By default, governments, media, and policy analysts often analyze "sides" through the lens of traditional state and nonstate categories. But these categories lose explanatory power in the face of contemporary warfare, where groups diverge in terms of their size and structure, ranging from clearly demarcated states with varying military and economic strength, to networked groups such as Al Qaeda or diasporas, to purely instrumental groups whose members join out of belief in their group's superior security force.

Third, as the Tribes exercise makes clear, policymakers lack theory to help them appreciate what compels group members to move from loose affiliation to tribal attachment, becoming willing to sacrifice heavily for their tribes.

Fourth, policymakers lack strategies and tactics to manage the emotional dynamics of intergroup conflict. After the world exploded in the Tribes exercise at Davos, I asked the group, "How many of you think that someone else in this exercise acted irrationally?" Nearly every hand rose. And all agreed the world needs a systematic approach to address this seemingly "irrational" dimension of negotiation.

To encourage constructive conflict management, leaders thus need to overcome each of these impediments. The rest of this article is structured accordingly. In response to the rational actor model, I introduce relational identity theory as a complementary model for understanding the emotional dimensions of conflict management. I argue that the optimal social unit for analyzing the lines of emotional loyalty in intergroup conflict is not a fixed category such as the state but rather the tribe. I define my use of the term *tribe* and describe its three core elements. I also introduce a psychological concept I call the *tribes effect*, which is the tendency for a tribe's relational identity to become rigid, increasing the likelihood that intergroup relations will become polarized and will trend toward violent conflict. I offer strategies to help negotiators mitigate the tribes effect and improve intergroup relations.

Relational Identity Theory: A Model to Understand the Emotional Landscape of Conflict

Relational identity theory (RIT) provides a systematic approach to understanding emotional and identity-based dimensions of conflict. I have developed RIT over the past decade as a complement to the rational actor model of conflict management (e.g., Shapiro, 2002, 2005), and I have refined its practical application through research and writing with Roger Fisher (Fisher & Shapiro, 2005).

RIT moves beyond neat social categorizations of "us" and "them" toward a dimensional, dynamic understanding of interpersonal and intergroup relations. Traditional social identity models describe how people divide the social world into ingroups and outgroups, identify with the ingroup, and enhance their identity by comparing the ingroup favorably with the outgroup on a valued dimension (Dovidio et al., 1997; Haslam, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Whereas social identity models examine the process and impact of intergroup *division*, RIT offers a model to explicate the degree and quality of intergroup *association*, thereby accounting for the dynamic, complex identities that emerge in many contemporary conflicts and that, unlike the straightforward division of sides in the Cold War, cannot easily be dichotomized into a clear us/them classification. Building on the work of Barth (1969), who argued that the boundaries between groups are continuously negotiated, RIT focuses not on static, fixed attributes of personal or social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) but on an individual's or group's *relational identity*—its perception of its association with another individual or group. This perception of the relationship is not a static "thing" one "has" but is ever-changing. At any point, relations may feel close or distant, open or closed, comfortable or distressed. Ultimately, neither personal identity nor social identity is constructed in a vacuum. We constantly position ourselves in relation to others and define ourselves according to these perceived relations (Buber, 1970; Cooley, 1902; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009).

RIT posits that, from a relational perspective, two motives define the association between individuals or groups: affiliation and autonomy. Numerous scholars across disciplines view autonomy and affiliation, or variations on them, as basic dimensions of the human experience (Angyal, 1941; Bakan, 1966; Bem, 1974; Benjafield & Carson, 1986; Brewer, 1991, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Freedman, Leary, Ossorio, & Coffey, 1951; Fromm, 1941; Staub, 1993; Wiggins, 1991). I call these two motives *relational identity concerns* (Shapiro, 2002). The concerns are relational, because the parties define their identity in the relationship vis-à-vis the other party. Affiliation refers to the degree and valence of each party's emotional connection *with the other*, whether close or distant, included or excluded, positive or negative. Autonomy refers to the degree and valence of each party's freedom *from the other*—their independence to think, feel, or do as they would like without being constrained by the other (Shapiro, 2005). It exists on a continuum from great liberty to undue restriction.

Whereas human needs theories explicitly assume that conflict results from frustrated *individual* needs (Burton, 1990; Fisher, 2001; Kelman, 1995, 2008), RIT examines the impact of frustrated *relational* identity concerns on conflict escalation. Its focus is not on the independent psychology of groups in conflict but on the psychological relations between individuals or groups. Important human needs such as self-enhancement and self-esteem serve to enhance the self, often through interpersonal or intergroup validation. Autonomy and affiliation, in contrast, serve to enhance the relationship. These relational identity concerns are the direct property of the relationship between parties and thus are core concepts of RIT.

Relational identity concerns affect conflict behavior in three substantial ways. First, they curb normative expecta-

Figure 1

Sample Depiction of Tension Between a Group's Currently Perceived Relational Identity and Its Desired Relational Identity
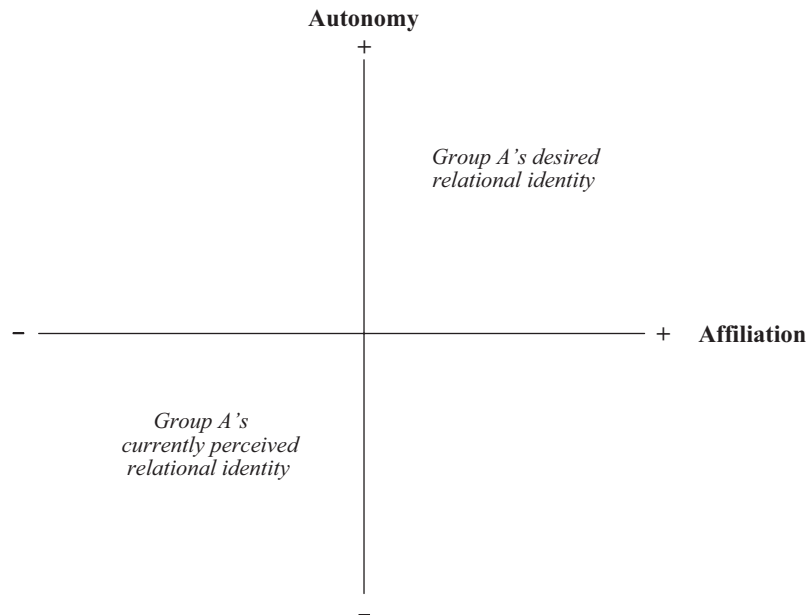
Note. A group's currently perceived relational identity and desired relational identity can be located in any of the four quadrants, depending upon the group's expectations for autonomy and affiliation.

tions about what is taboo to say, do, think, or feel in the relationship. The relational context establishes expectations about the limits of autonomy and affiliation as well as liabilities for a breach of the implicit social contract. These expectations are manifest in the roles we play and the statuses we hold (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stets, 2006; Stryker, 2004). A *role* can be viewed as a set of expectations about how an individual or group should be treated and should treat others in terms of autonomy and affiliation, and *status* is an individual or group's perceived standing in comparison to another (Shapiro, 2002). The higher the status and the broader the role, the larger a party's autonomy and affiliation are in relation to the other individuals or groups. Furthermore, respecting autonomy and affiliation tends to elicit cooperative norms, just as cooperative norms tend to elicit actions respecting autonomy and affiliation. This reciprocal relationship is consistent with "*Deutsch's crude law of social relations*," which proposes that "the characteristic processes and effects elicited by a given type of social relationship also tend to elicit that type of social relationship" (Deutsch, 1973, p. 365).

Second, unaddressed relational identity concerns can generate negative emotions and subsequent adversarial behavior. In a conflict, parties continuously conduct primary appraisal to evaluate what of personal significance is at stake for them in the situation (Lazarus, 1991; Parkinson, 1995; Shapiro, 2002). As RIT proposes, they are particularly concerned about autonomy and affiliation. The larger

the gap between *current* and *desired* perception about those concerns, the more negative their emotions and the more likely that behavior will undermine creative problem solving (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997; Daly, 1991; Loewenstein, Thompson, & Bazerman, 1989; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996; Shapiro, 2002).

Third, when relational identity concerns are well addressed (see Lazarus, 1991, on goal congruence), positive emotions tend to result, along with cooperative behavior and mutual gains (e.g., Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999; Carnevale & Isen, 1986; Fisher & Shapiro, 2005; Isen, 2000). Thus, in line with the work of Parkinson (1995) and Shapiro (2002), emotions are not simply a reaction to particular types of appraisal. They also serve a forward-looking function, indicating the degree to which an individual or group wants specific relational identity concerns addressed.

Imagine an intergroup conflict in which Group A feels enraged at Group B for both excluding them from political negotiations and impinging upon their autonomy through economic limitations on free trade. The resulting rage is not only a reaction to Group A's current plight but also, if expressed, a relational message to Group B that they want greater political affiliation and increased economic autonomy. Figure 1 depicts this dynamic, illustrating Group A's currently perceived relational identity and desired relational identity vis-à-vis Group B. For Group A, the gap between the currently perceived relational identity and the

desired relational identity generates rage. ("We deserve better treatment than this!") Because relational identity is a fluid concept, this gap is likely to change over time as a result of subsequent interactions and understandings within and between groups. A full relational identity analysis, therefore, would account for the ongoing interaction between Group A's and Group B's current and desired positioning in terms of relational identity concerns, thus providing insights into the dynamics of each group's emotional state and corresponding action tendencies.

Having defined a general theory for understanding the emotional dynamics of intergroup conflict, I turn to the task of explaining how the tribe is a particularly useful social unit to analyze the dynamic, overlapping lines of loyalty in intergroup conflict. I use the word *tribe* generically to indicate groups of individuals who feel drawn to each other by highly valued likenesses and who feel separated from other groups because of highly valued differences. I elaborate on a definition of tribe, describe its key relational attributes, and implicitly illustrate that intertribal relationships are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago. This detailed analysis will point us toward a framework for mitigating real-world tensions between tribes.

Tribes: Understanding the Emotional Lines of Loyalty

I define a *tribe* as any group whose members see themselves as (a) *like-kinded*, (b) *kinlike* in their relational connection, and (c) *emotionally invested* in their group's enhancement. All three elements are necessary for a group to be considered a tribe. Being of like kind denotes that group members identify themselves as part of a common identity group. Ethnopolitical groups—such as Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews, Catholics and Protestants of Northern Ireland—may be tribes, but tribes often are *not* built on ethnic or blood ties. Rather, tribes are socially and psychologically constructed. They can emerge whenever individuals share a common identity, whether as members of a neighborhood community, religious sect, corporation, nation, or international political organization. A tribe, however, is more than just a loose affiliation or a coalition joined for purely instrumental purposes. The second element of a tribe, kinlike connection, specifies the relational nature of the identity group, because tribe members subjectively define one another as "all of the same stock." This connection may be based on literally any shared characteristic, such as a physical trait, ideology, language, geographic "home," organizational mission, or religious conviction. As a result of the kinlike connection, members intensify their identification with the tribe and, consequently, intensify the emotional significance they place on their relationships with fellow tribe members. The third element is that members feel emotionally invested in the existence and enhancement of their tribe. Members can become so emotionally invested in the survival and enhancement of the tribe that they are willing—and group norms often require them—to put aside self-interest in order to protect and defend one another and advance group

causes. This investment, at its most potent, can lead tribe members to sacrifice their own lives or those of their children.

Several qualities of tribal dynamics are important to take into account when dealing with intergroup conflict. First, loyalty to the tribe takes priority. Tribes are heavily emotional entities, the members of which are likely to make greater sacrifices for those to whom they are more closely related. Social evolutionists have clarified this preference for supporting one's closest genetic relationships. Whether one commits a costly altruistic action depends upon one's genetic closeness to the recipient of that action and the benefit to him or her. The closer the relationship, the more likely that the action will be taken (Hamilton, 1964). As the Tribes exercise demonstrates, human psychology extends the propensity for sacrifice to those who are connected not through consanguinity but through *perceived* kinship. At Davos, members of each tribe demonstrated a greater willingness to sacrifice for their own tribe than for the six groups as a whole, despite their common cause to save the world from destruction.

Second, tribal norms reinforce loyalty. Indeed, the fundamental taboo of the tribe is engaging in any behavior that undercuts the legitimacy of the tribe and the relations binding everyone together. The tribe itself may be perceived as sacred, and sustaining its existence can become a holy mission. Disloyalty to the tribe's identity narrative can lead to shame, humiliation, ostracism, and death. As the Tribes exercise highlights, a threat to one's tribe can be equated to a threat to one's self, provoking powerful self-defensive responses that outsiders often fail to account for when designing conflict management policy.

Third, tribal loyalty tends to be strongest when members share a collective identity narrative that I term the *myth of common bloodlines*. This shared narrative binds people together through the belief that they are of the same stock, linked by a common lineage and destiny. A threatened group can turn quickly into a tribe the moment its members feel connected through a myth of common bloodlines. While a multinational company in a conflict can become a tribe, the more cohesive tribes—the ones for which people are willing to sacrifice the most—tend to be based on spiritual or actual bloodlines. Members are more likely to be fortified by righteousness when fighting to fulfill God's destiny than when fighting for a company's vision.

Fourth, the myth of common bloodlines is resistant to change. Tribes build a narrative based on their perceived history of victories, losses, trauma, and victimization, and this narrative is surprisingly resistant to political and social transitions (Volkan, 1998). In many ways, the preservation of a tribe's historical narrative is an exercise in establishing its autonomy as an insoluble entity. Fighting to maintain a historical narrative is a means to defend dilution of the tribal identity into the future. The Battle of Kosovo in 1389, for example, was a decisive loss for the Serbian army to the Ottoman Empire, yet the battle remains an indelible symbol to Serbs of the ascent of their national identity. In 1989, on the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, President

Slobodan Milošević of Serbia delivered a speech at the apparent site of the Battle of Kosovo, where he invoked a myth of common bloodlines through his emphasis on Serbian heroism, national unity, and patriotism. This ghost of war returned again to haunt Kosovo's recent move toward independence, as minority Kosovo Serbs claimed that Kosovo should remain integral to Serbia.

The Tribes Effect: Relational Identity at the Extreme

In my facilitation of the Tribes exercise, I have come to see a consistent pattern in the way tribes polarize. I call this relational dynamic the *tribes effect*, which refers to the rigidification of a tribe's relational identity vis-à-vis another group. Severe threat to autonomy and affiliation can turn a tribe from a loose association into a tightly defined unit whose members are willing to defend their tribe's physical and psychological existence at substantial personal cost. Elected or self-designated leaders in the tribe create or amplify the threat, calling attention to unaddressed relational identity concerns and their critical emotional significance for the tribe. These threats to a tribe's existence increase the salience and valuation of the tribe, and members withdraw to their tribe to protect against narcissistic injury. ("We are great, despite what they say about us!") Tribe members validate each other's worth and moral standing and legitimize to one another their own narrative of righteousness and victimization. Members also withdraw to their tribe for existential refuge; they may attempt to annihilate the source of the threat to secure their physical safety and to uphold their belief in their tribe's immortality (e.g., see Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997). Consequently, the tribe closes itself off from external influence and learning, relying instead on its own relational assumptions to guide behavior. And it views its understandings about other groups as reasonable and justified, because it has little or no accessible or legitimized data with which to call into question its underlying assumptions. Misperceptions thus can abound through stereotypes, prejudice, and misunderstanding, intensifying intergroup division and polarization.

In the Tribes exercise at Davos, for example, Round 1 of intertribal negotiations began with each group espousing cooperative norms to avoid destruction of the world. But five minutes into the exercise, this abstract threat of global destruction was overshadowed by the more immediate threat of every tribe vying to be *the* tribe to which all others would subscribe. "If I may . . . ," said one tribe member. "No you may not," interrupted another. "You're so confrontational!" said a third (World Economic Forum, 2007). After the exercise, I explained the concepts of autonomy and affiliation, and the group discussed how these concerns may have affected the negotiation. A CEO noted that his tribe's anger intensified as other tribes attempted to impose on his tribe's autonomy. Another executive described feeling anxious about abandoning his own tribe after working so hard to create it. With autonomy and affiliation besieged, each group appeared to retrench further to their own tribe

and to defend it, often around seemingly trivial differences. This *narcissism of minor differences*, as Freud (1930/1961) called it, commonly emerges in the Tribes exercise, and nearly identical attributes among tribes can become the source of intertribal hostility. In the second round at Davos, two negotiators argued vociferously about whether the name Humanity Tribe or Compassion Tribe signified greater ethnopolitical inclusivity. As Round 2 ended without agreement and the specter of tribal demise grew, members felt heightened emotional investment in their own tribe, generating norms of tribal loyalty and sacrifice. With the lines of loyalty firmly drawn between tribes, defensive posturing overtook collaboration, and any form of compromise was equated with injury to a tribe's pride. A reinforcing cycle of adversarial relations was set in motion.[2]
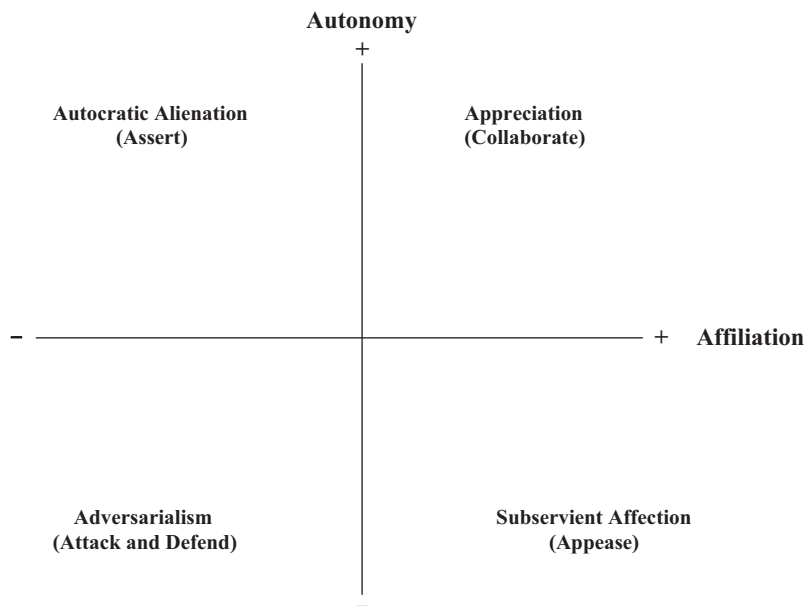
According to RIT, the tribes effect is most likely to snowball within the southwest region of Figure 2. As tribes interact, each side's disrespected concerns for autonomy and affiliation exacerbate *adversarialism*, reducing the mo-

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[2] Despite the high percentage of times the world has exploded in the Tribes exercise, I do not believe the data reflect an "objective," blanket propensity for the tribes effect to be triggered some 95% of the time. My experience suggests that the nature and structure of relations within and between tribes can mitigate the manifestation of the tribes effect. Mitigating factors I have observed include the following: (a) a leader who takes charge of the intertribal negotiation process; (b) a dominant, consistently prominent norm of compassion and empathy between tribes; (c) a group recently trained in leadership skills, which in fact characterized two of the groups who saved the world from exploding; (d) salience of structural affiliations between tribal spokespeople, as exemplified when I facilitated the exercise in Abu Dhabi and three of the four spokespeople all happened to be from the military and dressed in uniform; (e) a clear hierarchy of authority, as with the military officers; (f) approximately 15 or fewer participants in the exercise, which improves each participant's airtime and reduces the overriding feel of tribalism; (g) approximately four or fewer tribes negotiating, which enhances airtime between tribes and further reduces the feeling of tribalism; (h) virtually no cross-tribal differences in response to identity-divisive questions about abortion, capital punishment, and the like; and (i) creative, socially inclusive responses to identity-divisive questions, such as when tribes evade the exercise's instructions and answer an intentionally categorical, closed-ended question—for example, "What is your tribe's dominant religion?"—with a creative response such as creating a "new" religion that allows everyone to practice the religion of their choice. Paradoxically, the values each tribe creates for their tribe do not tend to predict whether the world explodes. Tribes always are drawn toward positive, humanistic values, yet as the negotiation progresses, these are not typically converted into a congruent set of prosocial behaviors. Conversely, the tribes effect has been more likely to take hold with great emotional intensity when (a) tribes do not listen effectively to one another; (b) at least one spokesperson in the intertribal negotiation is viewed as aggressive and egoistic by the other tribes; (c) spokespeople advocate, early on, for their own tribe *over* others; (d) at least one tribe feels slighted, especially early on, in terms of voice time or respect for its core attributes; (e) no consideration is given to the process tribes will use to come to consensus during the intertribal negotiation; (f) strong feelings of disrespect emerge; (g) approximately 40 or more participants engage in the exercise; (h) everyone feels crammed into a tightly enclosed negotiating room; and (i) intertribal differences about core beliefs become central to the intertribal negotiation, thus putting the spokespeople in the difficult position of having to defend their tribe's values or be seen as a traitor. More generally, as RIT proposes, when autonomy and affiliation are respected, collaboration tends to occur. When these concerns are trampled upon, the tribes effect tends to emerge.

Figure 2
The Relationship Between Autonomy and Affiliation, Emotional Reaction, and Action Tendency

Autonomy
+

Autocratic Alienation   Appreciation
(Assert)   (Collaborate)

−   +   **Affiliation**

Adversarialism   Subservient Affection
(Attack and Defend)   (Appease)

−

tivation to listen, learn, and problem solve. In contrast, the tribes effect is least likely to occur, and collaboration is most likely, when a tribe feels that its relational identity concerns are *appreciated*. It perceives that the other party acknowledges the value of its concerns. A number of middle-ground conditions lead to a modest propensity toward the tribes effect. If a tribe perceives its relational identity as high on affiliation but low on autonomy, it is likely to feel *subservient affection* and a resulting tendency to appease the other tribe. Although appeasement may promote cooperative intergroup relations in the short term, resentment at unmet autonomy concerns may compound over time and destabilize the relational system, creating the seeds for the tribes effect. If a tribe perceives its relational identity as high in autonomy but low in affiliation, it is likely to feel *autocratic alienation* and to assert its tribal interests. Again, this may serve the tribe's short-term interests but in the long term can reduce information sharing, foment distrust, and lead the other tribe to reassert its autonomy through underground or indirect routes. When affiliation is both negative and strong, autocratic alienation may manifest as domination.

Strong leaders can accelerate and intensify the tribes effect. They can shape a tribe's priorities, calling attention to or even promoting the perception that the tribe's wishes—for political, social, religious, or economic autonomy and affiliation—are being frustrated by the other. And in our interconnected world, where information moves effortlessly through state borders, leaders have ready-made networks to excite, recruit, and mobilize tribes literally scattered around the earth. Consequently they can boost the likelihood of the tribes effect and its impact at the local, regional, and global levels.

Mitigating the Tribes Effect: A Relational Approach

Intergroup conflict escalates when each tribe's relational identity concerns are unaddressed and the tribes effect takes hold. It follows that promoting cooperative conflict management should involve addressing each tribe's relational identity concerns and averting relational rigidification. This requires attention to four critical tasks that I describe below.

Identifying the Lines of Loyalty

Identifying the lines of *tribal* loyalty is not as straightforward as determining the lines of loyalty in traditional state-to-state warfare. Although some scholars have attempted to classify tribes into explicit, predefined categories (Huntington, 1993), this approach erroneously assumes that tribes do not change and that they can be classified without taking into account their relations with other groups. Since tribes are socially and psychologically constructed, however, they must be defined within a relational context that accounts for the subjective perspectives of tribe members. A useful starting point is to review reports by governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental groups, as well as news reports, to identify groups who may have an interest in the conflict, whether military, economic, political, financial, social, religious, existential, or moral. Third-party intermediaries also may be able to interview a

selection of potential stakeholders from across major socioeconomic and political divides, inquiring about their possible interests in the conflict and seeking their thoughts on other potential stakeholders. *These* stakeholders then can nominate even more individuals or groups who have a potential stake in the conflict. During interviews with stakeholders, and through gathering additional information, the lines of tribal loyalty can be tentatively identified. Who belongs to what tribe? Which tribes are aligned? Opposed? What are the factional allegiances within each tribe? Discovering channels of resource distribution can shed light on lines of loyalty. Who gives what degree of funds or other resources to whom? Who is excluded from this process? Because tribal relations are subjective and dynamic, this information should derive from the stakeholders and be reassessed regularly. The assessment should account for history, psychohistory, and propaganda. And it should acknowledge that a person or party may be a member of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory tribes with shifting alliances, as in the case of a child with a Bosnian Serb mother and a Bosnian Muslim father.

Discovering Relational Identity Concerns

Because members of a tribe, by definition, share a kinlike connection, actions affecting the tribe's reputation, existence, or other attributes have a psychological impact on its members (Kelman, 2001; Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007). Thus, interviewing members of a tribe about autonomy and affiliation will provide information about the tribe's relational identity. For example, in accordance with RIT, tribe members will tend to react negatively when they feel treated as outsiders (compromising *affiliation*) and when they feel that their input into important decisions is ignored (undermining *autonomy*). Relational identity concerns, like relational boundaries, are constantly being negotiated, and their intensity varies depending on the relationship in focus. Therefore, in order to understand a tribe's relational identity concerns, one must ask: What are this tribe's concerns in relation to [Group X, Y, Z]? For example, a tribe may have poor relations with a neighboring tribe but positive relations with another tribe halfway around the world.

Addressing Relational Identity Concerns

The foundation for integrative problem solving and long-term positive relations between conflicting tribes is to have them respect each other's autonomy *and* build intertribal affiliation. Gaertner and Dovidio's (2000) *dual identity model* supports this approach, arguing that a key to reducing intergroup bias is not to increase the salience of social identity at the expense of subgroup identity (i.e., recategorization; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1996) but to acknowledge and allow expression of both subgroup identities and superordinate identity (Dovidio et al., 2006; Eggins, Haslam, & Reynolds, 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner et al., 1996; Haslam, 2004; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). In the relational language of RIT, this means respecting autonomy and building affiliation.

Because relational identity is socially constructed, a group's relational identity concerns are not fixed, and therefore actions can be taken to change the expectations each group holds about their relational identity. At a structural level, parties may explicitly propose or implicitly foster conditions conducive to cooperative relations. For example, conflicting parties who mutually define their roles as cooperative and their status as equals consequently may expect of one another a collaborative sense of affiliation and a significant amount of autonomy to explore interests and options for mutual gain. In addition, in the actual interaction, parties may assert more (or less) autonomy and build closer (or more distant) relations to change their relational identity. What follows are illustrative strategies to address concerns for autonomy and affiliation.

Respecting autonomy. Respecting the autonomy of a tribe's right to exist and to make decisions about its future can reduce the likelihood of the tribes effect occurring. Therefore, before decisions are made that affect a group, policymakers should consider two key questions: (a) Which groups will be affected by this decision? and (b) To what extent might key members of those groups be involved in the decision-making process? Groups excluded from the decision-making process tend to devalue whatever decisions are made, even if those decisions are in their interest (Ross, 1995). Conversely, the more involved groups feel in the decision-making process, the less their autonomy will feel impinged upon and the less likely that the tribes effect will be fueled (Shapiro, 2005). Respecting autonomy can come in the form of involving a group in the negotiation process, consulting them on important issues, or at least informing them soon after relevant decisions have been made (Bradford & Cohen, 1998; Fisher & Shapiro, 2005; Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

Consider the role of autonomy in relation to the operation of the International Criminal Court (ICC). As the ICC launches an investigation into a potential crime against humanity or genocide, it becomes a de facto political actor in the conflict-ridden system. In other words, *how* the ICC exercises its political power can improve or harm long-term peace efforts. The tribes effect can be fueled if the Office of the Prosecutor publicly communicates its prosecution strategy in a way that local populations see as imposing on either their autonomy or that of leaders with whom they identify. Thus, with encouragement from the Chief Prosecutor of the ICC, Luis Moreno Ocampo, I co-led a research project to develop a conflict assessment instrument to help the ICC consider how best to frame its communications and prosecution strategy to strengthen its network of supporters on the ground. Our goal was to create a conflict assessment instrument capable of acquiring nuanced data about the subjective, ground-level realities of violent conflict. A portion of the resulting instrument assesses the extent to which local actors may feel their autonomy is violated by an ICC intervention and the nature of that violation, as well as what might be done to better respect the autonomy of the people (see Sonnenberg, 2005, unpublished manuscript). For example, the ICC may work with local communities to learn more about traditional processes of healing in response to

past atrocities or injustice, and they can consider how they might support, or at least not impinge upon, such processes. In this sense, while some scholars see peace and justice at odds, respect for relational identity concerns such as autonomy need not come at the sacrifice of high standards of justice. Even if the behavior of an individual in a tribe merits international reprimand or punishment, there is a greater likelihood for justice and for cooperation with the justice system when the individual and his or her followers perceive that the justice system is respecting their tribe's autonomy to the extent possible. Indeed, an individual whose relational identity concerns are respected is more likely to reveal reliable, valid information, to view the justice system as legitimate and fair, and to comply with the judgment (see Herman, 2003, on the impact of legal intervention on victim psychology).

Building affiliation. Where the tribes effect is emerging or manifest, building affiliation between disputing parties becomes critical. The core of this strategy is to turn adversaries into partners facing a shared problem (Fisher & Shapiro, 2005). Rather than seeing the "other" as the problem, parties reframe the situation as a joint problem-solving task. By affiliating around a mutually legitimized, shared identity attribute, tribes can work through historical resentments and humiliation. This structural affiliation acts as a relational holding force, because it holds tribes together through an overarching, cooperative structural affiliation in which they can work through differences and entrenched emotions.

Although there is no quick route to building affiliation, especially when disputing parties share a long history of adversarial relations, several strategies provide useful direction. First, leaders from disputing tribes can meet in an unofficial capacity, outside of the media limelight, to invent options to bridge their differences (Fisher et al., 1991). To reduce the political costs of talking to the enemy, a neutral third party might invite the participants to a meeting. Even during times of war or military battle, supplemental joint brainstorming can run parallel to military or political efforts at conflict management and work to build lines of affiliation (Shapiro, 2000). Following in the interactive problem-solving tradition of Herbert Kelman, Roger Fisher, and other scholar–practitioners, I have been involved as an instructor and advisor to the Israeli–Palestinian Negotiating Partners network, founded in response to the failure of the Camp David II negotiations. As part of this network, second-track Israeli and Palestinian participants spend one week in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they learn various methods of negotiation, including skills for dealing with unmet relational identity concerns, and have the opportunity to build relations within and between groups. Few of the participants have met one another prior to the workshop, especially across ethnopolitical lines. The workshop encourages the building of affiliation in numerous ways, including grouping Israelis and Palestinians together on the same side of negotiation cases, holding informal social events, and having participants all play the role of "students" in negotiation lectures. These kinds of activities help participants to see one another not as adversaries but as fellow problem solvers working together on shared problems (Allport, 1954, p. 454; Fisher & Shapiro, 2005). As a high-level Palestinian and a high-level Israeli negotiator active in the network both confessed to me in 2008, they felt a greater sense of connection to one another than to some in their own communities who were resistant to peace efforts. The results of this program are concrete and striking. On more than one occasion, a workshop alumnus facing a difficult political situation has resorted not to the rhetoric of violence but to a phone call to an alumnus on the "other side," allowing for expedient and constructive problem solving in response to an otherwise serious political conflict. This was the case in the secret negotiations in 2002 between Israelis and Palestinians during the deadly 38-day standoff at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (Crystal, 2007).

Second, parties may take a gradualist approach to building affiliation (see, e.g., Osgood, 1962). Rather than immediately working to resolve the "big" issues, such as Jerusalem or the Palestinian "right of return," parties may initiate more modest forms of cooperation that begin to reshape relational perceptions and increase openness for serious dialogue about the most central issues. The roots of this approach can be traced to Kurt Lewin (1952), who illustrated the power of structural connections in opening up individuals to greater influence. Standard gradualist efforts include economic collaboration, environmental protection, and improvements to public health (Blum, 2007).

Third, parties may build affiliation by jointly tackling taboo issues at the heart of their negotiation impasse. This less gradualist approach to building affiliation increases the political and personal risks for parties involved in the discussion and may best be facilitated by a third party who can enforce norms of confidentiality, respect, and mutual understanding. For the World Economic Forum's regional meeting in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in 2008, I devised such a seminar, called "Building Peace, Breaking Taboos," which I co-led with Tony Blair, former prime minister of the United Kingdom and the United Nations' Middle East Quartet special envoy. Participants included high-level regional and international negotiators, governmental leaders, royalty, and religious authorities. Our goal was not to have participants negotiate a "final peace agreement" to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict but to have them discuss how to deal with taboo topics that, according to our preseminar sampling of major Middle East negotiators, are central to impasse. Topics included Jerusalem's status, the right of refugee return, holy sites, and the use of the words "Israel" and "Palestine." Through small-group discussion and large-group presentations, participants became more aware of the impact of these taboos, considered the benefits and costs of addressing them, and jointly explored ways to overcome obstacles to addressing them. According to the World Economic Forum (2008, sec. 7.1),

This workshop has had a long-term, positive mark on Middle East peace efforts. More than a year after the workshop, Tony Blair noted: "The Taboos Session at Sharm El-Sheikh raised important questions around the fears each party holds about broaching taboo issues. It is only by raising awareness of these issues and tackling

them head on that we can hope to make progress on challenges such as the Middle East." A New York Times writer discussed the session afterward with another high-level delegate, who reportedly walked into the session nearly hopeless about the negotiation process, but walked out optimistic, armed with new insights on how to deal with taboo issues standing at the heart of stalemate and peace.

Fourth, where violence has broken out, a peacekeeping force can strengthen affiliation between disputing tribes as well as between the tribes and the peacekeeping force itself. As part of my research on constructive negotiation approaches for soldiers interacting with local Iraqi populations in the Second Gulf War, I interviewed Colonel H. R. McMaster of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tal Afar, who reported that successful stabilization of Iraq is based largely on the ability of U.S. troops to build affiliation with the Iraqi people (Shapiro, 2008). He described how he implemented a training program in Colorado, where soldiers searched houses and obtained desired information only after sitting down with occupants, drinking tea together, and asking culturally respectful questions. McMaster's regiment stayed in Tal Afar for nine months and worked hard to build affiliation with the local population. When McMaster's regiment was selected to leave, the mayor of Tal Afar wrote a letter requesting that the regiment stay another year and expressing his great respect for McMaster and his squadron commander, Lt. Colonel Chris Hickey, who apparently even knew the names of the mayor's children (Packer, 2006). These seemingly simple tokens of affiliation had a great impact on the extent to which each side supported the other, shared information, and worked toward mutual security.

After learning about the work of Colonel McMaster, I joined forces with an army research team, composed of several behavioral scientists, military subject matter experts, and an animation team, to investigate common disputes experienced by U.S. ground soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our team chose a prototypical conflict and developed a 3D animated story to depict a challenging cross-cultural interaction occurring in the context of counterinsurgency. This form of "digital storytelling" has been shown to be effective in stimulating learning conversations in U.S. Army online professional forums (Cianciolo, Cianciolo, Prevou, & Morris, 2007). We explicitly designed the story to foster learning on the proactive use of relational identity concerns in negotiation. Our resulting video highlighted subtle ways in which poor efforts at building affiliation and respecting autonomy can escalate tensions to dangerous levels, and it left the viewer with the open-ended challenge of how to manage difficult relational concerns effectively. The video is now being used across segments of the Army.

Conclusions

Dealing constructively with the emotional dimension of intergroup conflict is critical to sustainable agreement and long-term positive relations. RIT, a model for addressing the emotional dimensions of conflict, posits that conflict is often motivated by factors beyond social categorization or objective resource disparities. It suggests that destructive conflict is likely when a group perceives that their relational identity concerns for affiliation and autonomy are left unaddressed. The emotional complexities of intergroup conflict are best understood through the lens of *tribes,* a broad term describing groups whose members are connected through kind, kin, and emotional investment. When a tribe's relational identity concerns are undermined, the resulting negative emotions may stimulate what I term the *tribes effect.* This dynamic rigidifies the tribe's relational identity, increasing the likelihood of intergroup polarization and conflict escalation. Therefore, the future of global security hinges in part on addressing groups' relational identity concerns and mitigating the tribes effect.

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