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Bridging Partisan Divides: Dialectical Engagement and Deep Sociality

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Abstract

In recent decades, we have witnessed increasing polarization, divisiveness and hostility in political discourse. This paper outlines a relational-dialectical approach to constructive political discourse. Instead of treating political discourse as competition over clashing positions, the relational approach seeks ways to bridge political differences through *dialectical engagement*. The process is organized around three principles: (a) the focus on *needs* and *problems* rather than political *positions*, (b) *deep sociality*, and (c) the *dialectical construction* of novel forms of thinking through the *integration of opposites*. I illustrate these principles in the context of political discourse related to gun violence in the United States.

Key Words: Polarization, Political Discourse, Sociality, Dialectics, Development, Ideology

Bridging Partisan Divides: Dialectical Engagement and Deep Sociality

In recent decades, we have witnessed what many experience as increased polarization, divisiveness and incivility in political discourse (Bosancianu, 2017; Bougher, 2017; Kinloch & Mohan, 2013). We have found ourselves increasingly divided over social issues related to race, gender, identity and other forms of diversity (Klandermans, 2014). Globally, there is evidence of strain in democratic institutions that were once regarded as strong and vibrant (Dodd, 2015; Gervais, 2018; Mayo, 2005). Liberal values such as pluralism, tolerance and civil debate have increasingly given way to moralization, incivility and the dehumanization of the political Other (Harrison, 2016).

In this paper, I examine the sources of polarization, incivility and dehumanization in contemporary political discourse. In so doing, I argue that there is a need for alternatives to adversarial forms of political problem-solving. Drawing on constructivist theory (Kelly, 1955), principles and practices of constructivist psychotherapy (Basseches & Mascolo, 2010; Neimeyer, 2009; Oliver & Schlutsmeyer, 2006), models of conflict resolution (Coleman, Deutsch & Marcus, 2014; Fisher, 2005), and dialectical thinking (Basseches, 1984; Brincat, 2010), this paper outlines a relational-dialectical approach to managing political discourse and resolving socio-political conflict. This dialectical model draws on a series of core ideas. First, instead of debating the merits of alternative political *positions*, it is necessary to focus on identifying and meeting the underlying *needs, problems* and *concerns* that motivate those positions. The second is *deep sociality* – the idea that political engagement requires social partners to engage deeply with opponents to understand and appreciate the meanings, values and motives that drive political positions. The third idea is *dialectical engagement*, which seeks to resolve political conflict through the *integration of opposites*.

Polarization and Contemporary Political Discourse

Political differences are inevitable in any society. The democratic institutions that have evolved in Western cultures have been effective in producing a *pax democratica* – a largely peaceful co-existence within and among democratic nations (Klicperová-Baker & Košťál, 2015). Democratic traditions of government by the people, pluralism, representational government, voting, and checks and balances have provided mechanisms for political decision-making without recourse to extreme violence or autocratic control that often occurs in non-democratic societies (Mitchell, 2018; Rawls, 1987). However, Stavrakakis (2018) has suggested that the stability of democratic life takes place against the backdrop of an *agonistic common ground* – more-or-less shared beliefs and practices that provide the intersubjective grounding for public discourse and decision-making. Recent events in national and world politics suggest, however, an increasing polarization (Thornton, 2013) and incivility (Thiranagama, Kelly & Forment, 2018) in political discourse, as well as a decline in deliberative decision-making (Vallacher, 2015). It will be argued that polarization of political discourse has its origins in four sets of interlocking processes: (a) an *adversarial* approach of political problem-solving; (b) polarization of elite political *ideology*; (c) the *politicization* and *moralization* of social *identity*, and a resulting tendency to (d) *dehumanize* the political other.

Adversarial Political Infrastructure

Democratic decision-making is founded upon the idea that political decisions should be mediated by an argumentative exchange of reasons (Landwehr, 2010; Habermas, 1981). A prominent form of adversarial discourse, common to professionals and laypersons alike, takes

the form of a *debate over positions*. Political debates have much in common to what conflict resolution theorists call *positional bargaining* (Fisher, Ury and Patton, 2011). In a debate, political adversaries take opposing *positions* – stances on a particular issue – and advance arguments that support those positions in the face of counter-positions by an opponent. Ideally, a debate is intended to function as a “rational” exchange of ideas – an attempt to convince the other through the rational force of argument and evidence. However, in practice, a typical debate tends to operate as a zero-sum game. Debates are not so much directed toward solving problems as much as they are winning arguments, gaining status or attracting voters. In a zero-sum competition, although partners can tie, reach a stalemate or agree to compromise, any gain by one party necessarily comes at the expense of the other.

Adversarial discourse plays a role in democratic politics. For example, research has shown that public debates can sway voter opinions, particularly when voters are unfamiliar with candidates, when elections are close, or when voters have not yet decided on the preferred candidate (McKinney & Warner, 2013). Under such circumstances, political debates provide voters with information that can influence political preference (Benoit, Hansen & Verser, 2003). However, while public debates influence voters, they are less effective in fostering deliberation necessary for effective decision making. In a pluralistic context, political decision-making requires collaborative coordination between advocates of different positions (Fischer & Sciarini, 2016; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Landwehr, 2010). To the extent that adversarial discourse operates as a contest over positions, it is limited in its capacity to foster constructive problem-solving. While collaborative alternatives to adversarial discourse exist (Kelman, 2010; Zohar, 2003), they remain the exception rather than the norm in professional and lay political discourse. As the default for political discussion, adversarial discourse functions as a predisposing condition for the emergence of polarizing discourse.

Elite Polarization of Political Ideology

A growing literature suggests that increased political polarization has occurred – but operates primarily among *party elites* and those who identify themselves as *partisans* (Davis & Dunaway, 2016; Lelkes, 2016; Miller, 2018; Thornton, 2013). Despite the sense that there is growing general polarization, research suggests that in the United States, affiliation with Democratic and Republican parties has decreased, while those who have identified themselves as independents has increased (Twenge, Honeycutt, Preislin & Sherman, 2016). Even in “landslide” states which voters overwhelmingly endorsed either the Democratic or Republican nominee, there is more similarity than difference among voter attitudes. However, the meanings of terms like *liberal* and *conservative* have changed in relation to each other over time (Strickler, 2015). Voters have shifted in the ways in which they have identified with these political categories. Thus, while there is greater polarization at the political extremes, there is more commonalty and political dissatisfaction in the vast middle. Increased polarization among political elites has led to more contentious debates and election cycles (Gervais, 2018; Harrison, 2016), political gridlock (Jacobson, 2016), and attempts to consolidate power (Wheeler, 2017).

The Moralization and Politicization of Partisan Identity

Within the context of the polarization of ideology among party elites, issues related to recognition of *identity* loom large (Fukuyama, 2018; Moran, 2015; Taylor, 1994). The identity movement is animated around the idea of the need to transform society in order to empower marginalized groups against systematic and institutionalized discrimination. In the United

States, the political arguments that are focused on empowering marginalized groups are largely associated with liberal or left-leaning partisans (McCall & Orloff, 2017). However, a concern with social identity arises on the political right as well. This takes the form of a sense of political economic disempowerment among social groups (e.g. poor and working class whites) who express a sense of marginalization by political elites (Hochschild, 2016). While some have argued that identity politics are inconsistent with the liberal foundation of democracy (Lilla, 2016), others have argued that they are its natural extension (Stavrakakis, 2018).

Moran (2018) has noted that the political invocation of the concept of *identity* is a relatively recent invention. Prior to the 1950's, *identity* was a term primarily used to refer to *unity* of the self – the individuality, subjectivity or personhood of the individual person. During the 1960's, however, its meaning changed. *Identity* came to function as a term used to classify persons into various *social* and *cultural types*. According to Moran (2018), the contemporary politics of identity grew from internal divisions related to the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960's. Displeased with the "polite protest" of activism organized around integration and inclusion (e.g., the *Civil Rights* and *Women's Rights* Movements), *identity-based* movements (e.g., the *Black Power* and *Women's Liberation* movements) adopted the ideology "liberation from oppression". Extending the concept of *identity* to *social groups*, political activism became organized around the goal of mobilizing marginalized groups to move against their oppression (McAdam, 2015; Moran, 2018). In so doing, identity-based movements rejected the goal of cultural assimilation in favor of the radical restructuring of society (Brown & Shaw, 2002; Fominaya, 2010; Mayo, 2005)

Against this backdrop, perhaps the most important factor that animates contemporary political divisiveness is the *moralization* and *politicization* of personal identity (Valdesolo & Graham, 2016). Researchers have demonstrated that people who become political activists not only show heightened levels of *identification* with partisan ideologies, but also heightened *moralization* of those identities (Parker, 2014; Turner-Zwinkels, van Zomeren & Postmes 2015, 2017). For example, Von Zomeren, Kutlaca & Turner-Zwinkels (2018) have suggested that the tendency toward collective activism is motivated not simply by identification with partisan ideology, but also by *moral* stances that identify what will and will not be tolerated. Zaal, Sab, O'Briend, Jeffries, Barreto, and van Leaar (2017) reported evidence suggesting that partisans who embrace moralized political identities tend to respond with higher levels of negative emotion and an increased desire for social distance toward political out-groups.

Dehumanization in Political Discourse

A growing body of evidence identifies considerable *incivility* in current political discourse (Gervais, 2010, 2018). Much of this literature assesses political discourse that occurs in online social media scenarios. Research shows that uncivil political discourse occurs often (Yi-Fan, Xenos, Rose, Wirz, Scheufele & Brossard, 2018; Wang & Silva, 2018), and that when it does, it typically fosters negative affect amongst interlocutors and a spiral of retaliatory behavior (Gervais, 2017; 2018; Hwang, Kim & Kim 2018). For example, an analysis of signed versus anonymous comments posted on Facebook and website pages of the *Washington Post* revealed that anonymous posts exhibited greater incivility than signed posts (Rowe, 2015). Importantly, incivility in online contexts tends to generate *anti-deliberative* reactions where interlocutors *close off* opinions that depart from their own (Gervais, 2017; Hwang, Kim & Kim, 2018). Among

politicians, scholars have demonstrated tendencies toward increasing gridlock in legislative activity (Jacobson, 2016).

Incivility in moralized political discourse often involves language that dehumanizes political opponents. Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz and Cotterill (2015) have shown that blatant dehumanization predicts negative attitudes and relations with out-groups even beyond the effects of prejudice. In intergroup conflict, stereotypical thinking prompts partisans to exaggerate the extremism of their opponents (Keltner & Robinson, 1996). This is especially so in the context of intergroup grievances and the moralization of political identity (Clifford, 2018; Leidner & Gringes, 2013; Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013). Researchers have found that relations between in-group identification and the dehumanization of outgroups are mediated by perceptions of moral (Paccill, Perugia, Roccato, Pagliaro & Russo, 2016) and emotional (McDonald, Porat, Yarkoney, Reifen Tagar, Kimel, Saguy & Halperin, 2017) distance between groups. In intergroup conflict, dehumanization allows parties in power to justify acts of atrocity (Brunewu & Kteily, 2017; Lammers & Stapel, 2011; Oelofsen, 2009) and to legitimize withholding acts of care toward those who might otherwise be seen as vulnerable, such as asylum seekers (McDonald & Fletcher, 2002; Trounson, Critchley & Pfeifer, 2015).

Summary: The Moral Polarization of Political Identity

Drawing on the research discussed above, Figure 1 provides a representation of the adversarial structure of polarizing political discourse. Polarizing political discourse occurs as individuals construct moral identities organized around partisan ideologies. Both formal and informal political discourse typically takes the form of a debate – a contest over positions. We tend to conceptualized debates in terms of the metaphor of a battle, one side attacks the other, who defends their position. The risk of incivility and dehumanization of the other rises as one party views the other's assertions not only as an invalidation of core *identity*, but also as a violation of a *moral order*. As mutual incivility escalates, interlocutors cut themselves off both from each other and from the possibility of producing effective solutions to political problems.

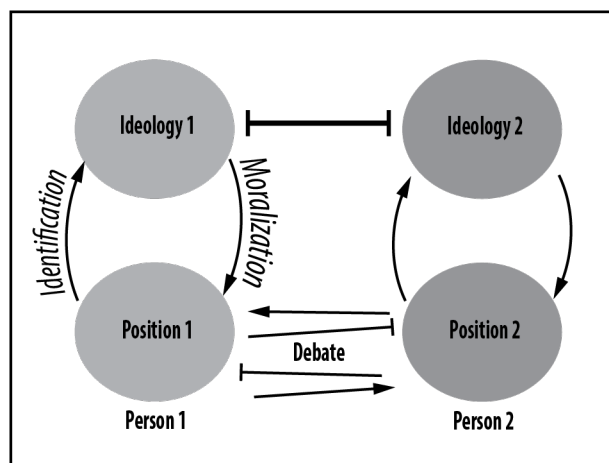


Figure 1: Adversarial Political Discourse

Bridging Divides through Dialectical Engagement

A relational-dialectical framework provides an alternative to adversarial approaches to social, political and ideological conflict (Brincat, 2010; Weiss, 2010). A dialectical approach embraces a *relational* rather than individualist conception of personhood. Instead of thinking of people as bounded, self-interested individuals, persons are understood as *relational beings* (Bauer & McAdams, 2000; Erikson, 1958; Gergen, 2009; Kahane, 2017; Mascolo, 2013; Macmurray, 1961/1991). As relational beings, self and other are not merely *interdependent*, they are *mutually constituting* (Fogel, 1993; Mascolo, 2013). Their survival and development is dependent upon their capacity for sociality and collaboration (Tomasello, 2017). Within a relational framework, human beings are viewed as neither selfish nor selfless. Human motivation functions within a dialectical tension between *self-interest* and *concern for the other* (Walker & Frimer, 2015). Theorists have described this dialectic in many ways – as a tension between *autonomy* and *communion* (Bauer & McAdams, 2000), *power and love* (Kahane, 2017), and *fear for the self* and *love for the other* (Macmurray, 1991/1961). Although self-interest and concern for the other arise as more dominant motives in some situations and social structures over others, neither pole of this dimension is primary in human relations. Humans engage each other within the relational dynamic of self-protection and communion.

Conflict consists of any form of opposition or contradiction between two or more elements. Instead of thinking of political discourse as a competition over clashing *positions*, the relational-dialectical approach provides a framework for bridging political conflict through the dialectical integration of opposites. The concept of dialectical engagement is organized around three basic ideas: (a) *dialectical principles of development*, (b) *interest-based conflict resolution*, and (c) *deep sociality*. In what follows, I first describe the process of dialectical problem solving. I will first illustrate the dialectical process of development through an analysis of Frimer and Walker's (2009) reconciliation model of *moral identity*. Frimer and Walker (2009) suggests that higher-order forms of moral identity develop through the integration of two distinct lines of development, namely *self-interest* and *concern for others*. The dialectical analysis of Frimer and Walker's model illustrates both the process of dialectical development and the development of a central aspect of the concept of dialectical engagement – namely the idea that as relational beings, humans act with a dialectical tension between self-interest and concern for the other.

Thereafter, I identify the foundations of dialectical engagement in interest-based models of conflict resolution. Interest-based conflict resolution differentiates between the *positions* that people adopt in a dispute and the underlying *interests*, needs and concerns that motivate people to adopt those positions. Quite often, in situations involving conflict, while the *positions* that people adopt on an issue may contradict each other, the interests, motives and desires that motivate those positions do not. In interest-based conflict resolution, interlocutors look beyond initial *positions* in order to identify and seek novel strategies that simultaneously meet the underlying interests and needs of both self and other. Finally, I examine the role of *deep sociality* in managing the dialectical relations between power and communion in the process of conflict resolution. In a later section, I apply these ideas to a political example, namely the issue of addressing gun violence in the United States.

Dialectical Thinking and Development

Dialectical thinking involves of thinking in oppositions and contrasts (Basseches, 1984; Kelly, 1955; Rychlak, 1968). It is helpful to think of dialectical development as a process that moves through a loose series of iterative moments organized in terms of Thesis → Antithesis → Conflict → Synthesis (Basseches & Mascolo, 2010; Mascolo, 2016). In this progression, a *thesis* consists of any given statement, assertion or act. Any asserted thesis implies an *antithesis* – a statement or act defined in opposition or contradistinction to the *thesis* (differentiation). *Conflict* occurs when the contradiction between thesis and antithesis is registered in awareness. Conflict generates *disequilibrium* within a developing system, which mobilizes activity directed toward moving the system toward some form of equilibrium (Piaget, 1985). While there are many ways to *manage* conflict, *resolution* of conflict can occur as thesis and antithesis undergo successive *differentiation* as they *adapt to each other* over time. Conflict between thesis and antithesis can be resolved as novel differentiations in thesis and antithesis are integrated into a higher-order *synthesis*.

The dialectical synthesis of higher-order means of resolving conflict is a *developmental* process. In development, novel structures of thought and action develop through the reciprocal processes of *differentiation* and *integration* (Piaget, 1952, 1985; Siegler & Chen, 2008; Werner & Kaplan, 1962/1984). *Differentiation* refers to the process by which the parts of a developing structure become distinguished (different) from each other over time. *Integration* refers to the process by which differentiated elements become coordinated over time. The development of higher-order structures of thinking, feeling and acting occurs as lower-order differentiations become integrated or inter-coordinated into increasingly higher-order structures.

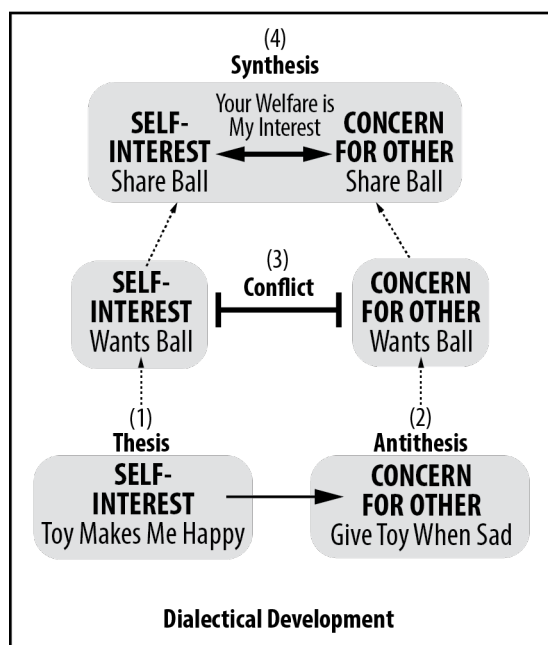


Figure 2: The Dialectical Development of Moral Identity

Figure 2 provides an example of the process of dialectical development. It draws on Frimer and Walker's (2009) *reconciliation* model of moral development. Frimer and Walker (2009) suggest that moral development occurs as two initially opposing classes of motivation – *agency* and *communion* – become increasingly integrated in development. Early in development, in different contexts, children engaging in actions that reflect either self-interest or concern for others. As indicated in Figure 2, if we identify *self-interest* as a *thesis* (e.g., wanting candy for oneself), *concern for other* becomes its *antithesis* (e.g., giving a sibling a piece of candy when she is sad). As long as these two motives operate separately from one another, no conflict between them emerges. However, with further socio-emotional and cognitive development, self-interest (*thesis*) and care for others (*antithesis*) come into *conflict*; conflict produces disequilibrium and the concomitant need to bring thesis and antithesis into some sort of equilibrium. One way to address the conflict without resolving it is for development to move in the direction of *either* self-interest *or* communion – that is, if these distinct lines of development remain separate. If a child's sense of identity moves in the direction of self-interest, the interests of the other become less salient; if the child moves in the direction of communion, the interests of the self become subordinated to those of the other. In either case, the conflict is avoided rather than resolved. For Frimer and Walker (2009), moral identity develops as children reconcile the contradiction between *agency* and *communion* through the *integration* of opposites. For example, an older child might construct a higher-order *synthesis* such as, "Your interests are my concerns", or perhaps the less noble, "It is in my interest to meet your concerns".

Dialectical development occurs as opposing systems of meaning (a) *adapt to each other* over time in ways that (b) resolve contradictions between lower-level conflicts while also (c) while simultaneously integrating core aspects of the initially opposed positions. In this way, the synthesis of higher-order systems of meaning and action is not a form of compromise or "splitting the difference". Dialectical problem solving holds out the possibility producing genuine novelty through the integration of distinct systems of meaning.

From Debating Positions to Asserting Needs

Adversarial political discourse typically takes the form of debate, bargaining and compromise. Opposing parties assume different *positions* on an issue and negotiate, argue or haggle over which should prevail. Many conflict resolution theorists have found it helpful to differentiate between the *positions* that individuals adopt on a given issue and the *interests* that motivate those positions (Fischer, Ury and Patton, 1991; Sebenius, 2013). While positions consist of a party's initial *stance* on an issue, *interests* refer to the underlying needs, problems and concerns that *motivate* those positions. Interests and needs are the underlying motives that define a conflict; they are the underlying problems that each party to a conflict seeks to solve. Where interests and needs function as *problems*, *positions* function as *solutions* to those problems. However, in social conflict, interlocutors often fail to differentiate between interests and positions. As a result, their expressed positions thereupon function as a kind of *initial solution* to a problem that has not yet been fully represented by either party.

As a form of collaborative problem-solving (Kelman, 2010), principled negotiation (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 2011) proceeds as an attempt to identify the underlying needs and interests of each party before seeking possible ways to address those needs. Once identified, parties to a conflict can often find that while their particular *positions* on an issue conflict, the

needs and interests that motivate those positions do not. As a result, it becomes possible for disputants to work together on the shared problem of seeking to meet the needs of all parties to the conflict. Parties collaborate in an attempt to create solutions to achieve maximum gain for all parties (so-called “win-win” solutions).

For example, consider a simple non-political example of collaborative problem solving between a mother and daughter discussing what the child will wear to school on a rainy day. The mother asks her daughter to wear a raincoat, but her child refuses. In a typical adversarial approach, a battle over positions would ensue. The mother would identify reasons why the child should wear the raincoat (e.g., “Your clothes will get wet”, “You’ll catch a cold”); the child would offer rebuttals (e.g., “I don’t need a raincoat”, “I don’t mind getting wet”). Framed as a contest over whether the child will wear a raincoat, the conflict becomes a zero-sum battle. The mother’s position can prevail only at the expense of the daughter’s, and vice-versa.

The situation changes when we separate initial *positions* from the underlying *interests*, *desires* and *needs* that motivate them. In this example, the mother seeks to identify her daughter’s needs. She finds that the daughter fears that the raincoat would make her look “uncool” in front of her friends. Once the underlying needs that motivate the mother and daughter’s positions become articulate, the original positions begin to lose their force, and the mother and daughter can focus on ways to address both sets of underlying needs. In so doing, the dyad can collaborate on the joint problem of meeting the mother’s need – how to *keep the daughter dry* -- while simultaneously meeting the daughter’s desire -- *looking stylish*. In so doing, they may create a solution that neither could have conceived of while working alone – wearing the mother’s old but cool “retro” jacket to school.

Deep Sociality: Managing the Dialectic Between Power and Communion

Fostering constructive political discourse is complicated by a series of obstacles. First, the needs and interests that underlie opposing political positions rarely stand alone. Instead, they are *historically, culturally, and ideologically embedded* and cannot be understood apart from the larger systems of meaning and value in which they are embedded (Balliet, Tybur, Wu, Antonellis & Van Lange, 2018). Second, political disputes tend to precipitate and be precipitated by threats to the *dignity, public identity* and *face* of disputing parties (Fukuyama, 2018; Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008). Third, political discourse often occurs in social relations characterized by a differential of *power* (Rouhana, 2017). Addressing these problems requires the capacity to position the self in relation to socio-culturally and ideologically-structured meaning systems and practice. These are problems of *sociality* (Butt, 1996; Kelly, 1955; Procter, 2014).

The concept of *sociality* has its origins in Kelly’s (1955) sociality corollary: “To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person” (p. xx). Sociality refers to the idea that genuine social engagement is mediated by the processes by which social partners construe the meaning systems of their interlocutors (Butt, 1998; Leitner & Thomas, 2003; Procter, 2016; Stojnov, 2003). In a political dispute, partners are typically immediately aware of each other’s clashing positions. However, they are not always aware of the needs, interests, historical grievances, indignities, and fears that motivate those positions – or even that their opponents may have different needs and interests that they are seeking to meet. A first step to identifying the interests and needs is to recognize that political others have needs and interests *of their own*,

and thus that those concerns may be different from those of the self. The quest to identify, understand and appreciate the underlying needs, concerns, identities and emotional dispositions of the political other are acts of sociality.

In political discourse, acts of sociality are complicated by the fact that other is experienced as a threat to the self. When one's interlocutor occupies a position of greater power, sociality often gives way to hostility and defensiveness (Kelly, 1969; Winter, 2019). In this regard, *deep sociality* refers to the process of engaging in sociality in circumstances in which one's interests are threatened. Deep sociality requires interlocutors to temporarily *bracket* their *own* deep-seated needs and concerns – the very needs and concerns that may be threatened by the political other – in order to play a role in a social process with the other. Deep sociality serves a dual purpose: When acting out of *self-interest* – and especially in contexts involving a differential of power, deep sociality functions to identify what is possible at any given discursive encounter. When acting out of *concern for the other*, deep sociality helps the interlocutor acknowledge and understand *humanity* of their opponents (Stojnov, 2003). In what follows, I examine the role of deep sociality in managing different aspects of the process of dialectical engagement.

Identifying Socio-Cultural and Ideologically-Embedded Interests

In a conflict, not only are parties often unaware of the interests and needs and ideologies that motivate their opponents to adopt different positions, they are often unaware of their own interests and needs. In a conflict, while people typically become immediately aware of each other's *positions* on an issue, they are not always aware that there are deeper motives, beliefs and values that organize those positions. An early step in fostering deep sociality is to promote awareness of the distinction between surface positions and underlying needs, that all parties to a conflict are motivated by underlying needs, and that the needs of the political other may be different from those of the self. Further, the needs and interests of any given party to a political conflict rarely if ever stand alone. Instead, interests are defined with reference to ideological, cultural, religious and historical systems of meaning and value (Shapiro, 2017). Interests and political ideologies structure each other. As a result, in political discourse, deep sociality takes the form of understanding the ways in which underlying needs are constituted by cultural and ideological systems in which they are embedded. For example, a mother who wants to solve the problem of why her daughter does not want to wear a raincoat must seek to understand her daughter's social identifications – that the daughter is invested in her friends' opinions; local sartorial conventions; the role of peer hierarchies, and so forth. The difficulty of this task becomes amplified in political contexts in which opponents identify with vastly different ideological beliefs, values and frameworks.

Engaging the Humanity of the Other

Framed as a contest or battle over positions, adversarial problem-solving becomes driven not simply by the local issues at hand, but also by the human desire to maintain dignity and avoid humiliation (Kteily, Hodson & Bruneau, 2016). For example, in the context of a debate, election, social movement or violent struggle, the goal is to *win*. Winning creates feelings of pride and esteem, where losing brings forth humiliation and shame (Kteily, Hodson & Bruneau, 2016). In political contexts, this problem of maintain dignity is exacerbated when feelings of marginalization are themselves the source of the conflict at hand, and when political discourse occurs between persons with ideological identifications and moral conviction. In such

contexts, expressions of political differences can be experienced as a threat to identity yielding defensiveness and the escalation of mutual hostility. Similarly, to the extent that conflicts arise from thwarted motives of those involved, they are typically accompanied by strong emotion (Clifford, 2018; Nair, 2008). The presence of negative emotion often interferes with the process of identifying core needs and concerns (Gervais, 2018; Halperin, 2014). In this way, the needs that define social conflicts extend beyond those involved in the dispute itself. It follows that effective political discourse is inseparable from relationship building. Effective political discourse thus requires deep attention to recognizing and affirming the *dignity, personhood* and *humanity* of the other – especially under conditions of deep disagreement (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008).

The act of engaging the humanity of a political other requires the cultivation of a suite of *values, emotions* and *skills* that depart dramatically from traditional modes of political communication (Boss, Boss, Dunford, Perrigino & Boss, 2018; Coleman & Prywes, 2014). It reflects (a) commitments to the *dignity* of the other (Kelman, 2008), *deep curiosity* about the experience of the other (Picard & Jull, 2011), and *care* for the mutual well-being of self and other (Kelman, 2008). It is mediated by (b) *emotions* like political and moral *humility, empathy*, and *compassion* (Seu & Cameron, 2013). It requires the construction of (c) *skills* for seeking to identify *interests* through *the positions* expressed by the other (Seu & Cameron, 2013), *emotional self-regulation* while experiencing contrary views expressed by the other (Halperin, 2014), experiencing the world through the eyes of others who hold deeply contrary positions (Zohar, 2003); and *expressing* the self without blaming or disparaging the dispositions of the other (Sinclair & Monk, 2004). In political discourse, deep sociality offers a space for the other to not only *express* their needs, emotions, grievances, and ideologies, but to also have those expressions *accepted as valid forms of experience* --- even if partners *oppose* the actual positions expressed (Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008). Although difficult, the capacity for deep sociality is a skill that can be cultivated (Jazaieri, 2018; Halperin, 2014; Peterson & Ferguson, 2014) and fostered through appropriate support systems (Kelman, 2010; Talesh, 2012). Deep sociality tends to have the effect of producing feelings of trust, compassion, empathy and humility among social partners, as well as a willingness to engage in more open dialogue (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Lewicki, Elgoibar & Euwema, 2016).

Managing Power and Powerlessness

Managing power differentials is central aspect of political engagement. As noted by Kelly (1955), Winter (2019) and others, sociality is not the same as care, empathy, or concern for others. While sociality facilitates actions based upon care, compassion and connection, it also mediates how people use and relate to power -- whether wielding it, responding to it, regulating it, or using it in the service of shared interests. Managing power and powerlessness requires sociality in the sense of becoming aware of the ways systems of power operates between self and other and within broader systems of social relation. Cultivating and managing power -- particular under conditions of powerlessness -- are necessary components of resolving political conflict. It is part of the dialectical relation between agency and communion.

Traditional sociological frameworks define *power* in terms of the capacity of one party to advance its will over the objections of another (Rutar, 2018). Power influences political problem-solving in direct and indirect ways. Asymmetries in power are ubiquitous and occur routinely in cases of political conflict (Rouhana, 2004). Embracing values such as equality,

inclusion and due process, liberal democracies strive to produce conditions that seek to reduce power differentials within public discourse. From this view, political problem-solving should occur in what Habermas (1981) calls an *ideal speech situation* – a context in which communication among individuals is governed by basic *presuppositions of argumentation* that ensure inclusion, rationality and non-coercion. However, even under the most optimal circumstances, political discourse rarely approximates the standards of an ideal speech situation. However, even under conditions congenial to an ideal speech situation, the effects of power are never entirely eliminated. This is because power is not a mere property of individual constituencies. As advanced by Foucault (2000), Bourdieu (1991) and others (Haywood, 2000), power is not so much a centralized capacity or commodity as it is a *form or relating* that operates outside of the direct control of any particular individual or political constituency. The exercise of power is mediated by processes that extend beyond individuals -- by shared meanings, norms and practices that are represented in language and distributed throughout the various forms of life that operate in a given society (Foucault, 2000; Rutar, 2018; Välikangas & Seeck, 2011). In political discourse, power operates in the ways in which interlocutors invoke and use language; in the moral status afforded to some forms of knowledge over others; in ways in which political speech and speech situations are organized; in the status conferred upon mediators and those who are allowed to speak; in the very forms of language used to articulate a position, and so forth.

Perhaps the primary process managing power relations is becoming *aware* of power differentials between constituencies (Rouhana, 2004; Wiseman & Poitras, 2002) as well as how systems of power operate independent of the will of particular constituents (Haywood, 2000; Foucault, 2000). Failure to acknowledge direct and indirect expressions of power tend to produce ineffective strategies and poor outcomes. Working with an awareness of the structure of power, conflict resolution processes are more likely to be successful when subordinate parties are able to identify what is possible within existing power structures (Wiseman & Poitras, 2002). A particularly strong source of influence in the context of the differential of power is to propose solutions to problems that advance shared or interdependent goals (Deutsch, 1979; Coleman, Mitchinson, Chung, Musallam, 2010) or which otherwise are consistent with interests and values of more powerful constituencies (Margeian, Lambert, LaTorre & Mascolo, in press). Within hierarchical organizations, this may mean working within the existing categories and procedures of the hierarchy, ensuring that superiors remain respected, and identifying the ways in which solutions to problems are consistent the interests of superiors (Wiseman & Poitras, 2002). Powerful interlocutors are more likely to engage in conflict management in contexts where actual solutions can be identified; if the moral empathic sense of the powerful other is evoked; if coalitions can be forged with factions within opposing organizations (Rouhana, 2004).

Beyond the particular content at issue in any given dispute, power differentials themselves tend to be inherently provocative. The injustice of inequality tends to breed indignation, which evokes a desire for aggressive confrontation. In the context of polarization and partisan politics, aggressive confrontation, including acts of confrontation, shaming and “calling out” on the part of marginalized groups, tends to foster further polarization, defensiveness, and hostility (Gervais, 2018; Mitchell, 2018; Willis, 2017). Deep power differentials call for radical strategies that can channelize more powerful others into meaningful

forms of conflict resolution. Such strategies are reflected in programs of non-cooperation and non-violent resistance. Examples of such movements include the influence of Gandhi in overthrowing British colonialism in India (Parel, 2009; Steger, 2001); the work of Mandela, Tutu and others in upending apartheid in South Africa (Ettang, 2014; Hostetter, 2007) as well as the Truth and Reconciliation processes that facilitated it (Bhargava, 2016; Rouhana, 2017); and the leadership of Martin Luther King in the American struggle for civil rights (Hunt, 2004). In each of these movements, marginalized and oppressed groups were able to seize moral power through a process of identifying the limits of what they could and could not control directly, and, through non-violence, exposing the wrongs of the other to the world's gaze (Ettang, 2014; Slaughter, 2003). Thus, under conditions of powerlessness, conflict resolution often begins with the capacity to say "no" (Ury, 2007).

Third party systems – mediators, government, non-governmental organizations – are often recruited to mitigate power differentials and bring conflicting parties into dialogue. In large-scale political conflicts, such endeavors have had mixed effects. On the one hand, they have been successful in mediating agreements among factions involved in violent conflict (Bhargava, 2016; Burg, 2007; Kluczevska, 2017). On the other hand, efforts to mediate are often complicated by a failure to recognize the complexities of the local conditions (Stein, 2001); inadequate inclusion of local constituents and understanding of long standing grievances (Yabanci, 2016); bias and lack of transparency in the mediating process (De Zeeuw, 2005); mistrust of the motives and mechanisms of mediators (Kluczevska, 2017) and related problems. The process of mediation and conflict resolution requires both sociality and reflexivity. It requires sociality to appreciate the grievances, beliefs, values and commitments of involved parties; it requires reflexivity so that mediators can identify the ways in which their own explicit and implicit assumptions affect the process of political engagement.

Dialectical Engagement in Political Discourse

In what follows, in broad strokes, I outline how the principles of dialectical engagement can provide an alternative to adversarial forms of political discourse. In so doing, I illustrate these principles in the context of an analysis of political discourse related to gun violence in the United States. In the United States, gun violence has long been a contentious political issue. In 2017, there were 39,773 gun-related deaths, including 23,845 suicides and 14,639 homicides and accidental deaths. There were 340 "mass shootings", (defined as shootings involving 3 or more deaths per incident) (gunviolencearchive.com). The United States leads the world in the number of civilians who own guns (approximately 120 firearms per 100 residents) (bbc.com). In 2017, the rate of death due to gun violence was approximately 12 deaths per 100,000 people (NYT), the 28th highest level in the world, and the highest in all economically advantaged nations (cnn.com).

The Limits of Political Positioning

Citizens of the United States are evenly divided on the issue of gun control, with about half advocating the need for some form of "gun regulation" and the other half arguing in favor of protecting some form of "gun-rights". The gun control debate spans many issues, including the extent to which the Second Amendment to the Constitution guarantees a right to "bear

arms¹; the degree of effectiveness of gun control legislation; the desire for self-protection; the need for private gun ownership to protect against the possibility of government tyranny; the right to freedom and privacy; and others (gun-control.procon.org).

Table 1
Forms of Discursive Positioning

POSITIONAL FORM	DEFINITION
POSITION	Statement of stance on an issue
COUNTER	Argument made to refute stance taken by other.
REDIRECT →	Attempt to focus the discussion in a different direction
CLARIFY	Questioning
DEFEND	Argument made to support counter advanced by other.
EVIDENCE	Invocation of data to support point
SOLUTION	Indicating approach toward resolving issue
IRONY	Expressing meaning through opposition for rhetorical effect

Like most debates, debates about gun violence take the form of a contest between positions. The following consists of an excerpt of a debate between two professors on the question of gun control. In what follows, drawing on the classifications identified in Table 1, the content of each conversational turn is classified into a series of discursive moves. Each discursive move identifies the function of the conversational content in the debate format.

A: Does gun control violate the Second Amendment?

B: Yes, (**POSITION**) guns do not kill people, people kill people. (**REDIRECT → POSITION**) I don't understand why you want to keep trying to isolate the attention on guns. (**REDIRECT → SOLUTION**) Let's go after the people that misuse guns. Doesn't make any sense to me.

A: Now, B, we do regulate automobiles? (**REDIRECT → POSITION**) Automobiles also kill people (**COUNTER**); or is it people that cars kill people who happen to be driving cars? (**IRONY**);

B: If automobiles kill people, let's get rid of them all like you want to do. Let's put safety latches on the doors and stuff like that or (**COUNTER, IRONY**)

A: I don't want to get rid of all of them, but (**DEFEND**)

B: Dogs kill people. Let's get rid of dogs in society (**COUNTER, IRONY**).

A: But since you're making it a matter of scale or a matter of availability, there are currently more guns or enough guns on the streets of America today to basically give two to every adult in America (**REDIRECT → EVIDENCE, POSITION**)

B: What's your point? There's a lot of guns (**CLARIFY, POSITION**).

A: We don't need that many (**POSITION**).

B: So, there's a lot of them in the United States. Do we get rid of stuff there's a lot of? (**COUNTER**)

¹ Much debate makes reference to conflicting interpretations of the Second Amendment to the *Constitution of the United States*, which states: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed". Some argue that gun rights are protected by the Amendment's reference to the "right to keep and bears arms"; others hold that this right refers primarily to the need for a "well regulated Militia".

A: M&Ms don't kill people, but guns do. (**COUNTER**)

B: No, that's a good point. You could choke on an M&M. Should we get rid of the M&Ms? (**COUNTER**) I mean, there are people who are doing individual behavior and we're trying to take stuff away from them and not address the behavior (**POSITION**).

A: But let's go to the original question: does the Second Amendment guarantee every person in this country the right to own a gun? (**REDIRECT**)

As a debate, it is perhaps not surprising that each conversational turn involves some form of adversarial positioning – most notably the assertion of positions and counter-positions. The debate continues for a total of 91 conversational turns. Of those conversational turns, only one includes a mention of an underlying *interest, need or problem* that motivates and structures the positions being adopted. This was a statement, offered by the gun rights proponent (B), about his desire to be able to protect himself from an intruder:

What am I supposed to do? Dial 911? Wait for a minute while this person kills all of us?

(**IMPLIED NEED**) Why can't I protect myself? (**COUNTER**) I can't protect myself against a gun.

(**NEED**) We are not going to get rid of guns in our society. (**POSITION**)

Collaborative problem-solving provides an alternative to the political discourse based on debate. Had the interlocutors sought to identify the underlying interests, needs and problems that they were seeking to address – fear of intruders; reducing homicides and suicides; desire for freedom; fear of guns, etc. – they would have opened up the possibility of collaboration toward the goal of constructing novel ways to meet the full complement of concerns presented by both parties to the maximum extent possible. Specific examples of how this can occur are provided below.

Dialectically-Engaged Political Problem-Solving

Figure 3 describes a multi-step process of *dialectical engagement* that has applications to political discourse and problem-solving. The process is composed of multiply-embedded processes that are intended to operate over relatively long periods of time. The dialectical process is organized into three broad phases: (a) connecting with the humanity of the other; (b) collaborative coordination of needs and interests, and (c) dialectical development of joint ideologies and identities. I illustrate the process by drawing upon political discourse as it relates to gun violence in the United States.

Engaging the Humanity of the Other. The first moment in the process of dialogical engagement involves connecting with the humanity of the other through deep sociality. This is shown in the bottom panel of Figure 3. Building upon the values, emotions and skills that support the process of empathic engagement (see above), the primary goal of engaging the other is to establish conditions of trust, safety and openness required in order to make it possible to address sensitive and divisive political issues in an open and non-hostile way. There are many ways to begin to establish such conditions (Peterson & Ferguson, 2014). Research shows, for example, that the most effective way to reduce intergroup prejudice involves bringing in- and out-groups together to engage in joint activity directed toward achieving a common goal (Dovidio, Love, Schellhaas, & Hewstone, 2017). In such contexts, stereotypes can be dislodged, and people can begin to look past existing bias in order to experience the humanity of the other.

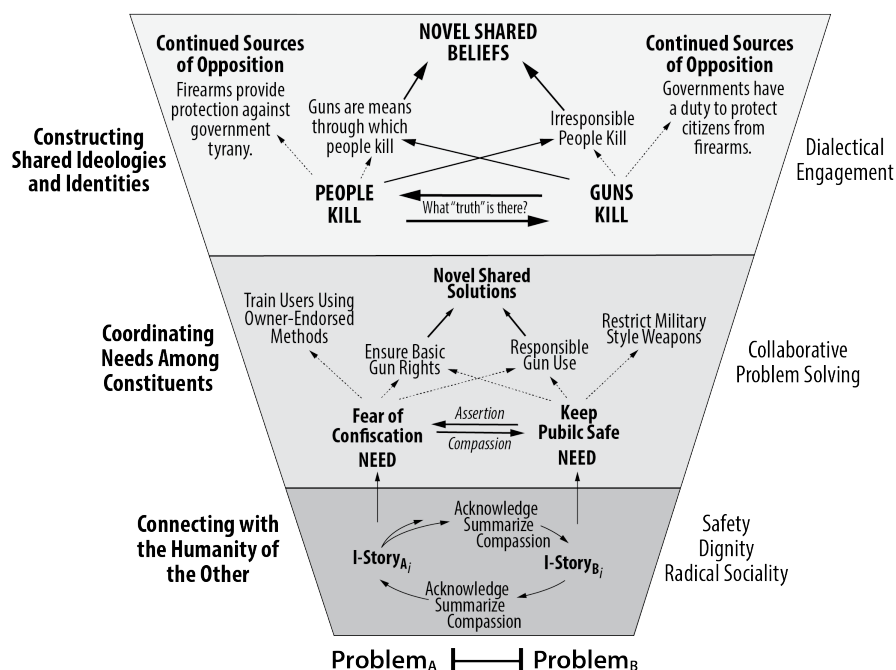


Figure 3: The Dialectical Development of Shared Solutions and Novel Ideologies

Another means for empathic engagement involves creating contexts that support the capacity for members of different groups through storytelling (Neimeyer, 1994; Viney, 1993). Again, drawing upon the values, emotions and skills that support deep sociality, the goal of shared storytelling is to provide a forum in which interlocutors can appreciate the human needs and experiences that motivate political positions that may be experienced as repugnant (Moyer-Gusé, Dale & Ortiz, 2018; Stojnov, 2003). Research suggests that the privileging of emotion and sociality over argumentation is critical in order to establish initial and evolving conditions of trust and mutual acceptance (Lewicki, Elgoibar, & Euwema, 2016; Nair, 2008; Peterson & Ferguson, 2014). In the context of the issue of gun violence, the following slices of narrative express human needs and interests without competitiveness or rancor:

It starts with the consciousness of a *threat*. Perhaps not the kind of threat my family has experienced. Some people experience more. Some less. And some people don't experience a threat at all—but they're aware of those who do. With the consciousness of a *threat* comes the *awareness of a vulnerability*. The police can only protect the people you love in the most limited of circumstances (with those limits growing ever-more-severe the farther you live from a city center.) *You want to stand in that gap.* (French, 2018, emphasis added)

On Feb. 14, 1964, my friend, Laurie Beth Cox, was murdered. Her mother, just released from a mental institution, walked to the Montgomery Ward in Falls Church, Va., and bought a gun. One by one, she pulled the trigger. Laurie, 11. Bang. Danny, 14. Bang. Joel,

2. Bang. Timothy, 4 months. Bang. Then Mrs. Cox killed herself. Bang. Laurie's hair was golden red. She had freckles and a big grin. *I hate guns*. (Lagorio, 2018, emphasis added).

Under the appropriate conditions, providing opportunities for storytelling allows people to express their experiences in ways that reveal the needs, interests, feelings and concerns that motivate political positions. In the cases describe above, both French and Lagorio describe experiences of either actual gun violence or threats of gun violence committed against them. These events created different experiences of need. French's (2018) desire to carry a firearm is motivated by the experience of *threat* and his desire to be able to *protect* himself and his loved ones. Lagorio's (2018) multiple encounters with acts of gun violence, including the loss of her son to suicide, simply evokes raw emotion: "I hate guns". The capacity for storytelling helps to humanize the person behind the position, sets up the possibility of constructive dialogue, and provides opportunities for the development of trust and collaboration.

Collaborative Coordination of Needs and Interests. Recognizing the humanity of the other, it becomes possible to separate needs and interests from political positions and begin the process of collaboration for the purposes of meeting the needs and interests of each constituency. There is a broad range of basic interests that motivate both gun rights and gun control advocates. The middle panel of Figure 3 identifies two basic interests as a simple starting point for collaborative problem solving. A central interest for gun control advocates is to *promote public safety or protect the public from gun-mediated violence*. Within the context of the gun debate, many gun owners fear that gun control advocates seek to ban all firearms; gun owners thus have an interest in being assured that their *firearms will not be confiscated*.

For collaborative problem solving to occur, a first step requires that each party understand, accept or even have compassion for the interests of the other – even if one party were to oppose the interests of the other. Having established a baseline of mutual acceptance (if not agreement), a next step would be to establish if the two interests were *compatible*. Much depends, of course, on how interests are represented and communicated. Nonetheless, one would expect most gun owners to share the basic interest of *protecting the public from gun violence*. Further, research suggests that among citizens of the United States, only a small minority endorse a full ban on all firearms. To the extent that the gun owner can be assured that basic gun rights would be protected, collaborators may conclude that interests in *protecting the public from gun violence* and *assuring that all guns will not be confiscated* are not incompatible interests.

Given this particular pair of compatible interests, collaborative problem solving can begin as the task of seeking novel strategies to begin to meet both sets of interests simultaneously. An initial set of steps might include agreement that promoting what might be called "responsible gun usage" could begin to reduce gun violence without instituting any sort of firearm ban. It might be possible to agree that already existing procedures – including those already invoked by large proportions of gun owners – could inform a movement toward providing firearm training. Still further, assured that the gun control advocate is not calling for a ban on all firearms, collaboration between the owner and the advocate can occur on what firearms, if any, might be restricted. For example, the vast majority of the American citizens – including gun owners -- approve of some form of restriction on military-style weapons (Igielnik

& Brown, 2017). Thus, in the context of compatible interests and assurances, collaboration can result in a variety of initial, mutually-agreed upon ideas for meeting the particular needs identified. Collaboration would ensue to coordinate such initial strategies into actual solutions².

Dialectical Development of Novel Ideologies and Identities. While the goal of a debate is to win, the goal of dialectical problem-solving is to identify the sources of conflicting ideological claims and resolve them collaboratively. In place of the adversarial process of seeking to defend one assertion against the other, dialectical problem-solving operates by (a) identifying what “truths” -- forms of agreement -- if any, can be found in opposing assertions; (b) differentiating individual assertions in order to accommodate to those “truths”; and (c) identifying and clarifying continued differences that remain between conflicting perspectives as the process continues. The possibility of constructing novel ideologies arises from the emerging capacity to collaboratively integrate increasingly differentiated forms of each assertion into an increasingly higher-order and shared structure.

In this context, the process of dialectically seeking out “truths” in the Other is a deeply relational one (Basseches & Brandao, in press; Mascolo & Kallio, in press). It is not merely or even primarily one of identifying facts, asserting reasons, or seeking strategies to convince the other of the merits of one’s own view. Instead, it consists of the process of seeking to establish *intersubjective foundations* – newly articulated forms of *shared experience* -- upon which to build new ways to understand and act in the world (Mascolo, 2016). Such forms of intersubjectivity can begin through attempts to identify and coordinate partially-shared aspects of experience -- elements of emotion, understanding, values, knowledge -- into increasingly shared webs of experience. Such intersubjective webs can integrate the experience of relatively few or relatively more people. The most adequate web, of course, would be one that integrates the experience of all people. Thus, as a proactive process of seeking ways to coordinate opposing perspectives, the act of identifying “truths” in the other is itself a constructive one. It occurs when parties actively seek to *differentiate* a kernel of resonance from what might otherwise be a thicket of opposition. To the extent that such forms of deep engagement occur against the backdrop of evolving trust and concern for the needs and well-being of the other, the act of identifying “truths” in opposing assertions need not be experienced as threatening to either the self or the other.

The ideologies and identities of gun-rights and gun-control advocates are complex and variegated. Like other political issues, they exist along a continuum, and tend to be more homogeneous at the extremes. The top panel of Figure 3 illustrates the dialectical process of creating ideologies through the integration of (differentiated) opposites. To simplify, we begin

² The interests and problem-solving strategies indicated in Figure 5 are intentionally hypothetical and illustrative and not prescriptive. The strength of collaborative problem solving lies in the relational process itself – the idea that novel ways of representing and addressing problems can arise that could not be specified prior to joint problem-solving. Thus, while the interests and strategies depicted in Figure 5 may seem relatively uncontroversial, offering particular ways of representing or addressing a given issue runs the risk of pre-empting and misrepresenting the open-ended nature of the collaborative process.

with the common argument organized around the assertion advanced by many gun-rights advocates: “guns don’t kill people, people do.” This phrase is often invoked by gun-rights advocates to make the point that, by themselves, firearms are mere tools – objects used for human purposes. As such, gun-violence cannot be attributed to the firearm itself, but instead to the qualities of the person using the firearm. Gun-control advocates often counter this assertion with the claim that the availability of firearms increases the likelihood of gun-related violence. In this sense, “guns kill”.

The clash between “people kill people” and “guns kill people” provides the starting point for the collaborative deliberation shown in Figure 5. In the context of open-exploration and continuous clarification of opposing ideas, dialectical engagement of opposites begins by seeking to identify the “truths” that exist in the seemingly opposing assertions that “people kill people” and “guns kill people”. What is the meaning of “people kill people”? This statement is typically used to communicate the meaning that people -- not guns -- are the *agents* who perform acts of killing. Understood in contradistinction to “people kill people”, a statement like “guns kill people” cannot be taken literally. Instead, it implies that guns are *agencies* rather than *agents* of killing; that is, they are *tools* that people use to perform acts of killing. Given this differentiation in the meaning of these two phrases, it becomes possible to integrate them into the higher-order statement, “people use guns to kill people” or even, “while people, and not guns, kill other people, people use guns to kill people”. This novel statement integrates the now more differentiated lower-order statements into a higher-order statement that resolves the apparent contradiction between them.

While this statement resolves a contradiction between the conceptual meaning of two initial opposing positions, it does not resolve the ideological conflict itself. It does, however, provide a means for further dialectical deliberation. The statement “people use guns to kill people” raises a suite of questions: What are the qualities of people who use guns to kill other people? Is it possible to construct a shared image of a responsible gun user? At this point, it becomes possible to begin to refer to evidence that can inform the collaborative construction of answers to these questions. What is the role of the availability of firearms in killing? Is there evidence that mere availability increases the likelihood of gun violence? Is there evidence that responsible gun use can be taught? What solutions are available that respect the interests of both responsible gun owners and those who fear the proliferation of gun violence?

Over long periods of time, sustained dialectical engagement, fueled by deep sociality, can function as a means for the collaborative construction of joint ideologies and identities. Where possible, like most developmental processes, progress toward such ends is likely to move in a non-linear sequence of forward movements and backward transitions (Mascolo & Fischer, 2010). Because of this, success in constructing shared ideologies and identities is most likely to be partial. In other cases, where the prospect for creating joint ideologies is limited, progress might simply take the form of a mutual understanding of opposing positions, supplemented by procedures for working together in the presence of opposition (Kahane, 2017; Zohar, 2003). Such outcomes have proven to be sustaining in many situations involving protracted conflict.

Conclusion: Dialectics, Sociality and Relational Being

Kelly’s (1955) sociality corollary maintains that the capacity to engage in a social activity relies upon acts of sociality – the capacity to engage the construction processes of the other.

Deep sociality take the process one step further. It underscores the need to *bracket* – but *never eliminate* – the inviolate needs, feelings and belief of the self for as long as it takes to engage the humanity of the other. Deep sociality provides a necessary but not sufficient foundation for bridging social divides -- political or otherwise. In political discourse, deep sociality takes many forms. Through the process of separating ideological positions from the human needs, feelings and pleas that motivate them, it becomes possible to humanize the political other. By seeking to solve joint problems rather than defend individual positions, it becomes possible to construct novel ways to discover and meet compatible needs between opposing parties. Through the collaborative process of dialectical engagement, opposing parties can construct novel systems of shared belief that can begin to bridge polarizing identifications and ideological divides.

In dialectical engagement, invoking the concept of *deep sociality* does not imply an attitude of appeasement, a willingness to “give in” or to “split the difference”. To the extent that dialectical engagement is successful in resolving conflict through the *synthesis* of novel frameworks, it does so through acts of *integration*. While the individual needs, interests, beliefs and positions may be transformed in the open-ended process of dialectical engagement, no party is called upon to “give in” on their core interests (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 2011) or sacred values (Shapiro, 2015). Similarly, while deep sociality embraces the notion of deep appreciation and acceptance of the other, it does not call upon people to agree with the beliefs that they may come to understand. Genuine integration, when it occurs, is a developmental achievement that provides a way to incorporate core needs and values, however transformed by the process. In this way, neither self-interest nor care for the other primary; they operate in relation to each other in the process of individual and joint development.

The relational conception of personhood has deep implications for the concept of identity and its role in contemporary political discourse (Moran, 2015; Taylor, 1994). Some scholars have argued that the politics of identity and recognition play a significant role in polarizing political discourse among partisan elites (Fukuyama, 2019). Organized around an adversarial approach to political discourse (Figure 1), in a noble effort to achieve equal rights for marginalized groups, identity-based political movements run the risk of pitting the rights of different identity groups against each other. A relational-dialectical view offers an alternative to political discourse organized around clashing group identities. From a relational point of view, identities are products of *relational* rather than *individual* activity; they are a product of processes that occur *between* individuals and groups rather than processes that occur simply *within* individuals and groups (Mascolo & Di Bianca-Fasoli, in press; Shotter, 2017). The process of cultivating an identity is a relational process; no individual or group is able to establish an identity by themselves. As a result, political discourse that pits the claims of one identity group against another is a form of positional bargaining. It treats political process as a zero-sum game in which one party’s gain comes at the expense of the other. It fails to recognize the mutual dependence of each party on the other – that is, the ways in which meeting the needs of the self is dependent upon meeting the needs of the other. The relational framework provides a means for fostering mutual development of conflicting parties through dialectical engagement.

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