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Diana Marginean, Sarah Lambert Derian, Joseph LaTorre & Michael F. Mascolo

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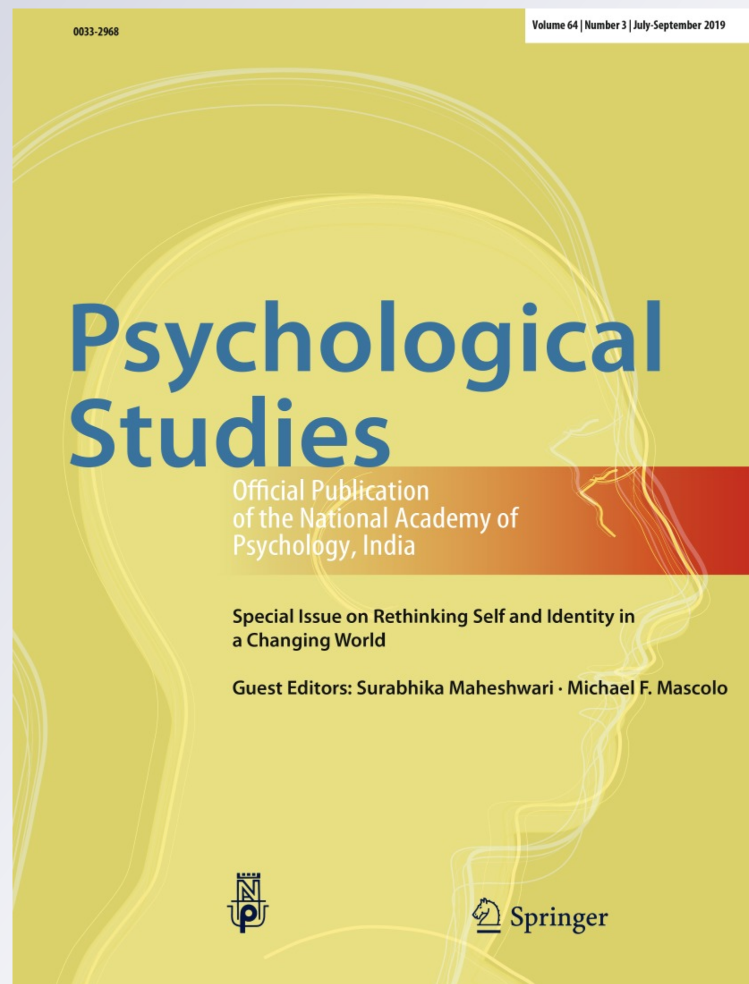

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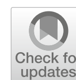

REVIEW ARTICLE

Constructing Intercultural Selves: Bridging Cultural Conflict Through Dialectical Engagement

Diana Marginean[1] · Sarah Lambert Derian[3] · Joseph LaTorre[2] · Michael F. Mascolo[1]

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Abstract This paper outlines a relational–dialectical approach to managing cultural diversity. Instead of looking at cultural diversity either through the lens of ethnocentrism or multiculturalism, the relational–dialectical view embraces the goal of creating *intercultural* selves and communities. The relational approach seeks ways to bridge cultural conflict through *radical sociality* and *dialectical engagement.* The process is organized around three principles: (a) engaging the humanity of the cultural other, (b) identifying culturally embedded needs, values and ideologies of conflicting individuals and groups, and (c) synthesizing novel forms of meaning and relating through the process of *dialectical engagement*. As a form of collaborative problem solving, dialectical engagement is the process of constructing novel ways of being and relating through the integration of opposites. We illustrate the process with the example of intercultural dialogue between a Bhutanese-American woman and her family.

Keywords Conflict resolution · Intercultural · Relational selves · Dialectical thinking · Collaborative problem solving

We live in a rapidly changing, fragmented, and postmodern world. At no time in history have we ever been more easily exposed to diverse ways of being. For many people who live in wealthy countries, travel across long distances has never been easier. At the other end of the extreme, others are forced to relocate or migrate as a result of economic deprivation or social unrest. Both social opportunity and disorder have resulted in mass immigration across national and cultural lines. As a result of the internet, social media, and other forms of electronic communication, individuals are increasingly freed from the communicative constraints of time and place. As a result, more than ever before, humans are able to find themselves exposed to diverse others, whose beliefs and practices collide with foundational assumptions about the nature of ourselves and the world in which we live. How does any individual person or group position themselves in the context of radical difference in culture, self, and personhood?

Power, Multiculturalism, and the Intercultural Alternative

There are many ways of approaching the problems posed by radical diversity. A common approach is to think of cultural conflict from the universalizing standpoint of *self-interest*, *power,* and *superiority*. Self-interest is often accompanied by a universalizing sense of morality in which the in-group's beliefs and values are experienced as morally superior. When the interests of an in-group are threatened, the out-group is seen as an opposing force whose beliefs and values are experienced as strange, inhuman, or morally inferior. In such circumstances, conflict often reduces to power struggle between opposing positions and values—a zero-sum battle in which one group wins and the other loses. In-groups muster whatever power and resources they can to mobilize against the out-group.

✉ Michael F. Mascolo
mascolom@merrimack.edu

[1] Merrimack College, North Andover, USA

[2] Harvard Graduate School of Divinity, Cambridge, USA

[3] Manchester, New Hampshire, USA

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An alternative to universalizing approach is founded in classic liberal values of pluralism, tolerance, and debate. While the universalizing approach proceeds from the standpoint of dominance and moral superiority, liberalism is based on a respect for the plurality of competing conceptions of the good. Within pluralism, no single cultural or moral position can claim primacy. Pluralism embraces the idea of tolerance among competing individual, social, and cultural belief systems. Differences are resolved through debate, persuasion, and compromise rather than the assertion of power. Multiculturalism consists of an extension of the concept of pluralism. Multiculturalism refers to the idea the coexistence of diverse cultures—within a nation or locality. Multiculturalist views often seek to move beyond mere *tolerance* of diverse cultural, religious, or linguistic traditions in order to embrace a *respect* for cultural diversity (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994) or, alternatively, *neutrality* with respect to cultural differences (Barry, 1995). Within a multicultural society, individual cultural groups are free to pursue their own cultural paths. In this way, multiculturalism stands in contrast with assimilationist conceptions, which embrace the idea of a dominant culture in which minority groups are eventually expected to accommodate to the dominant culture.

In recent years, difficulties with the multiculturalist view have become apparent. Critics have suggested that, at its extremes, multiculturalism encourages moral relativism and social fragmentation. It implies forms of cultural essentialism and determinism that foster rather than resolve social conflict (Levrau & Loobuyck, 2018; Raeder, 2017). Scholars have indicated the decline multiculturalism in both theoretical and public policy circles (Imbert, 2017; Joppke, 2014; Kymlicka, 2018) and have pointed to the rise of ethnocentrism, populism, nationalism, as well as cultural and religious bias that has accompanied mass immigration (Blake, 2017; Heath & Demireva, 2014). The demise of multiculturalism is felt especially in reaction to the challenge of Islam in the West (Igarashi, 2019; Mohiuddin, 2017). Such movements have prompted the quest for alternatives to both multiculturalism and nationalism. Scholars have offered *intercultural* perspectives that replace or work alongside (Loobuyck & Levrau, 2013) of multicultural approaches to managing social, cultural, and religious diversity (Caponio & Donatiello, 2017; Zapata-Barrero, 2017).

Instead of preserving sharp boundaries between and among cultural groups, interculturalism (Zapata-Barrero, 2017) seeks ways to establish dialogue between cultural groups for the purposes of fostering greater cohesion. Interculturalism embraces the ideals of connectedness and engagement between and among diverse communities. Instead of thinking of social and cultural groups as monolithic and bounded entities, interculturalism views cultures as moving and mixing and capable of transformation through deep engagement (Ghorayshi, 2010). Through intercultural dialogue, interculturalism holds out the possibility of creating new ways of being in the world through the integration and synthesis of differences. Intercultural discourse holds out the opportunity to create novel forms of relating (Levrau, 2018), hybrid communities (Ang & Stratton, 2018; Gomorasca, 2013) and other ways of coordinating diversity (Rodríguez-García, 2010).

Coordinating Diversity Through Dialectical Engagement

A relational–dialectical framework provides an alternative to adversarial approaches to sociocultural, political, and ideological conflict (Brincat, 2011; Weiss & Hughes, 2010). Founded upon individualistic assumptions, adversarial approaches represent conflict as a competition over clashing self-interests. In contrast, the dialectical approach is organized around a *relational* conception of personhood (Basseches, 1984; Gergen, 2009; Gottlieb, 2007; Lerner & Overton, 2017; Overton, 2013; Mascolo, this volume; Mascolo & Di Bianca-Fasoli, in press) conceptions of human psychological functioning. Persons are not encased and bounded entities motivated primarily by self-interest. Instead, persons are *relational beings* (Gergen, 2009) who develop through their relationships with each other (Mascolo, 2013). Self and other make each other up over the course of their development (Shweder, 1991). Human survival and development are dependent upon the relational capacity for collaboration and cooperation (Tomasello, 2016).

Within a relational framework, humans are neither selfish nor selfless. Human motivation operates within a dialectical tension between *self-interest* and *concern for the other* (Walker & Frimer, 2015). This dynamic has been alternatively understood in terms of the dialectic between *autonomy* and *communion* (Bauer & McAdams, 2000), *power and love* (Kahane, 2017), *separateness* and *connectedness* (Raeff, 2006), and *fear for the self* and *love for the other* (Macmurray, 1991/1961). Although one motivational pole may be dominant over the other in particular contexts, neither pole is primary in human relations. Humans act continuously within a relational dynamic between self-protection and communion with others.

Instead of thinking of interpersonal and intergroup conflict as a battle over clashing positions, the relational–dialectical approach views conflict as an opportunity for joint problem solving and development. Dialectical engagement refers to the process of constructing novel forms of meaning through the integration of opposites (Basseches, 1984; Mascolo, 2016, 2017, in press). Instead

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of seeking to avoid conflict or resolve it through power assertion, the dialectical approach acknowledges the ubiquity of conflict and seeks to engage it directly. The concept of dialectical engagement brings together theory and research on conflict management (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011; Kahane, 2017; Kelman, 2010, Sebenius, 2013; Shapiro, 2017), relational–developmental models of psychological development (Piaget, 1928–1965/1995; Kitchener, 1991; Mascolo & Bianca-Fasoli, in press), and models of dialectical thinking (Basseches, 1984; Basseches & Mascolo, 2010; Brincat, 2011; Mascolo, 2016, 2017). Building on these ideas, dialectical approach to intercultural transformation is organized around three basic principles and practices: (a) affirming the *humanity* of the other through *deep sociality*; (b) identifying culturally embedded *needs* of all parties; and (c) constructing new forms of relating through *dialectical problem solving*.

Deep Sociality

Genuine intercultural dialogue thus requires a willingness to adopt a *credulous* attitude toward the other. It requires what might be called *deep sociality*—the continuous process of seeking understand the needs, meanings, and values of the other (Butt, 1998; Kelly, 1955). This means not only seeking deep understanding of the cultural beliefs, values, and emotional commitments of the other, but also appreciating that—however, unfamiliar, strange, or inexplicable they may seem—those beliefs have *meaning* for the other. It is thus possible to understand—if not agree—with the actions of the other by understanding how the world makes sense to them.

Deep sociality is founded on affirming 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 the self and the other (Kelman, 2008). Against the backdrop of an inviolate commitment to preserve the integrity of the self, it is mediated by *humility*, *empathy*, and *compassion* (Seu & Cameron, 2013). In so doing, it offers a space in which the other can have their needs, emotions, grievances, and ideologies *accepted* as *valid forms of experience*—even when social partners *oppose* the actual positions expressed by each other (Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008; Zohar, 2003). Over time, deep sociality has the effect of promoting feelings of trust and openness in the other (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). Over time, sustained and authentic, expressions of sociality can engender feelings of compassion, empathy, and humility between and among social partners. Although difficult, the capacity for sociality is a skill that can be cultivated (Jazaieri et al., 2013; Halperin, 2014; Peterson & Ferguson, 2014) and fostered by establishing appropriate training systems of contextual support (Kelman, 2010; Talesh, 2012).

Deep sociality is simultaneously open-ended, reflexive, and cautious. Sociality is *open* to the idea that there may always be something in the experience of the other that is new and which can challenge our existing ways of thinking. As a result, sociality is *reflexive*; it requires that we examine what the other's experience reveals about our own ways of understanding the word. However, openness and reflexivity do not invalidate the beliefs, values, and practices of the self; they merely produce the self's beliefs into reflective objects of awareness. In a dispute, deep sociality is not self-abnegation: the core needs, beliefs, and values of both the self and the other are inviolate—at least until novel forms of meaning and practice can be developed that genuinely advance the interests of each group. Any change in the beliefs, ideologies, or practices of any party in a conflict must be under the control of the party themselves.

Identifying Culturally Embedded Needs and Values

Fisher et al. (2011) advocate a particular from of conflict management called *principled negotiation*. Principled negotiation provides an alternative to positional bargaining—which may be the most common way that people seek to manage conflict. In positional bargaining, each side takes a *position*—an initial sense of what a party wants out of a dispute. Having taken sides, negotiation then takes the form of bargaining over positions. Positional bargaining operates as a zero-sum game where advances by one party come at the expense of the other. In circumstances involving an asymmetry of power, the party with the more power can dominate at will. When parties are equal in power, a power struggle ensues. For example, a teacher assigns a paper to be completed by a certain deadline; citing hardship, the student requires an extension. If the teacher is willing, the teacher and student make a series of offers and counter-offers in arriving at an agreement about the deadline.

Principled negotiation provides an alternative to positional bargaining. Principled negotiation differentiates between *interests* from *positions*. While a position is a party's initial statement of what is wanted, *interests* refer to the underlying motives, goals, needs and desires that motivate a party to adopt the positions they do. Principled negotiation maintains the primacy of negotiating from interests—not positions. This is because while the positions between parties in a dispute may conflict, the interests that underlie those positions may not. By focusing on underlying interests rather than positions, it is often possible to construct novel ways to simultaneously meet each party's needs without either party having to give in. Conflict management becomes a form of *collaborative problem*

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solving (Kelman, 2010) moving beyond initial positions, parties work together to solve the problem of meeting other's underlying needs and interests.

For example, a professor and student experienced conflict over the student's inability to complete her work on time. The professor took the position that the student had ample time to complete her work. In contrast, the student adopted the position that because she had a full-time job, she had insufficient time to complete her work. Looking beyond these stated positions, the professor attempted to identify the underlying needs of the two parties. Both the teacher and student expressed the same underlying desire: to have the student complete her work so that she could pass the course. When asked about her job, the woman admitted that, because she lived with her family, she did not actually need the job for financial reasons. The pair agreed that the student would reduce her work hours and devote her efforts to school. This produced a solution that advanced the underlying interests of both student and professor.

In a dispute, it is helpful to think each party as engaged in a type of problem solving. Each party to a dispute seeks to solve the problem of advancing their interests. From this viewpoint, interests are problems while positions are solutions. In a typical dispute, a position is a kind of preemptive solution to a problem. In a battle over positions, parties bargain over solutions to unacknowledged and unstated problem. In this way, it is helpful to think of conflict resolution as a kind of collaborative problem solving—parties work together to solve the problem of advancing each other's interests in non-conflicting ways.

Meeting Culturally Embedded Needs

In disputes involving members of different cultural groups, the problem identifying and meeting core needs becomes difficult. This is because needs and interests do not exist independent of cultural beliefs, values, and ideologies. In intercultural conflict, the needs of members of any given cultural group are organized by cultural systems of meaning, value, and practice. It follows that one cannot seek to address the needs of any particular social group without understanding how those needs are prefigured by cultural beliefs and ideologies.

For example, let us reconsider the example of the student and professor described above. Although the student agreed to reduce her work hours in order to prioritize her schooling, and in the end, she maintained her work schedule and failed her course of study. Additional discussions revealed that indeed, while the student and her family were both committed to her schoolwork, and even though the student's family put no pressure on her to work, the student, who was from a Hispanic background, nonetheless felt the need to contribute to her family's well-being, a value typical in the community in which she lived. This cultural value conflicted with those of her European-American professor, who assumed that the student's primary obligation at this point in her life was to *herself*, and not to her family.

The clash of cultural values underscores the ways in which the needs that drive action are culturally organized. In addressing intercultural conflict, while it is necessary to seek to identify and reconcile the underlying needs, interests, and goals of members of each group, it is also important to understand how such needs are organized around cultural values, norms, belief, and practices that are taken to be important or even sacred in particular communities. Resolving intercultural conflict requires more than merely coordinating needs and interests between groups; it requires the capacity to enter into intercultural communication in ways that are sensitive to the deeply held and often opposing cultural beliefs. If novel ways of relating are to occur between cultural groups, there is a need to find ways to resolve conflict through the integration of opposites. This is the purpose of dialectical problem solving.

Dialectical Problem Solving

Conflict consists of any form of opposition between elements, processes, or forces. Understood in this way, conflict is ubiquitous. It occurs in physical and biological systems: within and between persons, and among groups, nations, and cultures. Although we often think of conflict as inherently hostile, this is not necessarily the case. In social systems, while conflict often leads to hostility, the mere presence of opposition is neither inherently positive nor negative. Conflict is, however, a motivating force. Whether it leads to hostility or growth depends on the context in which it occurs as well as how it is understood and managed.

Conflict can be a constructive force when it motivates developmental change through the dialectical process of differentiating and integrating of opposites.[1] It is helpful to think of the process of dialectical development as moving through series of iterative moments from *Thesis* → *Antithesis* → *Conflict* → *Synthesis* (Basseches, 1984; Basseches & Mascolo, 2010; Mascolo, 2016, 2017). In this

[1] In development, *differentiation* consists of the process of making novel distinctions in existing meanings or modifying existing forms of action to create new ones. *Integration* refers to the process by which differentiated elements are brought together or coordinated over time. Higher-order structures of thinking, feeling, and acting develop through the constructive integration of meanings that have been dialectically differentiated over time (Piaget, 1952; Siegler & Chen, 2008; Werner & Kaplan, 1962/1984).

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process, a *thesis* consists of any initiating statement, assertion, or act that occurs between people. Any implies and is defined in contradistinction to an *antithesis*—a statement or act whose meaning arises in opposition or in contrast to the *thesis*. An antithesis develops as an act of *differentiation*, namely the act of discriminating the antithesis from the thesis. Although an antithesis is defined in contrast to a thesis, it is possible for a thesis and antithesis to arise without acknowledging their contradiction.

In the process of problem solving, *conflict* arises when the contradiction between thesis and antithesis becomes registered in awareness. Such conflict generates *disequilibrium* which mobilizes an attempt to bring the thesis–antithesis relation into some form of equilibrium or resolution. There are, of course, many ways to address a given conflict: Social partners can ignore it; avoid it or work around it, give into each other, or attempt to dominate the other. Genuine resolution of conflict can occur as thesis and antithesis undergo further differentiation in relation to each other. Conflict between thesis and antithesis can be resolved as increasingly novel differentiations in thesis and antithesis are integrated into a higher-order *synthesis* that is capable transcending or otherwise bridging the initial conflict.

Figure 1 provides an example of the dialectical development of novel forms of being and acting. The draws on Frimer and Walker's (2009) reconciliation model of moral development. Frimer and Walker (2009) proposed that moral development occurs as two broad categories of motivation—*agency* and *communion*—become increasingly integrated in development. They note that early in life, children exhibit proclivities toward both self-interest and a concern for others. Although present, early in life, these motives are largely separate; a child might exhibit self-interest in one context, and concern for other in a different context. This is indicated in Fig. 1. If we identify *self-interest* as a *thesis* (e.g., wanting a toy for oneself), *concern for other* becomes its *antithesis* (e.g., giving a sibling a toy when she is sad). As long as these two motives operate separately (e.g., in different contexts), no conflict can arise between them. With further development, *thesis* and *antithesis* are brought into *conflict*. For example, a child and sibling might want the same toy. In the context of this disequilibrium, the child's behavior becomes unstable. Much depends, in development, with whether and how this disequilibrium is resolved. Resolution can be avoided if development moves in either the direction of *self-interest* or *communion*, or if these distinct lines of development are kept separate. According to Frimer and Walker, moral development occurs 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 the less compelling, "it is in my interest to meet your concerns." Such a *synthesis* provides a means to resolve the lower-order conflict in a way that preserves both *thesis* and *antithesis*.

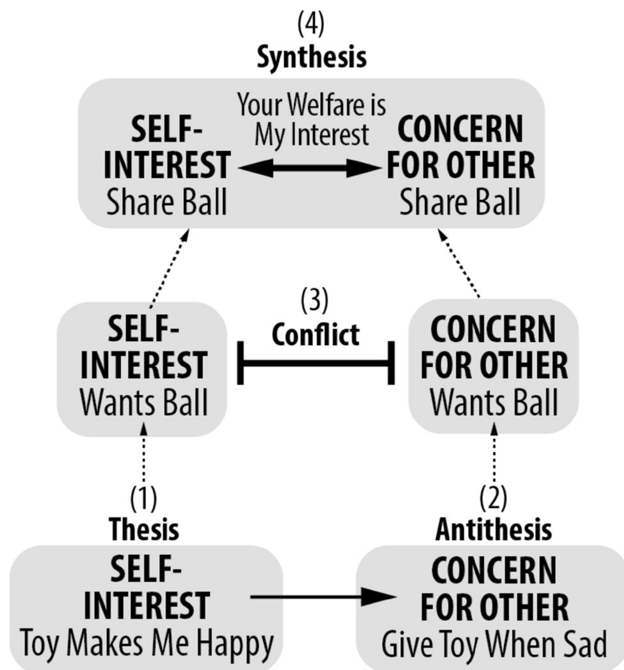

Fig. 1 The dialectical development of moral identity

Opposition need not be destructive. Open-ended development can occur as opposing systems of meanings *adapt to each other* over time. Over the course of dialectical development, opposing systems of meaning undergo developmental change *in relation to each other*. In so doing, novel structures of thought integrate opposites into higher-order meanings that resolve lower-level conflicts. In this way, the synthesis of higher-order meanings is not a form of compromise or "splitting the difference." Dialectical problem solving holds out the possibility of maintaining the integrity of distinct systems while reconciling their differences.

Illustrating the Process: Creating an Intercultural Self Through Dialectical Engagement

In the following section, we outline a process of dialectical engagement building on the experience of one of our co-authors (SLD), henceforth referred to as "Teacher" or "T." While employed as a teacher in an urban high school, T worked with Bhutanese high school students who arrived to the USA under refugee status. Over the course of the academic year, our colleague built a relationship based on trust and respect with these students, as she worked as their

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teacher in a handful of different programs. Many of these students prepared to enter the labor force upon graduation from high school. Some young Bhutanese women were already pursuing a trade school path to earn their aesthetician license, which would allow them to work in the beauty industry. In the context of one of her classes, T met one young Bhutanese female student who was interested in a different path. She wanted to attend college, a highly unusual aspiration given that it was extremely unlikely for a young woman to pursue higher education in her home country of Bhutan, never mind as a refugee in the USA. Her high ambitions were tempered by the reality of her cultural background, which included the expectation that she committed to an arranged marriage at a young age and bear children immediately thereafter. T invested time and effort in helping her draft a college essay and develop a realistic and practical plan for attending college.

At one point in the academic year, this young Bhutanese female student (henceforth referred to as "Daughter" or "D") asked T to help her convince her family that it was culturally acceptable for her to postpone reproduction (though the use of contraceptives) until she graduated from college. With the aid of her teacher, D successfully made a case for postponing her childbearing even as she entered into an arranged marriage, until she was able to graduate from college. The outcome of the story was successful at least in the short term, as D was able to enroll in a community college upon her graduation from high school.

The relational–dialectical framework proposed in this paper illustrates the process through which the teacher assisted her student in managing the conflict caused by conflicting, clashing ideological positions on the topic of family formation. In D's situation, her challenge as a young Bhutanese refugee was to negotiate living at the intersection of different and potentially divergent cultural worlds, each with its own particular demands. Her sense of autonomy, and desire to pursue the all-American individualistic goal of a college degree, was pitted against the familial obligation to value her family and community's collective interests above her own goals. She faced the formidable challenge of synthesizing and integrating Bhutanese cultural beliefs and practices with the cultural expectations of her new country that encouraged her to pursue the American Dream.

In what follows, we illustrate how the principles of dialectical engagement explain the processes by which T was able to bridge competing cultural values en route to constructing a novel solution to a seemingly intractable cultural conflict. In so doing, we show how T was able to (a) connect to the humanity of the various parties to the conflict; (b) identify culturally embedded needs of each party to the conflict; and (c) synthesize novel forms of being and relating through dialectical problem solving.

Connecting to the Humanity of the Other

The starting point for both parties—D and her parents and elders (henceforth referred to as "family" or "F")—consisted of two different meaning systems, each comprehensible and harmoniously integrated. Each party had their own personal narrative that possessed internal coherence and articulated their process of meaning making. The daughter and her family adopted a particular *position* on the topic of reproductive choice, specifically, who had the ultimate right to decide when family reproduction should happen. On the surface, their respective positions seemed to be oppositional in nature and prone to generating conflict. To pursue the goal of collaborative problem solving, however, it is important to acknowledge and respect these initial positions, because they hold inherent value to each party. Deep listening and summarization of the other's opinion are a form of respect and an upholding of the dignity of each human being. Thus, even in the context in which positions diverge in significant ways, it is important to enter a conflict resolution process by listening and not immediately passing judgment. The goal of this process is to take on the difficult task of appreciating the other person's perspective and demonstrating compassion and a recognition of shared humanity.

As stated in Fig. 2, D's initial *position* included the goal of *delaying pregnancy* and child rearing until after she completed her college education. Importantly, D indicates that both she and her partner agreed on the need to use contraception as a family planning method, and that they possessed the knowledge on how to use such contraception correctly. D's postponing pregnancy had functional utility for her for two reasons. As a young Bhutanese refugee living in the USA, the demands of motherhood would make it nearly impossible for her to attend college. Even if she could secure family help or access subsidized child care, it would not be culturally appropriate for a woman to step outside the family unit, especially while raising young children. Her position, i.e., her solution to this problem of being able to attend college, was to postpone her pregnancies until the time was right—where such timing would be determined in the future by D and her husband. Her family's position, in contrast, was incompatible with her desire. They expected her to complete high school, proceed with her arranged marriage, and fulfill her duties as a wife and mother immediately thereafter.

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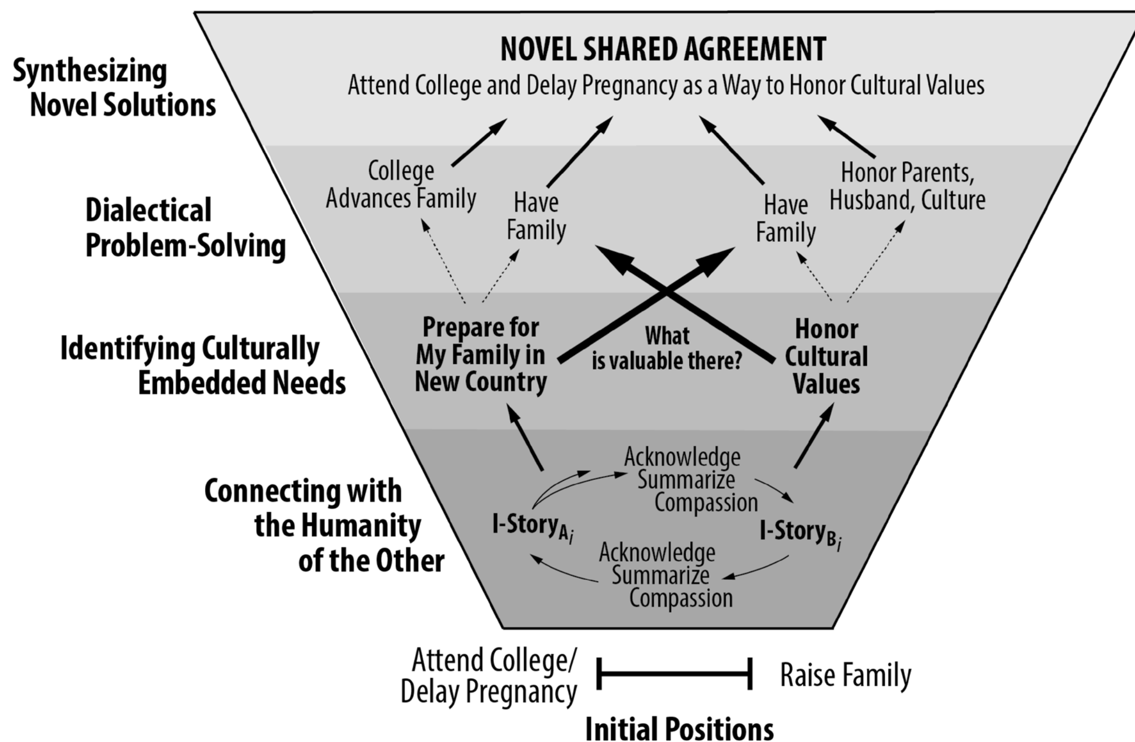

Fig. 2 Constructing an intercultural synthesis

Identifying Culturally Embedded Needs

For D, her *position* of postponing pregnancy until the time is right represents a blending of Bhutanese and American interpretations about pregnancy. In her desire to postpone pregnancy, D desired nothing less than what most American women aspire to: a sequencing and coordination of childbearing functions synchronized with desired educational and labor outcomes. In an American environment, it is solely the prerogative of two partners in a marriage to discuss and decide on family planning matter. It would be considered highly inappropriate and boundary crossing for the parents of the couple, or other extended family members, to interfere in this private decision-making process of the nuclear family. Nonetheless, D is not only a young woman who is emerging as an American citizen, she is also a woman deeply rooted in her Bhutanese community. For D, this demands that she elevate the views of her parents and elders above her own.

The parents' and elders' position was underpinned by a cultural logic whereby raising a family is primordial for the sustenance and continuation of family and kinship networks. Pregnancies hold value not only for the individual couples but also for entire collectivities. As such, their position of not postponing D's pregnancy was necessary in order to respond to the needs and values of the community to which they belong. In developing countries such as Bhutan, high fertility rates have been the desirable norm for generations, given the reality of child mortality. Children contribute to the household economy, and upon entering adulthood, become caretakers for aging family members or other elderly in their communities (Ahmed, Cruz, Quillin, & Schellekens, 2016). Thus, the parents' and elders' position for D to enter marriage and have children is embedded in a larger cultural milieu that assigns and expects collective value from sexual activities within the marital unit; furthermore, culture also expects reverence and respect for the elderly.

Tinkering with one aspect of this complex social structure—delaying pregnancy and allowing for too much personal agency in the reproduction process—entails consequences for individual couples as well as entire collectivities. From an elders' perspective, the cumulative impact of couples postponing reproduction or reducing family size could jeopardize the system of caring for the elderly within the extended family unit (as opposed to outsourcing it to nursing homes or similar facilities.) Further, in the bewildering scenarios of living as refugees in a new country, the need for in-group cohesion increases. It becomes essential for the elders to strengthen their community's efforts to protect shared cultural values, and resist forces that expose young Bhutanese to alternate lifestyles and value systems. These underlying *needs, concerns, and interests*, therefore, explain the parents' and elders' *position*, namely the expectation that D would graduate high school, get married, and begin raising a family shortly thereafter.

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Synthesizing Novel Ways of Being and Relating

The role of the teacher throughout the entire dialectical engagement process becomes crucially important, for a number of reasons. T was able to use her influential position as a teacher to facilitate a cultural engagement process that coordinated and reconciled the culturally embedded needs of both parties. Above and beyond any search for a solution to the problem, T was genuinely concerned with showing respect and appreciation for the Bhutanese culture, value system, and the authority of community elders.

In preparation for the family meeting requested by D, T invested significant time in learning about the Bhutanese culture, dinner etiquette, and polite ways of engaging with the elders and other family members who would be in attendance. T sought coaching in how to eat a Bhutanese meal using proper etiquette: how to swirl different Bhutanese dishes with her fingers in her plate, how to scoop food into her mouth with her hands, and how to spit out chicken bones and return them back onto her plate as is done in Bhutanese culture. She learned how to gage the correct food ratios so that she could consume the full contents of her plate (which included eating a spicy hot pepper), as leaving anything besides bones on the plate would be disrespectful.

Though she was coached, T was not prepared for the nuances of the cultural exchange. For example, T practiced how to eat the food and was told the overall experience would be different than what she was used to, but she had no idea she would have to eat this meal on a couch, with a plate on her lap, with all eyes on her as the guest of honor. In addition, T also had to adjust to social customs that might make an American feel uncomfortable. For example, as a sign of great respect in Bhutanese culture, T was given the first and fullest cup of tea, a comfortable seat while others sat on the floor, and was attentively observed while consuming the first plate of food before anyone else was even served. During her preparation, T also learned that she should expect to be present at D's home for a long time; as it turned out, 6 h. She had a rehearsed speech for the student's family, which was succinct, used clear English in short sentences, and to allowed time for translation. Still, she could not be certain that she was properly translated. She was aware that most of the visit would be spent exchanging mutual respect with D's family. T was told during her coaching that when the time for her to speak about the purpose of her visit arrived, her request would already be known to the family which is why T had prepared her rehearsed statement. She was told she could expect an acknowledgment, but not a discussion of her request. She would have to be satisfied with not knowing the elders' reaction or results in that very moment, or for quite some time thereafter.

T entered the home with the intent of showing D's family and elders the utmost respect for their culture. Although she was not praised verbally, her eating practice was met with grins, sounds of praise, and single clap prayer hands. Family members asked her questions about her teaching activities and her own family, and engaged her in small-talk throughout her visit. After many hours of expressing respect for Bhutanese culture in a variety of ways, T was invited to state the purpose for her visit. At that point, T mentioned her own profound respect for D's family and their culture. She also validated D's love for the Bhutanese culture and tradition. Importantly, she noted that their daughter could respect and participate in their culture while pursuing higher education in this new country. T emphasized that these two concepts were not mutually exclusive. It was equally valuable for D to prepare her future family for life in a new country, and also to honor the cultural values of her family and community. Rather than being contradictory and oppositional, T made the argument that these goals were complimentary and shared. That, to the extent that the Family would allow her to do so, D had the opportunity to create a new "self" and a way of being in this new country, which would blend the best of what both the American and Bhutanese cultures had to offer. Significantly, D could accomplish this goal without compromising her Bhutanese identity.

In essence, T handled the dialectical problem solving by herself, through the carefully thought-out process of her visit and the presentation of her arguments. Through the process of collaborative problem solving, T highlighted the commonalities present within the menu of needs on both sides of the issue. She developed a win–win solution that reconciled the cultural values/needs on both sides and presented it to the family. The novel agreement that she proposed, an agreement that was eventually accepted by the by family, was that D could delay pregnancy while she attended college, and that *doing so would honor Bhutanese cultural values*. This choice would help D meet both her needs *and her family needs as well*. She would be better prepared to transition from the life of a poor refugee to an upwardly mobile, middle-class lifestyle as an American resident. Her college degree would open up prospects for a career and better pay. This would, in turn, *bring honor to her family and community*. In this way, her choice (and her future husband's) to postpone her pregnancy until after graduating college would be *compatible with the Bhutanese tradition of filial piety* and commitment to the *collective welfare of the extended family*. It is important to note that the family did not agree to this novel shared agreement based on the logic of argumentation. T's efforts to respect their culture made the family feel safe and respected, which in turn made them able to hear her *solution* that provided the family with a way to *meet their*

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culturally embedded needs. T's argument opened up the possibility of *coordinating their most important needs and priorities*. In turn, this made it easier for D's parents and elders to acknowledge and consider the novel solution she proposed.

In conclusion, we highlight again the importance of coordinating between all the steps of the dialectical engagement process. Beginning with a clear understanding and articulation of the parties' respective solutions, the search for a novel solution that reconciles the parties' most important needs cannot happen without an active acknowledgment of the deepest humanity shared by people on both sides. Rather than stressing autonomy and American individualism, T and D collaborated and actively sought to reconcile and meet the needs of everyone. In this particular case study, the outcome was positive, as D was able to attend college. Of course, for any conflict that meets a successful resolution, many remain unaddressed and unresolved. Nonetheless, we affirm that using this methodology may lead to successful collaborative problem solving in many difficult conflictual situations, and that it represents an improvement over the traditional positional bargaining model introduced earlier in the paper.

Cultivating Emergent Ways of Being

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of the human condition. Hostility is a common response to conflict. It is not difficult to understand the relation between conflict and hostility. Social and cultural conflict does not result from the mere clashing of intellectual positions. Conflict occurs when a party's needs, motives, and interests are at stake. Emotions arise in circumstances that have implications for the fate of one's motives (Roseman, 1984). It follows that conflict creates conditions for strong emotion (Halperin, 2014), most notably feelings of fear, anger, and humiliation. Fear arises from the threat of losing what is valued; anger from the desire to move against the source of the violator; and humiliation from the actual and anticipated threat to the dignity that arises in confrontations between individuals or groups. The loss of self—the thwarting of agency or spoiling of identity—is a core component of social conflict, acting as both cause and catalyst (Sen, 2006).

Intercultural conflict brings added difficulties. The cultural other is experienced as different, exotic, or perhaps inferior. To the extent that interlocutors differ in core cultural beliefs and values, they may appear to each other to be unreasonable, irrational, or oppositional. A failure of sociality—the capacity to engage and appreciate the motives, meanings, sacred values, emotions, and practices of the other—has occurred. As parties experience themselves as increasingly unable to control the fate of their interests, they become defensive and protective. In such contexts, the risk of *dehumanization* runs high (Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016).

In such contexts, what would it *take* to humanize the other? What would it *mean* to humanize the other? There are many ways to approach the concept of humanization. One way involves thinking of humanity in terms of commonality. From this view, at base, all humans share something in common; humans are defined by what they share. From this point of view, the task becomes to find common ground. To humanize the other is to see the other as human in the same way that I see myself as human. However, this notion brings forth the issue of *totalization* (Levinas, 1969)—the problem of assimilating the other to a single encompassing conception of what it means to be human. It follows that the humanization of the other relies upon the application of some particular concept of humanity—a concept that, through excludes those who fail to meet its criteria.

A dialectical framework offers an alternative way of approaching the question of humanization. Instead of thinking of *humanity* as an existing property, common to all homosapiens, that must be found, it is perhaps preferable to think of *humanity* as a concept and condition that must be *cultivated*. It involves the open-ended process of continuously engaging the other in relation to the self in order to identify difference. Through acts of deep sociality—without self-abnegation—one seeks to understand the culturally embedded and embodied beliefs, values, and meanings of the other. To treat the other as human is to be open to the *plea* behind the position that might be assumed by the other—even if that *position* is something we may hate. Instead of seeking to dominate or acquiesce to the other, a process of dialectical construction ensues. In this way, a dialectical approach holds out the possibility of creating new ways of being and relating through the successive differentiation and integration of oppositions.

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