# *A Strategy for Reformulating the Dialectical and Functional Theories of Conflict**

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*ABSTRACT*

This paper attempts to examine the assumptions and major propositions of Ralf Dahrendorf's and Lewis Coser's theories of conflict. Particular attention is drawn to the divergence in their respective schemes and how such divergence actually makes the schemes highly complementary. By formalizing the propositions of Dahrendorf and Coser, then examining how the theoretical statements of each inventory correct for omissions in the other, a strategy for synthesizing the propositions on the causes and form of conflict is suggested. Such synthesis is presumed to improve upon previous attempts at theoretical reconciliation, since it is couched in propositional rather than assumptive terms.

The growing disenchantment with structural–functional theory has been marked by the rise of alternative theoretical perspectives over the last two decades. One of the most conspicuous of these alternatives has been "conflict theory" which has presumably rediscovered for the discipline such phenomena as power, force, coercion, constraint, and change in social systems. Despite the excessive polemics which have often accompanied this rediscovery (Dahrendorf, 1958b; Horowitz, 1962; Lockwood, 1956; Rex, 1961) there have been a number of impressive attempts at developing systems of theoretical statements on certain conflict processes (e.g., Blalock, 1967; Coser, 1967a; Dahrendorf, 1957; Mack and Snyder, 1957; Williams, 1947). One of the drawbacks of this accumulated body of theoretical statements is that attempts at synthesizing, reconciling, and integrating them into a more adequate system of propositions have not been often undertaken. The result is that sets of propositions exist side by side in the literature yet in virtual isolation from one another.

In this paper, I seek to begin redressing this oversight by examining the propositional inventories of two prominent conflict schemes, the functional conflict theory of Lewis Coser (1956; 1957; 1962; 1966; 1967a; 1967b; 1968; 1969a; 1969b) and the dialectical perspective of Ralf Dahrendorf (1958a; 1958b; 1957; 1961; 1967). The functional and dialectical schemes of these thinkers are singled out for examination because they are often presumed to be contradictory; and thus, if some tentative guidelines for synthesis can be suggested for these perspectives, then other conflict schemes should be more readily reconciled—thereby allowing for the development of a more unified theory of conflict processes.

In this effort, I will draw attention to how Coser's and Dahrendorf's assumptions have been translated into highly suggestive propositions. Emphasis is placed upon the respective propositions of these two conflict theorists, because it is in this form that: (a) the causal relations between concepts can be accurately discerned, (b) the points of compatibility and incompatibility between schemes can be readily visualized, and (c) the promise of operationalization and empirical investigation are greatest. Thus, I have chosen to focus on propositions because it is only when assumptions are translated into statements of covariance among explicitly stated variables that theoretical schemes become sufficiently clear to allow for tentative attempts at synthesis. Such a synthesis is, of course, only an uncertain first step in what will be a long process of converting theoretical schemes into propositional inventories, and then, critically examining them to see what they have to offer sociological theory.

## DIVERGENT ASSUMPTIONS

In his efforts to direct sociological theory out of a "functional utopia," Dahrendorf has reformulated in even more extreme form some of Marx's key assumptions: (1) social life is typified by opposed interests cohering around differ-

* This paper offers a revised version of propositions presented in an earlier work (Turner, 1974a) to suggest potential lines of synthesis for building a general theory of conflict processes, a difficult task which was not undertaken in my earlier work.

ences in the distribution of power; (2) opposed interests will inevitably result in conflict between those who have and do not have power; (3) conflict is dialectical since the resolution of one set of conflict relations establishes the conditions of opposed interests for subsequent conflict; (4) social change ensuing from conflict dialectics is therefore an inevitable feature of social systems.

Much like Dahrendorf, Coser (1967a:141) also views functional theorizing as having "too often neglected the dimensions of power and interest." But in contrast to Dahrendorf, he has not followed Marx's emphasis on conflict dialectics and their consequences for perpetual reorganization of social systems. On the contrary, Coser has sought to correct for Dahrendorf's one-sidedness with another one-sidedness emphasizing the "integrative" and "adaptive" functions of conflict for social systems. In so doing, Coser has been led to embrace many of the organismic assumptions of Simmel's (1955) earlier analysis of conflict: (1) social life tends to be organized into systems, whose interrelated parts reveal imbalances, tensions, and conflict of interests; (2) under different conditions, processes in social systems operate to maintain, change, and increase or decrease not only the system's integration but also its "adaptability"; and (3) some of these processes—notably violence, dissent, deviance, and conflict—can, under certain conditions, strengthen the system's basis of integration as well as its adaptability to the environment.

These two sets of assumptions would both seem one-sided, emphasizing some phenomena while excluding other key processes. As such, they project a seriously distorted vision of social reality. However, such indictments have little meaning when stated at the assumptive level, for one can endlessly argue over assumptions. More meaningful criticism, especially from the point of view of building a theory of conflict, comes when the propositions inspired by these assumptions are examined. For in the end, theoretical disputes can only be resolved at the propositional level.

## DIVERGENT PROPOSITIONS

In anticipating the following discussion of Coser's and Dahrendorf's propositions,[1] I should emphasize that while both thinkers at times conceptualize similar variables, they appear at different junctures in their propositional inventories—thus revealing divergent conceptions of the impact of similar variables on the course of conflict. To analyze these differences, I have grouped Coser's and Dahrendorf's propositions under the following headings: (1) the causes of conflict; (2) the intensity of conflict; (3) the violence of conflict; and (4) the outcomes of conflict.[2] While there are some conceptual merits to this ordering of propositions, I think that these headings are too simple and arbitrarily partition interrelated conflict processes. Hence, the grouping of the propositions under these headings follows the intent of both Coser and Dahrendorf. But as I will argue, this ordering creates some conceptual problems in building a theory of conflict.

### (1) *The Causes of Conflict*

In Comparison 1, I have summarized Dahrendorf's and Coser's propositions on the underlying causes of conflict. In their first proposition, both Dahrendorf and Coser assert that the cause of conflict in a social system ultimately resides in the dissatisfaction of the deprived. However, Dahrendorf visualizes this dissatisfaction in terms of awareness of interests, while Coser's analysis focuses on the question of legitimacy. Presumably Dahrendorf would argue that awareness of their true interests would lead the deprived to withdraw

[1] One drawback to Coser's propositional inventory is that it has never been delineated in a formal or logical format. Rather, the propositions appear in a number of discursive essays and in his analysis of Simmel's essay on conflict. While each discrete proposition is usually stated quite clearly, it is often necessary to interpret with some danger of misinterpretation the exact interrelationships among the various propositions. This fact makes the attempt at a systematic presentation of Coser's propositions an *ad hoc* exercise that may do injustice to some propositions and over- (or under-) estimate Coser's intended significance of others. Dahrendorf's propositions have been rephrased so as to facilitate comparison with Coser's. However, the rephrasing has not in any way distorted their intended meaning. The propositions were taken from Dahrendorf's most formal statement of his "theory" (1957:236–40). See also Turner (1974b).

[2] One of the problems with both Coser and Dahrendorf's theoretical schemes is their extremely broad and vague definitions of conflict. For example, Dahrendorf uses the term "conflict" for examining "contests, competitions, disputes, and tensions as well as for manifest clashes between social forces" (1957:135). Coser's definition is equally inclusive. This failure to define more specifically the key variable in their theories makes it difficult to know just *what type* of conflict is being addressed in a particular set of propositions.

legitimacy, while Coser would maintain that interests are only laid bare and articulated when the deprived withdraw legitimacy from the system. Now these are more than terminological quibblings, since they have implications for subsequent propositions. If awareness of interests is considered the key causal variable, then additional propositions need only specify the conditions raising levels of awareness. Thus for Dahrendorf, the major theoretical task is to list the "technical," "political," and "social" conditions fostering awareness of deprived groupings' "true interests." In contrast, Coser's first group of propositions addresses the structural conditions which would lead the deprived to question the legitimacy of existing structural arrangements. Coser follows up on this analysis in his second proposition in Comparison 1 by attempting to indicate that the withdrawal of legitimacy, per se, will not necessarily lead to conflict. A threshold of emotional arousal is also necessary, with this threshold being a result of unspecified structures involved in socialization and social control.

Dahrendorf's and Coser's divergent propositions reflect their differing assumptions about the nature of social organization. Dahrendorf's dialectical assumptions lead him to visualize conflict as smoldering just beneath the surface of all structures; and thus, it is to be expected that his propositions will be loaded in the direction of isolating those forces which will merely *release* inherent conflict potential. Coser's more organismic assumptions, borrowed from Simmel, dictate a concern with what forces would be involved in *overcoming* the "inertia" and organic interdependence of the system; and hence, it is likely that his propositions would focus, first of all, on the conditions causing the breakdown of the legitimacy holding the body social together, and then on the conditions causing the sudden mobilization of actors' emotional energies to pursue conflict in the system.

My ordering of the propositions in Comparison 1 is intended to suggest tentative guidelines for synthesis. I believe it is reasonable to hypothesize that conflict initiated by the deprived will be likely only after an initial withdrawal of legitimacy has occurred (Coser's Proposition I). Withdrawal of legitimacy, however, is not sufficient to initiate conflict, for the questioning of legitimacy must also be accompanied by a sudden arousal of the deprived's emotional energies (Coser's Proposition II). Thus, Coser's analysis directs sociologists to seek the causes of conflict in the structural conditions leading to a questioning of legitimacy and a sudden jump in emotional arousal. It also seems reasonable to predict that the conflict ensuing from these conditions will be spontaneous and expressive, lacking in a high degree of organization. Dahrendorf's propositions specify some of the conditions under which conflict will become more organized and instrumental, but I think it likely that the withdrawal of legitimacy and escalating emotions of relative deprivation must precede this organization. For it can be questioned whether mere awareness, even as fanned by technical, political and social conditions, is enough to induce the deprived to join in costly organized conflict with those in power. In sum, then, by examining Dahrendorf's and Coser's combined propositional formats, it is possible to suggest how different *types* of structural variables lead to different *types* of psychological states among the deprived which in turn, under additional *types* of structural conditions, cause different *types* of conflict. Coser's and Dahrendorf's combined propositions go a long way toward suggesting some of the generic classes or types of variables involved in developing a theory of the causes of conflict in social systems.

(2) *The Intensity of Conflict*

For Dahrendorf, the concept of intensity refers to the degree of psychological commitment of parties to pursue conflict. While Coser is less explicit, he appears to define intensity in a similar manner. In Comparison 2 I have listed, as in the previous table, Dahrendorf's and Coser's propositions on the conditions promoting intense forms of conflict. For Dahrendorf, the more the conditions of organization are met, the more the distribution of scarce resources are correlated, and the less the mobility of the deprived, the more intense will be the conflict. For Coser, the conditions causing conflict also affect conflict intensity, as is emphasized in his Proposition II on the conditions heightening emotional involvement. Further, Coser's Proposition III appears to parallel Dahrendorf's on the technical conditions found in Comparison 1.

The most striking divergence in Dahrendorf's and Coser's propositions can be seen in Dahrendorf's failure to incorporate propositions into his scheme on emotional involvement as either a cause or a condition leading to greater conflict intensity. As Coser's propositions underscore, emotional involvement is critical in both the initiation and the willingness of the parties

**Comparison 1. The Causes of Conflict**

| DAHRENDORF | COSER |
|---|---|
| 1. *The more members of quasi groups in ICAs can become aware of their objective interests and form a conflict group, the more likely is conflict to occur* | 1. The more deprived members of a system question the legitimacy of the existing distribution of scarce resources, the more likely they are to initiate conflict (1956; 1957) |
| | A. The fewer the channels for redressing grievances over the distribution of scarce resources by the deprived, the more likely they are to question legitimacy (1967c) |
| | 1. The fewer internal organizations there are segmenting emotional energies of the members of the deprived, the more likely are deprived groups without grievance alternatives to question legitimacy (1967c) |
| | 2. The greater the ego deprivations of those without grievance channels, the more likely they are to question legitimacy (1967c) |
| | B. The more membership in privileged groups is sought by the deprived, and the less mobility allowed, the more likely they are to withdraw legitimacy (1956) |
| | II. The more deprivations are transformed from absolute to relative, the more likely are the deprived to initiate conflict (1957; 1967b) |
| | A. The less the degree to which socialization experience of the deprived generate internal ego constraints, the more likely they are to experience relative deprivation (1967b) |
| | B. The less the external constraints applied to the deprived, the more likely they are to experience relative deprivation (1967b) |
| A. *The more the technical conditions of organization can be met, the more likely is the formation of a conflict group* | |
| 1. *The more a leadership cadre among quasi groups can be developed, the more likely are the technical conditions of organization to be met* | |
| 2. *The more a codified idea system, or charter, can be developed, the more likely are the technical conditions of organization to be met* | |
| B. *The more the political conditions of organization can be met, the more likely is the formation of a conflict group* | |
| 1. *The more the dominant groups permit organization of opposed interests, the more likely are the political conditions of organization to be met* | |
| C. *The more the social conditions of organization can be met, the more likely is the formation of a conflict group* | |
| 1. *The more opportunity for members of quasi groups to communicate, the more likely are the social conditions of organization to be met* | |
| 2. *The more recruiting is permitted by structural arrangements [such as propinquity], the more likely are the social conditions of organization to be met* | |

to become committed to the conflict. However, Coser apparently fails to make explicit the feedback processes between intensity and the outbreak of different types of conflict, for it can be hypothesized that, once initiated, conflict intensity will be necessary for Dahrendorf's conditions of social organization to be met. Thus, intensity of conflict is as much a cause as an effect of the technical, political, and social conditions of organization. Individuals are not likely to be moved by technical, political, and social conditions of organization to form conflict groups unless their questioning of legitimacy and escalated sense of relative deprivation (see Comparison 1) is sufficient to generate an emotionally charged commitment to and willingness to be involved in *organized* efforts at conflict. Coser's propositions in Comparison 2 on the structural conditions leading to emotional involvement thus provide a further specification of the causes of organized conflict, since they give a tentative indication of the structural conditions necessary for emotionally aroused individuals to seek further organization. In turn, as Dahrendorf's proposition on the conditions of organization (Comparison 1) emphasizes, a given level of organization can increase intensity as conflict groups become ideologically unified, develop clear leadership structures, and actively recruit members.

Thus, a theory of conflict must analyze conflict processes over time by focusing on the

**Comparison 2. The Intensity of Conflict**

| DAHRENDORF | COSER |
|---|---|
| I. *The more the technical, political and social conditions of organization are met, the more intense is the conflict* | I. The more the conditions causing the outbreak of conflict are realized, the more intense the conflict (1967a) |
| | II. The greater the emotional involvement of members in a conflict, the more intense the conflict (1956) |
| | A. The more primary the relations among parties to a conflict, the more emotional involvement (1956) |
| | 1. The smaller the primary groups where conflict occurs, the more emotional the involvement (1956) |
| | 2. The more primary the relations among parties, the less likely the open expression of hostility, but the more intense the expression in a conflict situation (1956) |
| | B. The more secondary relations among parties to a conflict, the more segmental their participation and the less emotional involvement (1956) |
| | 1. The more secondary relations, the more frequent the conflict, but the less the emotional involvement (1956) |
| | 2. The larger the secondary group, the more frequent the conflict, but the less the emotional involvement (1956) |
| | III. The more conflicts are objectified above and beyond individual self-interest, the more intense the conflict (1956) |
| | A. The more ideologically unified a group, the more conflicts transcend self-interest (1956) |
| | 1. The more ideologically unified is a group, the more common are the goals of a group, and the more they transcend individual self-interest (1956) |
| | 2. The more ideologically unified is a group, the more will conflicts be entered with a clear conscience, and the more they transcend individual self-interest (1956) |
| II. *The more the distribution of authority and other rewards are associated with each other (superimposed), the more intense is the conflict* | |
| III. *The less the mobility between super- and subordinate groups, the more intense is the conflict* | |

conditions leading to the withdrawal of legitimacy, the escalation of relative deprivations, the initial increase in conflict intensity, the organization of conflict groups, and the subsequent increases (or decreases) in conflict intensity. Only in this way can the causes of different types of conflicts be understood. Figure 1, is an attempt to use Dahrendorf's and Coser's combined propositional legacy on causes and intensity to develop a tentative model describing the major *classes* or *types* of variables, and the sequential and feedback relations among them, which will need to be incorporated into a theory on the causes of conflict. The arrows connecting the seven stages of conflict denote the key causal chains in the initiation of conflict. These causal relations could be phrased propositionally, but my efforts are so tentative that they can be adequately expressed diagrammatically. Some of the key propositions denoted by the arrows in Figure 1, which are not given sufficient attention in Coser's and Dahrendorf's inventories, concern the feedback relations among variables at different stages of conflict. As I have represented in Figure 1, stages (5), (6), and (7) are particularly critical for stages (2), (3), and (4), feeding back and accelerating the withdrawal of legitimacy, the awareness of interests, and the emotional deprivation which will cause both spontaneous outbursts and the resulting increases in intensity of commitment ultimately driving the deprived to become organized to pursue conflict.

### (3) *The Violence of Conflict*

As Dahrendorf makes explicit, violence denotes the degree of combativeness between parties to a conflict. Coser is less explicit in his formulation of the violence dimension in conflict, but it is nevertheless possible to isolate some propositions which pertain to conditions under which

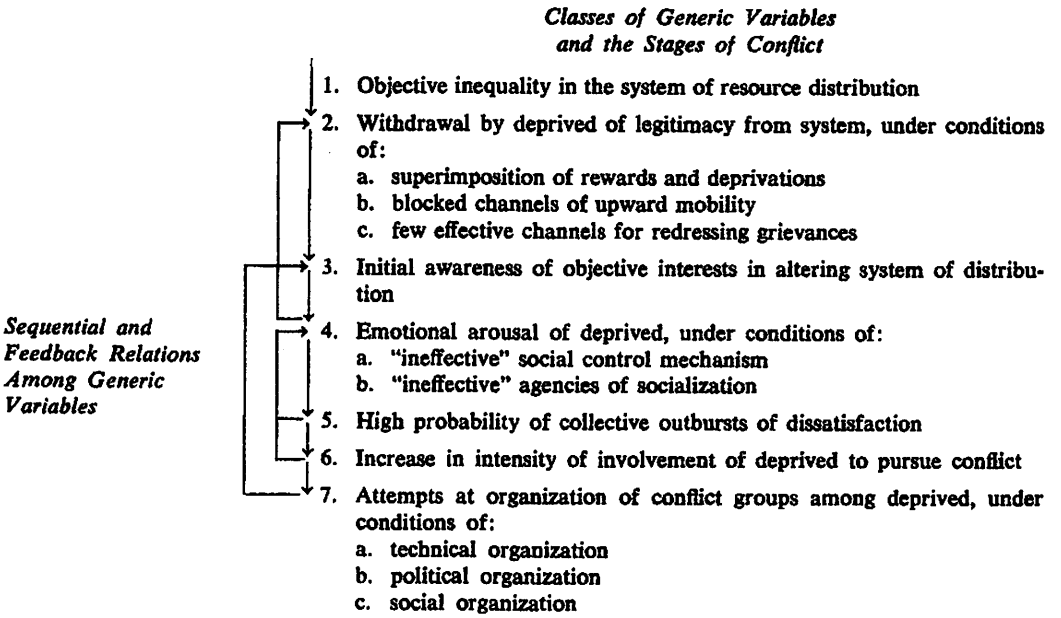


**Figure 1. The Causes of Conflict**

conflict will be violent. In Comparison 3, I have listed as in previous tables, the propositions developed by Dahrendorf and Coser with respect to the violence of conflict.

Dahrendorf's Proposition I restates the conclusion reached in the discussion of the causes of conflict: if the technical, political, and social conditions of organization cannot be met, conflict will be less structured and regulated. But why should it be violent, involving open combat between the privileged and deprived? Dahrendorf then specifies a proposition on relative deprivation which Coser included in his analysis of the causes of conflict. Thus, for Dahrendorf, conflict will be violent when the parties are emotionally aroused, the conditions of organization are not met, and as Proposition III indicates, the conflicting parties cannot develop regulatory agreements. What Dahrendorf fails to recognize in these propositions is that emotional arousal is also necessary for the conditions of organization to be met (see earlier discussion) and that unregulated conflict need not necessarily be violent. Coser's propositions provide more insight into what structural conditions would make violent conflict more likely. For Coser, whether conflict is over objective interests represents an important set of conditions facilitating or inhibiting violence. Dahrendorf recognizes this condition in his discussion of how awareness of true interests is a result of the conditions of organization being met. But Coser specifies additional conditions which can supplement Dahrendorf's limited discussion. Furthermore, Coser's inventory has already incorporated the relative deprivation hypothesis at a more appropriate place in the overall inventory of propositions on conflict (see Comparison 1 and Figure 1). Also, Coser's inventory specifies some of the conditions under which Dahrendorf's "regulatory agreements" inhibiting violent conflict will be likely to emerge between conflict parties. And finally, Coser places more significance on the impact of values on conflict—a variable Dahrendorf only implicitly acknowledges in discussion of the technical conditions of organization.

Thus, for both Coser and Dahrendorf the degree of organization of the conflict parties, the capacity of the more inclusive system to institutionalize conflict relations, and the ability of conflict parties to articulate their interests independently of core values will influence the degree of violence in the conflict between the deprived and privileged. In turn, these variables are influenced by those variables first initiating conflict relations as well as by a series of only partially specified structural arrangements of the system in which the conflict occurs. In Figure 2, I have again sought to represent diagrammatically the classes of variables and the general types of interrelations among them which the Dahrendorf and Coser schemes offer a theory of conflict violence. Figure 2 should

**Comparison 3. The Violence of Conflict**

| DAHRENDORF | COSER |
|---|---|
| I. *The less the technical, political, and social conditions of organization are met, the more violent is the conflict* | I. The more groups engage in conflicts over their realistic (objective) interests, the less violent the conflict (1956) |
| | A. The more groups conflict over realistic interests, the more likely they are to seek compromises over means to realize their interests (1956)<br>1. The greater the power differentials between groups in conflict, the less likely alternative means are to be sought (1956)<br>2. The more rigid the system where conflict occurs, the less availability of alternative means (1956) |
| | II. The more groups conflict over nonrealistic issues (false interests), the more violent the conflict (1956) |
| | A. The more conflict occurs over nonrealistic issues, the greater the emotional involvement of the parties in the conflict, and the more intense the conflict (1956)<br>1. The more intense previous conflict between groups, the greater the emotional involvement in subsequent conflicts (1956; 1967c)<br>B. The more rigid the system where conflict occurs, the more likely is the conflict to be nonrealistic (1957)<br>C. The more realistic conflict endures, the more nonrealistic issues emerge (1956; 1967c)<br>D. The more the conflicting groups have emerged for purposes of conflict, the more nonrealistic the subsequent conflicts (1956) |
| II. *The more the deprivations of the subjugated over the distribution of rewards shift from an absolute to relative basis of deprivation, the more violent is the conflict* | |
| III. *The less the ability of conflict groups to develop regulatory agreements, the more violent the conflict* | III. The more rigid the social structure, the less will be the availability of institutionalized means for absorbing conflict and tensions, and the more violent the conflict (1956) |
| | A. The more primary the relations among parties where conflict occurs, the more rigid the structure (1956)<br>1. The less stable the primary relations, the more rigid the structure of those relations (1956)<br>2. The more stable the primary relations, the less rigid the structure of those relations (1956)<br>B. The more secondary (based on functional interdependence) the relations among parties where conflict occurs, the more likely are institutionalized means for absorbing conflict and tensions, and the less violent the conflict (1956)<br>C. The greater the control mechanism of the system, the more rigid the structure and the more intense the conflict (1957) |
| | IV. The more the conflict in a group occurs over core values and issues, the more violent the conflict (1956) |
| | A. The more rigid the structure where conflict occurs, the more likely is conflict to occur over core values and issues (1956)<br>B. The more emotional involvement in a situation where conflict occurs, the more likely it is to occur over core values and issues (1956) |

be visualized as an extension of the variables and interrelations outlined in Figure 1. As indicated in Figure 2, attempts at organization (stage [7] in Figure 1) will result in conflict of varying degrees of violence, depending upon a series of causally related conditions. In turn these conditions display both sequential and feedback relations which need to be incorporated into propositions on conflict violence.

(4) *The Outcomes of Conflict*

I have listed as in earlier tables Dahrendorf's and Coser's propositions on the outcomes of conflict in Comparison 4. For Dahrendorf, the only outcome of conflict is social change, with only the amount and the rate of such change visualized as varying. In contrast, Coser has developed propositions on integrative and adaptive outcomes of conflict for both the parties to a conflict and the social whole within which the conflict occurs. In the first group of propositions conflict can cause a shoring up of group boundaries, centralization of decision-making, ideological solidarity, and increased social control. As with previous propositions, these events occur only under specified conditions, including the degree of rigidity and differentiation in social structure, the intensity of the conflict, and the extent to which conflict is perceived to affect all factions of the group. Of particular interest is the fact that only in Proposition IV-A is there a clear statement about the potential dysfunctions of conflict for each respective conflict group. Furthermore, in this particular inventory it is not immediately evident that stating the inverse of the propositions would reveal the conditions under which conflict would lead to disintegration of conflict groups. For example, taking Proposition III, it would be difficult to maintain that if all group members did not perceive the conflict as affecting them, ideological disunity or some other less positively functional state would be forthcoming. Clearly, additional propositions would be necessary to establish the conditions under which less benign outcomes could be expected. Thus, by choosing to focus primarily on the *positive functions* or *outcomes* of conflict for social integration, the net effect of the propositions as they now stand is to convey an overly integrated view of the social world, even in the face of open conflict among groups.

This unfortunate connotation is buttressed by Propositions V through IX in which conflict in loosely structured systems is seen as promoting integration, innovation, creativity, release of hostilities, and attention of elites to system maladjustments. Furthermore, under conditions of conflict frequency and intensity, conflict can promote varying degrees and types of equilibrium, normative regulation, and associative coalitions. While the inverse of some of these propositions perhaps reveals a few of the conditions promoting disequilibrium, anomie, and antagonisms among subgroups, the propositions still remain overly loaded in the direction of emphasizing system integration and adaptability.

In reviewing Coser's and Dahrendorf's propositions on the outcomes of conflict, then, I think that the one-sidedness of their assumptions about the social world has greatly diminished the power of their propositional inventories. We may applaud Coser and Dahrendorf for undertaking an analysis of conflict outcomes, but the two schemes ignore more than they include. Probably the most obvious problem with these propositions is that they fail to conceptualize adequately the conditions under which conflicts of varying degrees of violence cause certain outcomes in the short and long run for both conflict parties and the more in-

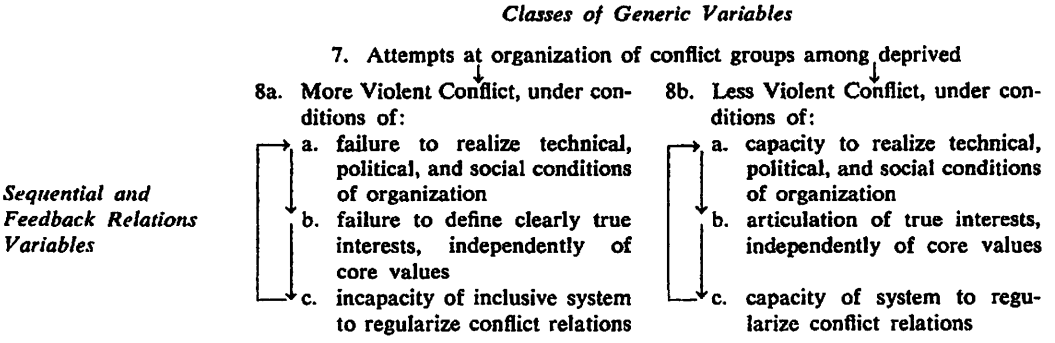


**Figure 2. The Degree of Violence in Conflict**

**Comparison 4. The Outcomes of Conflict**

DAHRENDORF

I. *The more intense the conflict, the more structural change and reorganization it will generate*

II. *The more violent the conflict, the greater the rate of structural change and reorganization*

COSER

I. The more intense the conflict, the more clear-cut the boundaries of each respective conflict party (1956)

II. The more intense the conflict and the more differentiated the division of labor of each conflict party, the more likely each to centralize its decision-making structure (1956)
   A. The more intense the conflict, the less differentiated the structure and the less stable the structure and internal solidarity, the more centralization is despotic (1956)

III. The more intense the conflict and the more it is perceived to affect all segments of each group, the more conflict promotes structural and ideological solidarity among members of respective conflict groups (1956)

IV. The more primary the relations among members of respective conflict groups, and the more intense the conflict, the more conflict leads to suppression of dissent and deviance within each conflict group and to forced conformity to norms and values (1956)
   A. The more conflict between groups leads to forced conformity, the more the accumulation of hostilities and the more likely internal group conflict in the long run (1956)

V. The less rigid the social structure where conflict between groups occurs and the more frequent and less intense the conflict, the more likely is conflict to change the system in ways promoting adaptability and integration (1956)
   A. The less rigid the system, the more likely is conflict to promote innovation and creativity in the system (1957)
   B. The less rigid the system, the less likely is conflict to involve displacement of hostilities to alternative objects and the more likely is conflict to confront realistic sources of tension (1956; 1967c)
      1. The more a system is based on functional interdependence, and the more frequent and less intense the conflict, the more likely it is to release tensions without polarizing the system (1956)
      2. The more stable the primary relations in a system, and the more frequent and less intense is the conflict, the more likely it is to release tensions without polarizing the system, but not to the extent of a system based on secondary relations (1956)
   C. The less rigid the system, the more likely is conflict to be perceived by those in power as signals of maladjustment that need to be addressed (1966; 1967c)

VI. The more frequently conflict occurs, the less likely it is to reflect dissensus over core values and the more functional for maintaining equilibrium it is likely to be (1956)
   A. The more a conflict group can appeal to the core values of a system, the less likely the conflict to create dissensus over these values and the more likely it is to promote integration of the system (1968)
   B. The more a conflict group does not advocate extreme interpretations of core values, the less likely a counterconflict group to form and the less disruptive the conflict for the system (1968)

VII. The more frequent and less intense are conflicts, the more likely they are to promote normative regulation of conflict
   A. The less rigid a system, the more frequent and less intense the conflict (1956; 1957)
      1. The less rigid the system, the more likely conflict to revitalize existent norms (1956)
      2. The less rigid the system, the more likely conflict to generate new norms

*(Continued)*

**Comparison 4. Concluded**

COSER

B. The more frequent and less intense conflicts, the more likely are groups to centralize in an effort to promote conformity of each group's membership to norms governing the conflict (1956)
   1. The more equal the power of conflict groups, the more likely is conflict to generate centralization promoting normative conformity (1956)

VIII. The less rigid system, the more likely it is that conflict can establish balances and hierarchies of power in a system (1956)
   A. The less knowledge of the adversary's strength and the fewer the indexes of such strength, the more likely is conflict between two groups vying for power to promote a balance of power relations in a system (1956)

IX. The less rigid the system, the more likely is conflict to cause formation of associative coalitions that increase the cohesiveness and integration of the system (1956)
   A. The more other parties in a system are threatened by coalitions of other parties, the more likely they are to form associative coalitions (1956)
   B. The more a system is based on functional interdependence, the more likely coalitions are to be instrumental and less enduring (1956)
      1. The more a system reveals crosscutting cleavages, the more likely groups in a coalition are to have their own conflicts of interests, and the more likely is the coalition to be instrumental (1956)
      2. The more a coalition is formed for purely defensive purposes, the more likely it is to be instrumental (1956)
   C. The more tightly structured and primary the relations in a system, the more likely coalitions are to develop common norms and values and form a more permanent group (1956)
      1. The more coalitions are formed of individuals (or more generally, the smaller the units forming a coalition), the more likely they are to develop into a permanent group (1956)
      2. The more interaction required among the parties of a coalition, the more likely it is to form a permanent group (1956)

clusive system. For example, does violent conflict always result in rapid change of a system? It is clear that such a proposition would hold true only under conditions which would have to specify the causal impact of such variables as the duration of the violence, the repressive powers of the privileged, the nature and composition of the deprived who initiate the conflict, the issues over which the conflict is fought, the values involved to justify the violence, and so on. Coser's propositions would seem to provide a list of variables influencing outcomes; but unfortunately the variables of "intensity" and "violence" are not clearly defined in this context. Hence, the propositions on outcomes are not systematically linked to the conditions causing conflict of varying degrees of violence. To take another example from Dahrendorf's analysis of outcomes: Does organized conflict of high intensity necessarily lead to "more structural change?" Or, could not the regularization of conflict among highly organized groups result in forms of competition which maintain the status quo? This possibility is, of course, the point to be emphasized by Coser's propositions, and a number of suggestive variables are introduced to explain when such an outcome is likely. But Coser's inventory again raises as many theoretical questions as it answers. For example, does frequent and violent conflict in flexible social systems which have clear-cut mechanisms for regulating conflict lead to change? or to counter reactions maintaining the status quo? And could one objectively describe either outcome as increasing integration or adaptability?

These, then, are the kinds of problems presented by Coser's and Dahrendorf's propositions on the outcomes of conflict. Seemingly, the one-sided assumptions underlying their analysis forced *evaluative* conclusions about the desirable outcomes of conflict—for Coser, integration and adaptability, and for Dahrendorf, social change and reorganization. As such, the analysis of outcomes is not easily connected to their more interesting analysis of the causes of conflicts of varying degrees of violence. Thus, in contrast to Coser's and Dahrendorf's propositions on the causes, the intensity, and the violence of conflict, I do not think that the propositions on outcomes suggest any leads for synthesis. Coser provides a suggestive list of variables: but no clear causal relations can be inferred from this list because they are not clearly linked to the conditions affecting the causes and violence of conflict. And yet, Coser's

propositions do have an intuitive plausibility, as they apparently did for Simmel. Indeed, it does seem that conflict groups do become clearly bounded, more centralized, and more ideologically unified and that frequent conflicts between such groups in less rigid systems do increase the level of system integration. Or, as hypothesized in Dahrendorf's analysis, extensive and perhaps rapid structural change will ensue from conflict between groups of varying degrees of organization in rigidly structured systems. But these propositions represent only crude hypotheses which will require considerably more refinement through delineation of the conditions under which violent or nonviolent, long or short, and frequent or infrequent conflict among variously organized groups over differing issues variously charged by values in systems of varying degrees and forms of rigidity influence diverse outcomes, including change, stasis, reaction, integration, or adaptability. It is to the specification of the causal relations among at least these variables, so conspicuous in Coser's and Dahrendorf's inventories, that true theoretical synthesis must be directed.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have tried to bring together the disparate and yet suggestive propositions of Coser's and Dahrendorf's continuing work on conflict processes. In focusing on their propositions, I hope that I have avoided the tendency to debate the assumptions from which the propositions are derived, since sociological theorizing has too long argued over assumptions about the relative degrees of conflict, consensus, change, stasis, equilibrium, and disequilibrium in social systems. The more important task of theory is to begin to specify the conditions under which different events can be expected to occur. Dahrendorf and Coser have provided an important set of theoretical statements on the conditions under which conflict of varying degrees of violence is likely. By not focusing on their divergent assumptions, but rather on the propositions these inspire, we may achieve considerably more theoretical pay-off.

In Dahrendorf's and Coser's works, the Marxian and Simmelian legacy has been recast in an important list of theoretical statements that complement not only each other, but also inventories developed elsewhere. These tentative suggestions for synthesis with respect to the causes and violence of conflict can, I hope, provide some clues as to how a more adequate set of theoretical statements on conflict processes can be developed. If the combined inventories of Coser's and Dahrendorf's propositions still seem sparse and inadequate to the task of explaining even some conflict processes, I suspect that other schemes will appear the same when boiled down to their generic propositions. This inadequacy is the result of an unwillingness by theorists to integrate, reconcile, and synthesize their inventories so as to create a more comprehensive body of theoretical statements on conflict processes. Until this difficult task is more frequently undertaken, the propositions of any one conflict theorist, whether Dahrendorf, Coser, or anyone else, will continue to appear impoverished.

And thus, the substance of this paper is perhaps less important than the strategy advocated: *to examine propositional inventories and to seek reconciliation at this level.* For only by focusing on explicit propositions will a body of true sociological theory be possible. While few would argue with such a platitude, its dictates have not always been translated into vigorous theoretical activity.

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# *A Structural-Behavioral Theory of Intergroup Antagonism*

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*ABSTRACT*

Based on structural and behavioral orientations, a theory of intergroup antagonism (subsuming ethnic prejudice, racism, and sexism) is developed interlinking social power, competition, labor force structure, and contact. The behavioral orientation is invoked chiefly on matters of interpersonal contact, and the development of individual attitudes and behavioral patterns towards others. Employing a structural orientation, social power, competition, and the labor force structure are assumed to affect intergroup relations directly. Given the learning of prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behavioral patterns, differences in power, competition, and the structure of the labor force lead to five hypotheses on intergroup antagonism.

The aim of this paper is to develop a theory of intergroup antagonism, interlinking the variables of social power, competition, labor force structure, and contact.[1] Intergroup antagonism subsumes both attitudes and behavior,[2] and refers to a variety of forms of prejudice, discrimination, racism, and sexism.[3]

## GENERAL THEORETICAL POSITION

The theoretical position is derived from a combination of both structural and behavioral

[1] For two other "social" theories of race and ethnic relations see Bonacich (1972) and Lieberson (1961).

[2] It is recognized that the theory may explain or predict behavior to a greater degree than attitudes (or vice versa). At this rather modest stage in theory construction, it was assumed to be a better strategy to keep the theory broad in scope and to revise it later as empirical evidence may dictate.

[3] Antagonism, prejudice, racism, sexism, discrimination, race, and ethnicity are defined and used in the following way. The more general and neutral (Bonacich, 1972) term of antagonism is used to refer to all types of discriminatory behavior or prejudicial attitudes from one group to another. Discrimination is overt antagonism and refers to behavior of members of a group in preventing or restricting access to scarce resources to members of other groups. Prejudice is covert antagonism and refers to negative evaluations of members of a group, because they belong to that group (Allport, 1958). Racism is antagonistic behavior or attitudes of members of one group toward members of another on the basis of certain physical characteristics. Sexism is subsumed under racism and refers specifically to the differences between males and females. Ethnicity is used as the most encompassing category referring to any social, cultural or physical differences between groups.