Narrative Conflict Coaching

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NARRATIVE CONFLICT COACHING

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Counseling and Guidance

by

Ashley June Pangborn

June 2014
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ABSTRACT

Narrative conflict coaching is a counseling technique which focuses on separating clients from their problems and encouraging them to see their lives and futures from new perspectives. It has been used in a variety of arenas and is consistent with other practices within the field of narrative conflict resolution, such as narrative mediation. In this project I utilized qualitative research methods to analyze the immediate effectiveness of conflict coaching questioning techniques within the setting of a counseling conversation. The analysis focuses on the detail of the process of narrative conflict coaching more than on the final outcomes. The data was collected through two different conflict coaching conversations, one of which was about a conflict in a work context and one in a family context. The conversational data collected was compared with a set of detailed guidelines for narrative conflict coaching specified by Dr. John Winslade and the question that was asked was whether the conflict coaching process corresponded with these guidelines. The data confirmed that this was the case and also showed some indicators of the effectiveness of narrative conflict coaching techniques through documenting the participants’ responses to each of the steps in the process. Analysis of discursive positioning from statements early in each of the conversations and also from late in each conversation indicated positioning shifts in the direction of creating an alternative narrative into which the participants might live. Both participants were shown to reach a place of difference in perspective in relation to the conflict.
story. It is therefore argued that the guidelines for a conflict coaching process are adaptable in at least two different areas of life. It cannot yet be generalized to all areas of conflict but looks promising for multiple personal conflict situations.
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I would also like to thank all of my friends and family who encouraged me along the way and always believed in me. The continuous support through prayer and love provided me with the strength and perseverance to continue.
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family, my father and mother, Randy Pangborn and Terry Gerner, as well as my beautiful nephews and niece. My family has created strength within me in every way possible, through love and support as well as encouragement and challenges. My parents never accepted less than my very best and instilled in me the same, never accepting the minimum and always striving for perfection. This is also dedicated to my grandparents Shirley and Harold Herren, brother Matthew Pangborn and sister in law Jennifer Pangborn, aunt Carol Anne and cousin Chrisie Collinson, who through prayer and encouraging words supported me throughout my entire graduate school program, often encouraging me through positive words and providing realistic views when things became overwhelming. My nephews and niece, whom are the center of everything for me. The sacrifice of time spent on achieving this aspiration meant less time with auntie, but will be something I can show them as an accomplishment in years to come. I love you Jackson, Owen, Mason and Emerson you are my world!
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Conflict coaching is a technique within the field of counseling where a current conflict is explored within a counseling conversation. This study will focus on a particular approach to conflict coaching in which the conflict is explored through various narrative questioning techniques in order to help a person decide how to move forward in relation to a conflict. It may not reach the point where it can be called a conflict resolution process because it only involves one party at a time. It is not intended to replace a mediation conversation but to be used where mediation is not yet possible. This is a more useful goal for narrative conflict coaching than resolving the conflict, because the latter necessarily involves the involvement of the other party.

This study is an investigation of what happens in a conflict coaching process. It involves recording examples of a counseling conversation in which a current conflict is explored with a counselor. The counselor listens to the narrative given by the client and assists in exploring the conflict in relation to the situational context. From the recording a transcript was made of the conversation. This transcript then became the basis for an analysis of the questioning techniques throughout the process in order to explore how the process worked and to begin to understand the effectiveness of narrative conflict
coaching for a person in the middle of a conflict.

Purpose of the Project

This research project attempts to analyze narrative conflict coaching questioning techniques and to trace in particular any change in the discursive positioning of the client in regards to the conflict narrative. The purpose of the analysis was to show how narrative conflict coaching techniques work in practice and to begin to understand their effectiveness. In theory narrative conflict coaching works with a client to create an alternative story in which the conflict narrative is no longer as powerful as it was. The narrative approach to conflict coaching was developed by Dr. John Winslade and his work is the subject of this study. This work was recorded within the situational context of a counseling conversation with two different graduate students, who volunteered to participate in this study. The context of the current study was within the college setting. Volunteers were recruited to bring a story of conflict, and Dr. Winslade offered them a single conflict coaching interview. Participants were graduate students who were all female. The conversation was recorded.

Various narrative therapeutic techniques were utilized in order in these conversations to reach a place of difference in relation to the conflict story. The project goal was to conduct a close study of the conversation the details involved the narrative conflict coaching process.
What is Conflict Coaching?

Trish Jones and Ross Brinkert (2008) wrote a book that claimed to be the first book on conflict coaching. Here is their definition of what conflict coaching is:

Conflict coaching is a process of conflict intervention involving one disputant/client and one conflict resolution professional, given the resonance of one on one professional coaching and the fact that it is often not feasible to engage two or more parties simultaneously. (Jones & Brinkert, 2008, p. 4)

The definition is important because it shows a way that conflict can be worked with by a client meeting with a conflict resolution professional. It is not always necessary to have two disputants involved in order to make some type of progress toward eventual resolution. Conflict coaching can also potentially be used as an intervention technique in order to move toward a resolution.

The conflict coaching process was developed primarily in the field of management coaching, where a person in a management role explored a current conflict with the help of a professional coach (Jones & Brinkert, 2008). Jones and Brinkert also talk about the processes that a conflict coaching conversation might involve.

Conflict coaching is a process in which a coach and client communicate one on one for the purpose of developing the client’s conflict related
understanding, interaction strategies and interaction skills. (p. 5)

The two main contexts for conflict coaching have been: executive coaching and conflict resolution communities. Jones & Brinkert say that executive coaching usually means, “one-on-one professional development within an organizational setting,” (p. 5). They state its purpose in the following terms:

It has been used to teach specific skills, improve job performance, prepare for professional advancement, and assist with broader purposes such as an executive’s agenda for major organizational change. (p. 6)

Conflict coaching techniques have also been seen as useful within conflict resolution practice. The need for one-on-one conflict resolution arose when only one person was present for mediation. As it began to evolve, the process was named, “problem solving for one,” (Jones & Brinkert, p. 7). The process continued to diversify within the field and it soon became more specified for different purposes, “leading to new subtypes: coaching for confrontation, coaching for diversity, and coaching as possible preparation for mediation,” (Jones & Brinkert, p. 7).

Conflict coaching can be used in a variety of circumstances, because of the adaptability of the process. The tools that are implemented are not specific to one field or discipline. The goal may be described as: “making sense of conflict, general plans for actively managing conflict and specific communication behaviors for the client to use,” (Jones & Brinkert, p. 5). The context in which the
conflict occurs is still vital however, because it informs the best way to apply conflict coaching in various situations.

**What is Narrative Conflict Coaching?**

The current project was grounded in the field of narrative conflict coaching which was developed by Dr. John Winslade, who first wrote about it in 2012 (Winslade & Williams, 2012). Here are some of the things he said about the process:

The aim of conflict coaching will be to help the person separate himself from the dominant conflict–saturated story and grow some preferred story of relationship with the other party. The assumption is that a relationship change will occur if this narrative shift takes place. (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 34)

A narrative approach to conflict coaching starts from the assumption that conflict is embedded in competing narratives about what has happened. It also assumes that these narratives will be shaped by a process of selection from out of the range of possible plot elements and that there are always possible narratives that can be developed other than the conflict-saturated one. The conflict narrative that dominates will likely be held in place by power relations of some kind, particularly as expressed through some dominant discourse. In the shadows of the dominant story will always exist some other possible stories, some of which the person consulting the counselor will prefer to what has been
happening (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 34).

Narrative conflict coaching is an in-depth narrative technique which aims to guide the client to find a pathway to move forward through the conflict by creating a new narrative or alternative story in which the conflict is no longer determining a person’s responses. Narrative conflict coaching also focuses on the discursive position of the client in relation to the conflict through the deconstruction of the client’s story. As the counselor uses narrative conflict coaching techniques the conflict begins to change as does the position of the client in relation to the conflict. As the process continues the client begins to change their story and re-story the conflict.

As the process continues, various questions are posed in order to obtain specific details of the conflict within the conversation. This process focuses on the use of narrative therapy techniques of questioning and begins by seeking out a description of the conflict, based on Gilles Deleuze’s (1990) four dimensions of an event or a series of events: denotation, manifestation, signification, and identifying the sense that holds it together. Once the initial story of the conflict has been understood, narrative conflict coaching proceeds to deconstruct the problem through externalizing it, and to further deconstruct the assumptions on which it rests. A variety of factors that influence the conflict can be explored through various questioning techniques. Next the narrative practitioner explores the effects of the conflict in the client’s life and maps the effects of the conflict on
the person and on others. Then he or she invites the person to evaluate these effects, and seeks to open a counter story by finding unique outcomes and anchoring the client’s sense of agency in his or her preferred value system. The counselor then traces the history of these values and extends them into the future (Winslade, 2014). The counselor may also inquire into examples of when the conflict was not strong because of the strengths of the client. The goal of all this is to reach some type of clarity about how to move forward in relation to the conflict and an increased resolve to act out of the person’s preferred story about the situation.

Narrative conflict resolution is derived in large part from narrative therapy. It first applied many of the same concepts to the practice of mediation (Winslade & Monk, 2000; 2008; Monk & Winslade, 2013; Winslade & Williams, 2012). “Mediation opens up space for the performance of alternative stories in conflict situations, and qualitatively different relationships can result,” (Winslade & Monk, 2000, p 134).

Narrative therapy has largely impacted the field of narrative mediation through the use of conflict resolution questioning techniques borrowed from narrative family therapy (Cobb, 1993, 1994, 2004; Winslade, 2003, 2006; Winslade & Monk, 2000, 2008; Winslade, Monk, & Cotter, 1998).

Narrative practitioners work with the story of the relationship between the parties, rather than directly with the relationship itself, on the belief that it is the
story that governs what people decide to do. “Narrative practice is founded on the principle that changing the story of relationship will change the experience of it,” (Winslade & Williams, 2012).

The counselor begins to assist the client in referring to the past or present where the alternative story might possibly be located. By looking at a different time in their life when the conflict was not present, the client can make a decision which is not violated by the current conflict (Winslade & Williams, 2012). Subsequently, the end result of a conflict coaching process is to help a client create an alternative story with a future where the conflict is no longer dominant (Winslade & Williams, 2012).

It is common in conflict resolution for mediation practice to be built on the assumption that conflict emerges out of competing individual underlying interests. As stated by Christopher Moore,

Dividers in the context of conflict involves perceived or actual incompatibility of parties’ needs and interests, competing values perceived as mutually exclusive significant differences between parties’ means of influence to effect dispute resolution procedures or desired outcomes. (Moore, 2014 p. 111-112)

Narrative conflict resolution does not share this assumption. Narrative mediators do not understand conflicts as effects of objective, contradictory interests that should be mediated; rather conflicts are seen as expressions of the
positioning practices that marginalize or negatively define persons in conversations. The main goal in this context is to create the conditions for the growth of alternative relationship stories that challenge the dominating discourses in the relationship (Kure, 2010, p. 23). So what do narrative practitioners base their work on? The next section will address this topic.

Assumptions of Narrative Conflict Coaching

One assumption is that a conflict results from a relationship in which competing narratives about what happened are vying for people’s attention. It is assumed that the competing narratives will be shaped by the process from which the variety of plot elements have been developed, instead of embedded in the essence of individual interests in the conflict.

From a narrative perspective, the conflict occurs within the context of a personal story but it is influenced socially and especially by the context in which it occurs and the discourses that are at work in this context. In addition the conflict is assumed to be outside of the story of the client and not part of who the client is. “This is based on the premise that the problem is the problem, as opposed to the person being seen as the problem,” (Morgan, 2000 p.17). “The last assumption is that the problem does not derive from a character deficit but separate from the client,” (White & Epston, 2009). It is common for people to be
labeled as something instead of focusing on the problem that is occurring. The tendency for people to attribute a problem behavior to a part of a person’s character occurs frequently. The field of narrative counseling aims to change this view and assist the client in externalizing the problem where it becomes separate from their character. This process creates a non-threatening way for a person to explore this problem story, because it is no longer a character deficit but rather a problem outside of who they are.

What This Project Sought To Investigate

The project focused on producing an analysis of the conflict coaching process as recorded and transcribed from two conversations with participants who were experiencing a conflict. The narrative conflict coaching process and strategies were analyzed in regards to some research questions which guided the study.

The main research question being addressed in this project was: “How is narrative conflict coaching helpful in conflict resolution?” The postulate or hypothesis was that analysis of conversation would show that participants shifted their discursive positioning in response to being asked narrative questions. The study was therefore also interested in asking, “What kinds of shifts in discursive positioning can be shown to happen in response to narrative questioning?”
Scope of the Project

The objective of the study was to generate examples of conflict coaching situations in which the narrative approach to conflict coaching was utilized. The participants volunteered to participate based upon their experience of a small conflict. Subsequently, the conflict coaching process was implemented in order to help them identify a path forward in the conflict situation, or to develop a sustaining narrative about how they had already found such a path forward. In order to investigate the research question, the focus of my research project is on the process of narrative conflict coaching within a conflict coaching conversation.

The project intended to show the positive effects in the participant’s responses to the conflict through tracing the shifts in positioning that took place in response to the narrative conflict coaching process. Such shifts should be manifest throughout the process, rather than being simply final outcomes and consequently they were described here in detail through the close analysis of these interactions.

What Is Discursive Positioning?

Discursive positioning refers to a relational process in which a person occupies a position in a discourse through the making of a response in a dialogue. At the same time he or she may call another person into a position from which this person is required to respond. This is called a position call (Winslade & Monk, 2008). Mediation conversations can be understood as the ongoing
negotiation of these positions. The material out of which the positions are
developed is discourse (Winslade & Monk, 2008). Discursive positions may be
fluid and constantly in play throughout a conversation; however the discourse
may be constant and embedded in the taken-for-granted assumptions that lie in
the background of a conversation (Winslade & Monk, 2008).

One of the advantages of positioning theory is that it affords people the
opportunity to address the particularity of localized experiences without
losing touch with the powerful social discourses within which subjective
experience is built. (Winslade & Monk, 2008 p. 43)

Therefore, it is both the personal and social aspects of a conflict that each person
experiences that are most often brought to a mediator (Winslade & Monk, 2008).
Positioning begins to occur as the mediator and client(s) explore the discourses
that are present in people’s stories about what has happened in the conflict. The
goal becomes the client’s view of the construction of the world. The different
people who are involved in the conflict continue the discourse within society and
create social norms through this repetition.

The idea of discursive positioning was developed by Bronwyn Davies and
Rom Harré (1990) and was derived from Michel Foucault’s concept of subjective
positioning (Foucault, 1989). The value of positioning theory began to be applied
to mediation when it was used to identify how the position of a client changed in
relation to the dominant discourse. Discursive positioning focused on the societal
influence within the context and was dependent on the dominant discourse. But positioning is sensitive to the nuances of conversation. The client may take an initial specific position on an issue, depending on the dominant discourse. The position continues to change as the context in which the conflict occurs is explored. As a person changes their position in response to the effects of a conversation and in relation to the background dominant discourse, the performed effect of the conflict within the narrative changes. The field of discursive positioning can be thus adapted to illustrate these changes and used to further explain how the process of conflict coaching works and to show its extensive effects in action. The analysis of discursive positioning was thus useful to this study, because the position a client takes in relation to a conflict can be said to continuously change in response to the questioning process posed by the conflict coach.

The conflict coach can inquire of one party about the position they take up in a conflict story in relation to the other person.

**What Is The Difference Between A Position And A Role?**

Positioning is much more fluid than a rigid, fixed concept like a role. The position that the client takes in relation to a conflict is continuously changing in response to the moves undertaken by another person. In a conflict coaching conversation this might mean the client no longer views the conflict as fixed but rather a fluid process where the position in relation to the conflict is continuously
changing and is based on the questioning of the counselor.

As the counselor and client explore the conflict through the process of mediation or conflict coaching, the position of the client in relation to conflict, which is embedded in discourse, is claimed to change. Even if the discourse is not dislodged, the current position of each party may remain continuously fluid in relation to this discourse (Winslade & Monk, 2008).

As the conflict coaching process unfolds, the process by which the construction of the world is achieved is illustrated by positioning. All are involved in reproducing the dominant discourses within society and in creating social norms through this repetition. Discourse is constantly changing throughout various conversations, however in conflict; the patterns of discourse become stuck in a limited range of possibilities (Monk & Winslade, 2008).

Personal Interest

In this section conflict coaching will be explored in relation to a personal interest. Conflict coaching is a unique approach to exploring various conflicts. Throughout the Counseling and Guidance program various narrative counseling techniques were fascinating, because of the distinctive process of approaching various struggles in a unique way. The idea of the client being an expert in their own experience and thereby possessing the knowledge of what works best in their own life, in contrast to an external expert description has appealed to me because it empowers the person and their story, based on what they view is best
A personal experience concerns a variety of conflicts throughout the lifespan, where the emphasis often turns to an exploration continuously focused on others and their effect on the conflict. The conclusion is that focusing on another person’s behavior is useless because you cannot control another person. It is more beneficial to view the conflict from a position of strength in order to subsequently reach a resolution.

Conflict involves a plethora of experiences throughout the lifespan. In my life it began at a young age within the first few years of life in situations as simple as a disagreement with a sibling over a desired toy. Parenting and societal influences, of course, shaped my approach to conflict resolution. Parental modeling of how to approach conflict resolution was not always effective. As a result, new conflict resolution techniques were adopted.

From a very young age it was apparent that a personality trait which would continue throughout my life was a sense of justice or a sense of fairness. It was always a trait that was important in any type of conflict. I can remember at a young age being so adamant about fairness in sibling conflicts, and feeling intense passionate emotions when confronted with an unfair resolution. As life continued and various conflicts occurred, which were out of my control, but nonetheless experienced, the concept of conflict coaching would have been extremely powerful in gaining a sense of release from the outside contextual
situations. The field of counseling planted a seed of an intense desire to resolve conflicts in a personal way in which I was able to obtain control of any situation. The power present in the ability to take a situation from the past and make sense of it in the present, in relation to personal attributes or alternative stories in which the conflict was no longer a part of the person I was, was staggering, because my past could no longer affect my future through careful exploration of understanding the effects of what was experienced. The personal attributes which were developed provided a way to resolve conflict on the strength of my personal attributes, instead of on past modeling. The conflict was removed from my current alternative story, because it was something within the social context that affected my past and no longer my future.

As life continued from early childhood into the tumultuous period of adolescence, conflict continued to grow. The variety of conflict resolution techniques learned through personal conflicts, as well as through observing others’ conflicts, continued to shape the way in which I approached conflict. For example, personal conflicts provided opportunities to use personal attributes as well as successful conflict resolution techniques. The ineffective conflict resolution techniques within the problem story were modified into healthier and effective conflict resolution skills, resulting in a personally acceptable conflict resolution. The early modeling of conflict resolution featured: avoidance of conflict completely, arguing in ways that were witnessed by outside influences, physically, conversationally as well as internalizing. There was a lack of healthy
techniques provided in all areas of life. The concept of actually exploring the complexities of each and every conflict would have been desirable and unfortunately were not developed until later. Conflict coaching would have been extremely beneficial at this point in life, but instead conflict was usually, “resolved,” by means of rules and authority. Various authority figures, both socially and educationally, were not interested in actually hearing the specifics of the conflict and its effects, but rather in solving conflict through authoritative power. The idea was that, “I am the authority and these are the rules and now we are done discussing them.” If people would take the time to allow adolescents the opportunity to express their feelings, then many issues could be successfully resolved.

As life continued and independence ensued, the ability to approach conflict in personally desired ways occurred. Many of these conflicts were not dealt with in a healthy manner, mainly due to the lack of guidance by others on healthy ways to do so. The freedom to explore educational desires created a way to explore the various techniques of conflict resolution which were personally desirable. Many of these techniques began with an undergraduate degree in psychology, where various theories and classes created a desire to learn more. Conflict continued to be a struggle in daily life and relationships, but a variety of factors played a role in this challenge, such as personality differences.

As I continued to explore the field of psychology, the path expanded to the
field of counseling. The concept in the beginning of my master’s program of the
client being the expert in their own life was inspiring. It was no longer necessary
to ascribe labels to various personality characteristics or challenges, but rather to
explore these factors in regards to societal influences which helped explain
conflict without having to resort to pathologizing.

Significance of the Project

The significance of the project is that narrative conflict coaching has not
been studied before – neither the process nor the outcome. This study, therefore,
breaks new ground. The conflict coaching process provides the client with an
individualized way to explore a current conflict, with or without the presence of
the other person involved in the conflict. Because there are many situations in
which mediation is not (at least immediately) possible, this process offers one
option for those who are suffering the pain of conflict. The client is able to explore
the current conflict in relation to personal views and ways in the past where the
client is empowered, based on past successful conflict resolution. The process is
of value because it is personalized and client-driven.

The current project aims to explore the process of conflict coaching
through the experience of various client/counselor interactions in order to show
the effectiveness of the conflict coaching tools when implanted within a
counseling conversation. Through analysis of the various counseling
conversations a successful pathway forward will be reached. Therefore, it is significant because it points towards counseling conversations using this process that can be shown to be effective.

Conflict coaching is of social importance, because conflict is a feature of many people’s lives. Nobody’s life is free of conflict, because it is the product of difference (Winslade & Williams, 2012). If conflict coaching can help clients identify a successful way to respond to conflict, then there are many people who stand to benefit. Benefits include gaining a thorough understanding of what is occurring and how it affects both personal and professional relationships. The client may also be able to learn to apply various techniques to conflict situations in order to understand what is happening and to take up positions of empowerment based in cherished values or learnings from past situations in which the client was able to successfully resolve the conflict.

The research project is an analysis on the process of narrative conflict coaching. The data was collected through two different conflict coaching conversations and used for research purposes to show the effectiveness of narrative conflict coaching techniques. It is useful because, in each conversation, the client reached a space of difference in perspective on the conflict, while also establishing an alternative story through which to respond in future to the conflict. The underlying themes which are explored in these two conversations occur throughout various conflicts and can be utilized in order to create resolution or
compromise in many situations. Conflict coaching may prove useful in many areas of life. It can eventually be generalized to various areas of conflict and further study may demonstrate its effectiveness across situations. Conflict coaching can also be useful in professional conflicts, as well as in multiple personal conflicts.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in the study. I will now outline the sense in which they have been used.

*Qualitative Research*: Qualitative research focuses on the descriptions and analysis of the individual and collective social actions of the beliefs thoughts and perceptions of people (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

*Discourse*: “The clusters of taken-for-granted assumptions that lie just beneath the surface of many conversations in a particular social context,” (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 29).

*Discourse Analysis*: Discourse analysis involves analyzing the social reality produced and made real through discourse exchanged in social interactions which give meaning to the discourse (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

*Narrative Mediation*: The ‘intervention of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power’ (Moore 1996) in the resolution
of a conflict. It is called narrative mediation when it involves helping parties separate from a conflict-saturated story and develops a counter story.

**Discursive Positioning:** The involvement of two parties within mediation where the position of each party is affected by the other party and also affected by an underlying discourse (Winslade, 2005).

**Positioning:** The link between the dominant discourse and the responses of each party through which meaning is exchanged (Winslade, 2005).

**Narrative Therapy:** A type of therapy where the client is the expert in their own life and the importance of their story provide the basis of what is explored. It usually involves exploring the effects of a problem story; deconstruction and creating an alternative story (Morgan, 2000).

**Deconstruction:** The process of “taking apart” the problem story in order to explore its effects on the client’s story (Winslade, 2012).

**Conflict Coaching:** The process of exploring a current conflict within a counseling conversation. The exploration focuses on the problem/conflict its effect on the client’s story and ways to rectify the conflict. (Winslade, 2005).

**Alternative or Preferred story:** A client’s story in which a problem or conflict is no longer dominating or pathologizing a person (Morgan, 2000).

**Reflexivity:** Reflexivity entails the researcher being aware of his effect on the process and outcomes of research based on the premise that ‘knowledge cannot
be separated from the knower’ (Steedman, 1991).

Landscape of action: An exploration of the various actions that are taken in order to reach a unique outcome (Morgan, 2000).

Landscape of consciousness or identity: An exploration of a client’s desires, personal values, motives within a counseling conversation (Morgan, 2000).

Thin description: Usually created by outside influences and labels a problem so that there is little room for movement within the exploration process in a counseling conversation (Morgan, 2000).

Externalizing conversations: The process of taking a problem and removing it as a label of a person. The problem is then explored with the client as outside of who the client is (Morgan, 2000).
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Qualitative Research

This study was pursued within a qualitative research tradition. It is important, therefore, to explain what is meant by qualitative research. Qualitative research focuses on the descriptions and analysis of the individual and collective social actions of the beliefs, thoughts and perceptions of people (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The purpose of qualitative research is to focus on the social and linguistic aspects of a phenomenon, usually from the perspective of the participants. The focus becomes analyzing the meaning of what happens in the context of the situation and the events as they are narrated through the lens of the participant.

In my study this means the social context is vital when working with conflict coaching. The experience of the client can only be understood as a narrative if we fully understand the complexities of the conflict which is occurring and the conversation in which it is described. This principle accords with the narrative practice of respecting the viewpoint of the client as the expert in his or her own life. Both the counselor and the researcher need, therefore, to demonstrate respect through assuming that the client knows what is best and what will be effective in resolving their own conflict.
The strategies utilized in qualitative research commonly focus on interactive methods of inquiry such as: participant observation, direct observation, in-depth interviews, artifacts, and supplementary techniques. In this study I used the method of recording a series of counseling conversations in which various conflict coaching and narrative strategies were implemented. The client was guided throughout the counseling conversation by an experienced practitioner who was utilizing various narrative therapy and conflict coaching techniques in order to assist in addressing the conflict. The counselor used strategies such as: externalization of the conflict, creating an alternative story in response to the conflict and establishing positions of strength in which the conflict did not affect the alternative story. The recording of this conversation then formed the basis for the analytical inquiry that followed. The aim of the research was to analyze the conversational record to trace the shifts in meaning that took place for the client.

The context in which the research is conducted is a critical aspect of conducting any qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research relies on the validity of the context in which human actions are studied on the assumption that they are influenced by the context in which they occur. The context for the conversations I was studying was that the participants were experiencing a current conflict, and the position the client was taking up in the narrative they were telling about when the conflict was present. The study analyzed a naturally occurring conversation guided by a framework of questions
designed as a model for narrative conflict coaching. The participants were told that the conversation would be about a personal experience of conflict and were invited to participate in the exercise of the study by bringing along a story of conflict to talk about.

Another feature of qualitative research is that the research question being studied must focus on description and exploration as well as understanding and discovery (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The research question focused on understanding examples of conflict coaching situations and describing the use of the narrative approach to conflict coaching in these situations. The research question being answered in this project is: “How are the questions of narrative conflict coaching helpful in conflict resolution?” The client was asked to describe the current conflict in her life and then to explore the conflict with the guidance of the counselor. This exploration took place within the context of the client’s narrative and was guided in a sequential manner by a list of questions. These questions were devised in order to work through the various aspects of the problem story and to open up areas of strength in the client’s life that could form the basis of the client’s response to the conflict. As the process continued, these areas of strength in the client’s narrative story were emphasized further in order to show that the client had the ability to change their story so that the problematic effects of the conflict were diminished.
The language used by the client in the counseling session was taken as indicative of the participants' confirmation of the significance of the process. In each conflict coaching conversation, each participant was also asked their view on the helpfulness of the counseling process that had just occurred. The response of the client provided an affirmation that the process was effective and helpful.

In addition, it is essential that researchers exercise reflexivity in order to remain neutral. Reflexivity is commonly used in qualitative research and is accepted as a method where qualitative researchers can validate their research practices (Pillow, 2003).

That there are four common trends in the current uses of reflexivity: reflexivity as recognition of self, reflexivity as recognition of other, reflexivity as truth, and reflexivity as transcendence. (Pillow, 2003, p. 2)

The conflict coaching process emphasizes the importance of the client in relating each and every step to their personal self-awareness. The client is consistently asked by the counselor about the effect of the conflict on themselves. The focus is not on other people but rather on how the conflict is affecting the client and all aspects of the past, current and future of the self. Reflexivity refers to the ability to recognize the impact of the other on oneself. The technique of asking questions of what the client means by certain words or phrases is ongoing. The counselor will periodically ask for clarification of the participant's words and not
assume that the view of the counselor’s meaning of various words is congruent
with the participant’s meaning. Reflexivity as truth gathering, used for obtaining
accuracy, occurs when the counselor is willing to understand the truth of a
situation in terms of its meaning for the client. Finally, reflexivity as
transcendence means removing the researcher’s own subjectivity and cultural
context in order to accurately report (Pillow, 2003). The counselor does not
impose his or her own ideas and meanings on the client’s conversation but rather
respects the client’s personal views of the situation and cultural context, thereby
respecting that the story is the client’s and not imposed upon from the outside.

Qualitative research is utilized in predominantly four paradigms: social
constructivism, critical theory, feminism and queer theory (Patton, 2002).
Narrative conflict coaching claims to be based on a social constructionist
paradigm, which is close to constructivism. Hence the research method had a
close fit with the practice orientation.

Positioning

In this section positioning theory will be explored. It is the basis of a major
aspect of the data analysis. Positioning theory argues that each person takes a
position in relation to discourse immediately when speaking in a counseling
conversation, or any other type of conversation (Winslade, 2005). Here is a
description of positioning theory from Rom Harré and Luke van Langenhøve
(1999).
Positioning theory is the study of the nature, formation, influence and ways of change of local systems of rights and duties as shared assumptions about them influence small scale interactions. Positioning theory is to be seen in contrast to the older framework of role theory. Roles are relatively fixed, often formally defined and long lasting. Even such phenomena as `role distance' and `role strain' presuppose the stability of the roles to which they are related. Positioning theory concerns conventions of speech and action that are labile, contestable and ephemeral. (Harré & van Langenhøve, 1999, p.9)

Therefore, the position a person takes in relation to society is constantly changing. A position is no longer stagnant as previously assumed in role theory. The discourse is constantly changing in regards to changing relationships and the personal subjective responses (Harré & van Langenhøve, 1999). Therefore the position of a person is dependent on various relationship influences as well as on the changing social discourse which is affected by culture (Winslade, 2005). Any disagreement between the position allowed by the dominant society and other viewpoints creates a space for people to begin to resist the dominant discourse. A person can decide to take the position of the dominant culture or refuse and take the position of an opposing viewpoint. It is the individual choice of a person to create a position they desire, however, it is always still a position in
relation to a dominant discourse. This process is more likely to occur when discourse is more obvious and no longer hidden.

The possibility of contradiction of discursive positioning is necessary for the possibility of change. If we could not at times refuse the positions we are offered, then we would be determined by the discursive worlds in which we live. We would have no room to make choices, to take stands, or to protest injustice. In other words, we need the possibility of contradiction in order to exercise agency (Winslade, 2005).

**Discursive Positioning**

Within narrative practice therapists view positioning as an expression of what marginalizes or negatively defines persons in conversation (Kure, 2010). Each time someone speaks within a counseling conversation, positioning in relation to discourse occurs, because of the discursive material or utilization of words and meanings, which allow the conversation or response to make sense (Winslade, 2005). According to Bakhtin, (1986) it is not the actual response that is vital, but rather the response within the context of a specific conversation which is an essential part of the concept of discursive positioning. The main function of the context is to create power in developing the alternative relationship story, which challenges the dominant discourse in the relationship (Kure, 2010). When responding within the conversation the client has created a discursive position as well as allowing the other person a position to respond
(Winslade, 2005). As each person responds within the conversation both parties responding in relation to a social discourse contribute to the responses of the other (Winslade, 2005). Therefore, the concept of positioning provides a view of the complexities of outside influences impacting the current conversation, carried by words used in the utterances within the current conversation (Bakhtin, 1986).

Therefore positioning creates a link between the person and the constant existence of discourses, which are actively working with the social world through the process of exchanges of meaning (Winslade, 2005). The continuous influence of the discursive background on the client continuously affects what can be said and heard in a conversation (Winslade, 2005). As a result the meaning of the conversation is continually changing due to various outside influences. Throughout the process of meaning-making theories of discourse control, discourse dominance or discursive hegemony are at play (Winslade, 2005).

The dominant discourse is constantly affecting the meaning of the conversation, regardless of awareness of this influence on the client’s part (Winslade, 2005). The effects of the power of the dominant discourse consistently constrain our choices and people’s lives are consistently becoming patterned by the dominant discourse (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 45). The task of conflict resolution work is to create a new discursive background that does not
fit into the events of the dispute and creates less polarizing and marginalizing positioning practices (Kure, 2010).

We can think of each utterance as situated in discourse, simply because it uses discursive material (words and meanings) in order to make sense. Any utterance calls upon a discursive background which, if we follow it back far enough, is formulated in a view of the world. Moreover, according to Bakhtin (1986), each utterance can only make sense in response to other utterances in a dialogue or in the history of dialogues in a particular genre of conversation. An utterance is not just a representation of discursive meanings that have their existence somewhere else. It is also where the event of discourse production takes place. It is a response to another utterance and it anticipates a subsequent response. As we speak, we create and exchange pieces of discourse and in the process structure and give shape to our own and each other’s worlds. It is this moment-by-moment process of construction of the world that the analysis of positioning seeks to describe (Winslade & Monk, 2008, p. 44.)

Discursive positioning refers to a relational phenomenon in conflict resolution where each party calls the other party into a position through responses in the conversation (Winslade & Monk, 2008). The mediation conversation involves the ongoing negotiation of these positions (Winslade & Monk, 2008). The only material, out of which discursive positions can be developed, however, is discourse (Winslade & Monk, 2008). The positions
occurring throughout the narrative mediation are constantly changing based on the conversation, however, the discourse itself usually remains stable (Winslade & Monk, 2008).

One of the advantages of positioning theory is that it affords people the opportunity to address the particularity of localized experiences without losing touch with the powerful social discourses within which subjective experience is built. (Winslade & Monk, 2008, p. 43)

Therefore it is both the personal and social that each person experiences within a conflict that is brought to a mediator (Winslade & Monk, 2008). As the conflict coaching process unfolds, deconstruction of the process of the construction of the world is the goal. All people participate in continuing the discourses within society and creating social norms through repetition.

A process for a counselling conversation that pays attention to discursive positioning might work through the following steps:

1. Build trust in a relationship and explore the problem(s) that brings a person to counseling.
2. Develop an externalizing conversation that deconstructs the problem story and locates it in the world of discourse.
3. Map the discursive positions that the person is invited into by the problem story.
4. Identify the person’s efforts to resist being
positioned in this way. 5. Inquire into the person’s preferences for the kind of re-positioning that would make a difference. 6. Develop an account of such position changes that is located in personal history, in a community of membership, and also in alternative discourses/knowledge that can serve to sustain the positioning shift in the face of the continued assertion of dominant discourses. (Winslade, 2005, p. 358)

**Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis investigates the social reality that is produced and made real through discourse, where the social interactions are only understood in relation to the meaning of the discourse (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Discourses are shared and social and are created through interactions between social groups and are influenced by societal structures (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). The discourse embedded within the dominant society continuously changes based on the social influences. The group that controls the power and privilege within a society forms the dominant discourse, because of its control of what is seen as acceptable within that society. “That is, dominant discourses reflect prevailing ideology, including popular norms, values, and beliefs,” (Winslade & Monk, 2008, p. 119). Discourse can be hidden and difficult to identify and resist as well as to oppose when identified (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999, p. 352). The relationship
between text, discourse and context are explored within the social constructivist view (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

This concept of discourse, influenced chiefly by social constructionist and poststructuralist theory, is based on the work of Michel Foucault (1972), who described discourse as a “social practice” disseminated through cultural space that ‘exerts a dominating effect on what can be thought or spoken. (Winslade, 2008, p. 115)

Therefore, the dominant views within a society determine socially what is acceptable and create the dominant discourse. In addition, interactions between people and the products of their interactions influence the discourse (Winslade & Monk, 2008). The discourse within a society is often controlled by the dominant culture and can be opposed by others when forming their identity in order to position themselves the way that they see fit. “Identity is made up of both personal preferences and cultural specifications for the range within which we are allowed to form preferences,” (Winslade & Monk, 2008, p. 122). Discourses are dependent on the various situations and settings a person is in. The position we take depends upon the discourse and whether or not we desire to follow the dominant discourse or create a new position in opposition to this discourse.
Narrative Therapy

The focus of this study is on narrative practice in the field of conflict coaching. It draws from narrative practice which originally developed in the field of family therapy. In narrative therapy, as developed by Michael White and David Epston (1990), the emphasis became separating clients from their problems and encouraging them to see their lives and futures from new perspectives.

Narrative therapy is built around the concept of “story”: 1. The meaning people give to their lives is shaped by the stories they tell themselves; 2. These stories can constrict their lives and are often influenced by the dominant culture in which they live; 3. The proper focus of counseling should be helping people examine and “re-author” their stories. (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 40)

Narrative therapy involves a focus on a person’s identity story as well as an emphasis on understanding various problems and the effects these problems have on an individual’s life. Narrative therapy views the problem as separate from the person and often involves taking a client’s story and “re-authoring” or “re-storying conversations” (Morgan, 2000, p.5). A story consists of different pieces organized in a coherent way in order to understand the entire picture. As Morgan comments, a narrative involves events, linked in sequence, across time, and according to a plot (Morgan, 2000). Furthermore, White (1995) applied Bruner’s (1986) idea of different narrative landscapes to therapy conversations.
by showing the differences between sequences, time or plot (landscape of action) sequences and the meanings or the way in which interpretations are made (landscape of consciousness or identity) through the process of reflection on these events (Morgan, 2000, p. 61). The landscape of consciousness or landscape of identity refers to the process of assigning meaning to the various situations that occur throughout life (landscape of action) (White, 1995, p.31). In narrative therapy people are constantly engaged in an ongoing struggle between the dominant story and the alternative story. The dominant story consists of a story in which outside influences determine the story of an individual and their life, whereas the alternative story is the story that is created from the viewpoint of the client and includes what is of importance to them. This focus creates a sense of empowerment that changes the dominant views into an externalized view of the problem story, one in which it is no longer so powerful or so pathologizing of the client.

In addition, in narrative therapy it is often assumed that problems occur when people are made subject to “thin descriptions” which contribute to the creation of the problem-saturated narrative of the client. A thin description involves an extremely limited view of people’s actions and identities which are usually created by other people in powerful positions (Morgan, 2000). The person thus becomes “the problem” through the spread of a thin description of the person and is consequently labeled by this description. The goal then becomes to help the client create an alternative story where the thin description no longer
fits with who they are, but rather appears as something that has taken control of their life. This process begins with the use of externalizing conversations, where the client no longer is the problem; the problem is the problem, and the counselor assists the client by beginning to externalize the problem and thereby separate themselves from the problem (Morgan, 2000).

It is common in this process for the counselor to ask the client to name the problem (Morgan, 2000). A client might be asked, for example, what he or she would call it. The process of narrative therapy then moves towards tracing the history of the problem in the client’s life. As the process continues the therapist will then begin to explore with the client the effects of the problem, while maintaining the externalized viewpoint. Exploring the effects of the problem involves the asking about the effects that the problem has had on the client’s life, as well as on others’ lives. In addition, exploring the effects of the problem may lead to the discovery of unique outcomes, which can be found in moments when the problem story did not affect the client’s life in a specific situation (Morgan, 2000). The client and narrative therapist then work together to explore why the problem did not have effects in these moments. The client is asked first to evaluate the problem and it effects, and then to justify the evaluation by saying, for example, why he or she does not like what the problem is doing.

Narrative therapists are interested in discovering, acknowledging and “taking apart” (deconstructing) the beliefs, ideas, and practices of the
broader culture in which a person lives that are serving to assist the problem and the problem story. (Morgan, 2000, p.45)

Cultural influences have often become intertwined with the problem story and increased the power of the problem story. Through questioning and conversation the narrative therapists can untangle the complexities of these cultural influences on the problem story with the client and consequently begin to create an alternative story. Alternative stories are then developed through the creation of two landscapes: a landscape of action and a landscape of consciousness (Bruner, 1986). The process to ensure that these changes occur is called deconstruction, where “taken-for-granted” truths are explored and processed (Morgan, 2000, p. 45). The process of deconstruction will then lead to the creation of a unique outcome which is anything that does not fit with the dominant story. This in turn will then lead to the creation of an alternative or preferred story (Morgan, 2000). The preferred story is then supported through the use of therapeutic documents in order to support its continued growth, instead of relying on chance and hearsay to grow the story (Morgan, 2000).

Therapeutic documents have also been developed and utilized by narrative therapists, instead of the official document file process followed by most therapists. The purpose of the therapeutic document is to record in writing the alternative story and continue the deconstruction of the norms of the general
therapeutic process, which are often automatically believed (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Parker, 1999).

The narrative approach to counseling assists people to view their lives through the lens of being an expert of their own life, as well as seeing the problem that is influencing their life as separate from their identity. People have the ability to reduce the influence of the problem through the utilization of various skills. The story begins to change with the assistance of the narrative therapist by re-creating “their story” through the use of various techniques which are implemented and guided by narrative therapists. The process of “re-authoring” occurs throughout this collaborative process between client and counselor, as well as taking the context of such stories into account (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative therapy thus aims to show that the problem is viewed as external to the person, locates it in the broader socio-political context, and reflects it in discourse, rather than within the individual or family (Madigan & Law, 1998).

Narrative Conflict Coaching

Now it is time to outline a narrative approach to conflict coaching. Here is what Winslade and Williams (2012) say in their introduction to conflict coaching:

A narrative approach to conflict coaching starts from the assumption that conflict is embedded in competing narratives about what has happened. It also assumes that these narratives will be shaped by a process of selection from out of the range of possible
plot elements and that there are always possible narratives that can be developed other than the conflict-saturated one. The conflict narrative that dominates will likely be held in place by power relations of some kind, particularly as expressed through some dominant discourse. In the shadows of the dominant story will always exist some other possible stories, some of which the person consulting the counselor will prefer to what has been happening. (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 34)

This statement outlines the general intention but does not spell out the details of practice. The next task is to explain how it is done.

**Listening to the Story**

The first step in a conflict coaching conversation is to listen carefully to the story of what has happened, such as to the plot, characterizations of people, the thematic elements being emphasized.

It involves hearing the events being told as a selection out of all the possible stories that could be told and as a particular arrangement of these story elements…. In addition it is vital to listen by utilizing the double listening technique in order to listen for exceptions, gaps, contradictions, and expression of resistance of the dominance of the conflict, as well as the conflict-saturated narrative itself. (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 34)
The counselor should begin by using high level counseling skills in order to grasp the entire conflict story, such as clarifying questions, summarizing skills, and acknowledging the feelings of the client.

The next step involves exploring the discourse through naming the problem story, beginning the externalization process, as well as deconstructs assumptions. The beginning of mapping the effects and evaluating these effects continues the process towards opening the counter story in order to create an extension to values into the future. The conflict coaching questioning techniques are mapped out in Table 1: each question focusing on a specific purpose in the process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understand the conflict story</th>
<th>Deconstruct the conflict story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Denotation</td>
<td>Establish the facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Manifestation</td>
<td>Inquire about people’s desires and intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Signification</td>
<td>Ask about the influence of discourses and systems of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> Series of events</td>
<td>Establish how events are part of a series, each influencing other events in the series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong> Sense</td>
<td>Ask what holds the series of events together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Narrative Conflict Coaching Guidelines

It sounds like … happened, but you would prefer … Is that right?

How much were gender stories, or race, or the
After asking about the story of the conflict, to the narrative conflict coach begins to deconstruct the story of the conflict. The counselor will aim to assist the client in challenging the assumptions with the other party (Winslade & Williams, 2012). This will then lead to the step of naming the problem in an externalizing
conversation. A helpful question to lead clients towards naming the problem would be: “So if you could think of a name for this conflict what would it be?” The process of naming the problem helps to externalize the conflict versus internalizing the conflict. The next step in conflict coaching is to, “map the effects of the problem.” When mapping the effects of the problem, the counselor starts to use the name of the problem in order to emphasize that it has been externalized and then begins to ask about “its” effects on the client. The goal of the counselor asking about the effects of the problem is to begin to increase a sense of importance of the damage the conflict is causing for the client (Winslade & Williams, 2012). “Questions should aim for breadth of coverage of all the domains in which the problem is having an influence,” (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 39). The effects focus on such areas such as: emotional experiences, cognitive domain, relational domain, practical domains of action and the physical domain (Winslade & Williams, 2012). An example of inquiry into emotional experiences would be, “How is it getting you to feel?” A cognitive domain would be explored through asking, “What thoughts does it persuade you to think?” A question about a relational domain would be, “What is it getting you to say to the other person?” A practical domain would be explored through asking, “Does it get you to do anything that is out of character for you?” A physical domain would be asked about through, “Is the problem causing any physical effects, such as headaches?” (Winslade & Williams, 2012). In addition, the effect of time is vital to the conflict coaching process. Therefore it is essential to ask about the conflict in
relation to time. Questions focus on the past, current experience and the possibility of future effects of the conflict.

The next step in the conflict coaching process is to assist the client in evaluating the effects of the conflict. The counselor inquires whether or not the conflict and its effects are something that the client wants to change or simply continue to live with (Winslade & Williams, 2012). Throughout the evaluating of the effects of the conflict, the focus is on why, in order to lead the client to articulate their own rationale for change (Winslade & Williams, 2012). The next step in narrative conflict coaching is to assemble the alternative story, with the focus being on the relational aspect. “Narrative practice is founded on the principle that changing the story of relationship will change the experience of it,” (Winslade & Williams, 2012). The counselor begins to assist the client in referring to the past or present where the alternative story was possibly located. By looking at a different time in their life when the conflict was not present the client can make a decision which is not violated by the current conflict. Subsequently, the end result of the conflict coaching process is to help a client create an alternative story with a future where the conflict is no longer present (Winslade & Williams, 2012).
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

The beginning of data collection occurs once planning has been completed. The focus during the beginning data collection phase involved joining with clients to begin collecting data. It is vital to complete this process by using language which is understood by the client. In my case this meant explaining in an easily understood way what the goal of the conflict coaching session would be and, if the client agreed, obtaining informed consent to move forward.

The next step in the data collection process involved recording the conversation. The counselor conducted the conflict coaching counseling session and utilized the guiding questioning strategies and the researcher videoed the conversation in order to create a record of the conflict resolution process. Before describing the data analysis process, I will outline how this first phase was done.

The data collection process begins with participants being selected for specific reasons in order to test a hypothesis for a construct through theoretical sampling (Hays & Wood, 2011). The conflict coaching research project selected participants willing to talk about the experience of a current or recent conflict situation. The participants were asked to volunteer if they were dealing with a current conflict in their life in order to focus on the construct of conflict and hence to utilize narrative therapy techniques through the conflict coaching process.
Throughout this process counseling researchers typically focus on theory-driven data collection in order to create a core category to unite both constructs (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The conflict coaching process utilized the theory of conflict coaching in order to unite both constructs of counseling and conflict coaching through process counseling. This is in contrast to outcome process research which focuses on the goal of finding a specific outcome in regards to the research throughout the process of the research.

Subsequently, researchers typically utilize various techniques such as interviews and observations in order to create codes which are developed as a result of participant domains into a “codebook” which is revised through a comparison process (Hays & Wood, 2011). The “codebook” utilized in the current research project of conflict coaching was represented by the guidelines for asking questions in narrative conflict coaching (see chapter two).

The researchers typically continue the process through constant comparison of the theory with the data that is collected and analyzed, attempting to locate convergent and divergent data categories through the use of “codebook” (Hays & Wood, 2011). Hays and Wood explain thus:

As additional data are collected to refine the codebook, axial codes, or open codes that are collapsed into larger categories based on relationships among them, are identified. Next, selective codes are created to capture patterns and sequences among axial codes. As
coding proceeds from open coding to selective coding, counseling researchers look for causal conditions (factors influencing a phenomenon), intervening conditions (ways participants respond to causal conditions), and consequences (results of intervening conditions for participants). Saturation of data, where there are no new data to build or reflate a particular theory, typically occurs at the axial coding phase. (Hays & Singh, 2011)

In this study the questions in the guidelines were used as the codes and the study examined responses to each question, asking whether the response supplemented the question. If this happens it can be argued that the questions have produced an intended class of response. And if the process is propelled forward along the expected trajectory then it can be claimed (in at least a preliminary way) that the process is causing therapeutic movement to occur.

Validity in qualitative research is enhanced when there are a variety of strategies used to collect the data. The term triangulation refers to the opportunity to increase the credibility of findings through the use of a variety of strategies in regards to the topic being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Here there were three strategies used, each of which is triangulated with the others. The analysis of the counseling techniques used and the clients’ responses to these was the first strategy. The specific question asked in the conversation about ways in which the conflict coaching process was helpful was
the second. The analysis of shifts in discursive positioning was the third. There was not a singular strategy that contributed to the evaluation of the conflict coaching process, but rather a variety of strategies which were used. Thus the study could corroborate data on the basis of multiple data sources.

This research project is an analysis of the effectiveness of implementing conflict coaching techniques in order to reach a conflict resolution. The data was acquired within two counseling conversations. Dr. Winslade agreed to act as the counselor within the context of a counseling conversation. The participants were invited based on the premise of experiencing a current conflict. The analysis based on the conflict coaching questioning grounded in theory of narrative conflict coaching. The data collected was through video-taped counseling conversations, where I reviewed and analyzed transcriptions focusing on conflict coaching questioning techniques based in theory. In addition transcriptions were analyzed in regards to the change in positioning of the client to the conflict.

There are a variety of strategies for the data collection process. The term *triangulation* refers to the opportunity to increase the credibility of findings through the use of a variety of strategies in regards to the topic being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The plethora of counseling techniques in the current study provided a variety of ways in which the conflict coaching process occurred. There was not a singular strategy that contributed to the effectiveness of the conflict coaching process, but rather a variety of counseling techniques
and strategies which were essential in working through the conflict and creating multiple pathways to reach the point of conflict resolution. In addition to the use of several researchers, a variety of theories, various viewpoints in data interpretation as well as the corroboration of data based on multiple data sources (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The use of multiple researchers can enhance the validity of qualitative research as well as mechanically recorded data, participant researchers, member checking, and participant review (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Recruitment of Participants

The data collection process begins with participants being selected for specific reasons in order to test a hypothesis or a construct which are subsequently tested through sampling of data (Hays & Wood, 2011). The conflict coaching research project selected participants on the basis of a current or recent conflict situation. The participants were volunteers from the California State University San Bernardino Counseling and Guidance program. This pool of participants consisted of students between the approximate ages of 21 and 40. They included a range of cultural backgrounds and sexes. The process of recruitment was as follows:
1. An email inviting people to participate was sent out to all students in the Counseling and Guidance program and they were asked to respond by email with an expression of interest.

2. Those who expressed interest were then emailed an information sheet and an informed consent form (see Appendix B) to consider. Three people in total responded.

3. The researcher then contacted each person by phone and discussed any questions they may have had and made an appointment for the video recording for those who wish to participate. One of the three possible participants did not agree to go ahead. The other two did.

4. In this conversation the researcher screened potential recruits to ensure that their offer fitted the project. The screening involved asking the participant about the kind of conflict they were contemplating discussing. The emphasis on small issues of conflict rather than, say, being subjected to a major trauma was stressed. Volunteers who had gone through or were embroiled in major conflicts that might require more processing than the single video conversation would be screened out at this stage. For the two volunteers this was not necessary.

How the Data Was Collected

The data was collected in two conflict coaching conversations. The participants explored a current conflict they were personally experiencing in each
conversation. The narrative conflict coaching questioning techniques were used in both of these conversations.

The participants were two female graduate students, both of whom were students at California State University, San Bernardino. Each conversation lasted between 45 minutes and 60 minutes. The counselor began the conflict coaching session by inviting the client to share the story of the current conflict. The steps continued based on the guidelines which served as a framework for narrative conflict coaching questioning techniques created by Dr. Winslade (see Table 1). The conflict was explored through the various theory-based questions. The client progressed through the various narrative purposes by responding to these questions.

The data was collected through video recording (on a flip camera) conversations between Dr Winslade and the volunteer participants. The videos were then transferred to the researcher’s computer and deleted immediately from the camera. The videos were stored on the researcher’s computer under password protection until the research process was complete. Next the videos were transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were then analyzed in order to describe the process that occurs in the interactions and the moment-by-moment movements in discursive positioning in a conflict coaching conversation were identified. When the research project was written, the video files were deleted.
Data Analysis

For the purpose of this research project I am focusing on the progress of the client in moving towards a conflict resolution. The analysis focuses on the process of the questioning techniques and the effect on the narrative. I utilized the tools provided by Dr. Winslade throughout the analyzing process. The transcriptions were analyzed against the conflict coaching guidelines (see Table 1). The focus was to take the transcriptions and compare them with the questioning techniques as well as the purpose. The position of the client in relation to the conflict was analyzed.

I transcribed both counseling conversations and analyzed Dr. Winslade’s questioning and the reasoning behind the selected questions. The majority of the conflict coaching exercise questions was utilized throughout the session, however not always sequentially. The transcripts were then analyzed in order to describe the process that occurs in the interactions and the moment-by-moment movements in discursive positioning in a conflict coaching conversation were identified. The data analysis further examined how the position of the client in the conversation changed based on the questions being asked.

Ethical Considerations

Considerable care was taken to protect the anonymity of participants and to keep their contributions confidential. Names of participants did not appear on video or computer document filenames. Videos were stored on the researcher’s
computer under password protection. Transcripts did not include names of participants and identifying information was omitted from transcripts. The data collected through video recording will be deleted from the researcher’s computer upon the completion of the Master’s research project. The responses in the recorded conversations were coded in order to protect the confidentiality of the clients. Names of participants or identifying information have been excluded from the final project.

Due to the nature of the study, there was a concern about small risks to participants. Short term effects may have been experienced by participants, if painful feelings about conflict situations had been activated. As mentioned above, conversations about major trauma or entrenched ongoing major conflicts would be screened out. On the other hand, positive responses to the conversation were likely to be experienced. The alleviation of worry or distress was a focus of the conversation. Active engagement with distressing emotional content was not the intended focus of the conversation. If participants had experienced acute distress, the interview would have been terminated. At the end of the conversation, participants were invited to debrief on their experience of the conversation. Dr. Winslade and Ashley Pangborn (the researcher) both watched for any ongoing concerns and were ready to raise the possibility of referral to the California State University San Bernardino student counseling service for further assistance, if required.
Data Analysis

The data analysis involved identifying each of the steps in the conflict coaching guidelines (See Table 1), describing how they were attended to, and looking at how the interviewee responded to each conversational move. Responses were analyzed in terms of how they indicated the participant’s discursive position in relation to the issue. The focus was not so much on whether the process was effective in an outcome sense as on how it produced responses (and what kind of responses) in the immediate moment of conversation. The analysis of the process of responses of the participants made use of aspects of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) and, in particular, the analysis of discursive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990).

The analysis of discursive positioning made use of the following questions which were intended to guide rigorous inquiry into the text of a conversation. This version is drawn from Dr Winslade's analysis of a mediation conversation (Winslade, 2003) but the same principles apply to a conflict coaching situation.

1. What position calls are being offered by the mediator? How are they taken up or refused?
2. What positions do participants seek to establish for themselves?
3. What assumptions need to be present in order for what each person says to have meaning?
4. Who else (not in the room) might participants be responding to?
5. To what extent do the positions established involve agency?

6. What power relations are being promoted?

7. What shifts in position are enabled?

(Adapted from Winslade, 2003)
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the project. It consists of an analysis of the process of conflict coaching by examining the transcriptions from the two conversations. The sequence of conflict coaching follows a series of questioning techniques which were intended to lead the participant to synthesize the conflict. The conflict coach created questions for specific purposes in order to move through the conflict coaching process. The question that remains, however, is whether these questions and the overall process did actually achieve what they were intended to do. The theory based questioning techniques were analyzed in order to answer this question for each transcript. The goal was to examine the immediate effects produced by each question in order to demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the theory-based questions.

The second task that this chapter will undertake is to analyze a section of conversation from early in each conversation and one towards the end and ask whether there has been a shift between the two. This aspect of analysis will be presented as part of chapter five. The analysis of the two sections will be done by using a discourse analysis method. It will particularly ask whether there is a shift in the participant’s discursive positioning in the later section, when compared to
the earlier one. Such a shift will be argued to be produced by the conflict coaching methodology and also to be evidence of effectiveness of the approach.

The conflict coaching process is a sequential process of different questions, which are asked by the conflict coach in order to gain a better understanding of the current conflict and help generate a way forward built on a counter story. The process does not always follow each step in strict order but can change based on the participant's response and the direction of the conversation.

Understanding the Story of the Conflict

In the current section of the research project each step will be analyzed and an explanation of each step will be provided. The question that will be asked is whether the conflict coach addressed in the two sample conversations each of these lines of inquiry and also whether the various responses of the participant showed this line inquiry to be helpful in the resolution of the conflict.

Listening to the Denotation of What Happened

The first task of narrative conflict coaching is for the conflict coach to listen to the story of what happened. Winslade describes the purpose of such listening as about understanding what happened. To achieve this understanding, Winslade borrows from Gilles Deleuze's (1990) philosophy of the event. For
Deleuze understanding an event involves understanding in terms of the three dimensions advocated by Bertrand Russell after Gottfried Frege (Bowden, 2011) of denotation, manifestation and signification. But Deleuze believes that these three dimensions are insufficient without adding a fourth one that serves as the glue that holds the other three together. For Deleuze this fourth dimension is, “sense.”

Understanding an event in terms of denotation means to understand the various factual pieces of what happened in the events of the conflict. So, the first questions that need to be asked are about what happened and what was the sequence in which they happened? In the conflict coaching guidelines, the first questions listed are: “Tell me what happened.” “When did it first start?” “What was it like before that?” The purpose of these questions is to begin to elicit the denotative account of what happened. In the first transcribed conversation, lines 1 through 33, the conflict coach is asking questions to elicit this denotative aspect of what happened.

Conflict Coach: You understand from the invitation that we’re looking at some piece of conflict that you’ve experienced. It doesn’t have to be something out of the ordinary. I mean it doesn’t have to be a huge conflict. It can be something on your mind right now or it can be something that happened in the past. So I’m interested in what came to your mind, when you thought about that.
Participant: Well I do have something on my mind that’s been pressing and it’s my job. My boss currently and we used to be co-supervisors, and when the program manager retired he is acting program manager so now he’s my boss. And because he’s wanting the program manager’s position he now sees me as competition.

Conflict Coach: Oh I see.

Participant: And so the relationship that we’ve had since December of 2012 has been very oppressive like he’s not communicating anything with me. If I shut my door to my office he’s knocking on it to ask what I’m working on. He’ll want to ask me what happened at the meeting. Or if someone is coming to my office he’ll stop them on the way or he’ll call people into his office after they come out of mine. So he’s had this almost like paranoid type of reaction and it’s just, yeah.

Conflict Coach: So this changed around December you said.

Participant: Mmm hmm.

Conflict Coach: What happened in December? What followed through? What happened?

Participant: The program manager retired. So he went from being my supervisor. I mean he went from being my co-supervisor to because there was two.

Conflict Coach: So you were colleagues then.
Participant: Right we were colleagues and then we would play uh supportive roles to each other and we had two different units that we supervised and we were under one program manager and so when that program manager left he became acting program manager. But that doesn’t necessarily give him the full scope of the program manager’s duties, however it does give him. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In this section of the conversation the conflict coach is asking questions about the denotative aspect of the conflict. He begins in line 5 and 6 with a general inquiry into what has happened, “So I’m interested in what came to your mind.” In line 20 he says, “So this changed around December you said,” Which seeks to understand the timing and sequence of the events described by the participant and he follows this in line 22 to 23 with, “What happened in December? What followed through? What happened?” In line 27 he responds with, “So you were colleagues then.” Here the word “then” indicates an interest in the temporal dimension of events which are being described. The initial purpose of the questions asked can, therefore, be seen to focus on the denotation of what happened.

How does the participant respond to this inquiry? We can see the participant in line 7 beginning to tell the story of what happened. She supplements the denotative inquiry by establishing a time sequence in her account through the use of words like: “… we used to be co-supervisors,” (line 8);
“… now he’s my boss,” (line 10); “… the relationship that we’ve had since
December of 2012,” (line 13, 14); “… then we would play uh supportive roles.”
Each of these responses includes a temporal location for events. The response
therefore addresses the questions asked.

Here is how the same denotative inquiry developed in the second piece of
conflict coaching.

Conflict Coach: Ok [name], well thank you for being willing to talk to me
there is some piece of conflict that you have experienced, and I presume
that you know what this is about and what this is for, right?
Participant: Yeah.
Conflict Coach: And so my guess is that you have thought of something
that sort of came to mind. There are certainly always many of these things
that we can deal with but something that we sort of use as a piece of
corversation and something that we can use to think through and sort of
work through.
Participant: Right, sure.
Conflict Coach: So, tell me I’d like to know a little bit of what you thought
of.
Participant: Ok, well I was thinking that there’s, there’s five of us children,
and my mom lives in [name of city], and um and some, let’s see the
conflict is really between one of my sisters and myself.
Participant: And that she, they have my mom and my sister have always had a close relationship.

Conflict Coach: Mmm hmm.

Participant: And [name of sister] was made executor of her will, and my mom’s still alive.

Conflict Coach: Right.

Participant: And [name of sister] feels strongly that being the executor of the will gives her the right to kind of do whatever [name of sister] wants with Mom’s stuff. And [name of sister] has an opinion about it and a couple other siblings have an opinion that it should be sold and uh I feel that it’s moms and if she doesn’t want to sell it then she doesn’t have to sell it. Now my mom she doesn’t have a lot of money and so she understands that she’s choosing to hold onto her stuff to live the life that she wants to live or she could sell this item and live really well. But that’s her choice and so [name of sister] and I. See my sister lives in Thailand and we’re really close but I love her, and so she comes here every summer but she was here and she feels that this thing should be sold and that she was going to talk to one of my other siblings about doing that.

Conflict Coach: Yes.

Participant: And I said I don’t think that’s right. You know I think that you have to let mom make her own decisions and she’s not gone.
Conflict Coach: So that happened this summer?
Participant: Now this happened before, but this just happened this month she was just here.
Conflict Coach: So this particular conversation just happened.
Participant: Yeah, yeah so we had had that conversation and then we had a family gathering and I knew she was going to talk to my other sibling at that gathering and I calmly said [name of sister] please have mom's um desires at hand you know don’t do what she doesn’t want done, just respect her wishes. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

In lines 34 through 79 the inquiry focused on what happened and in what sequence. The purpose was to listen to the details of what happened and to locate them in a time series. For example, in line 71, the conflict coach begins to inquire into the context and time period in which the current conflict occurred when asking, “So that happened this summer?” The participant’s response clarifies when the conflict occurred, stating in line 72, 73, “… now this happened before, but this just happened this month she was just here.” A further clarification is posed by the conflict coach in line 74 with, “So this particular conversation just happened?” Thus we can see that there are multiple references to time and to sequencing.

In both conversations then, there was attention given to understanding the denotation of the conflict. In both too the participants appeared easily willing to respond to this inquiry. Sometimes the questions scarcely needed to be asked
because the participant volunteered responses that might have been expected of such an inquiry.

**Listening to the Manifestation of What Happened**

After the conflict coach listens to the denotation of what happened the process continues to step two where the manifestation of what happened is explored. Often this purpose overlaps with and is woven into the inquiry into the denotative details. The manifestation focuses on beliefs and desires and how they change when viewed from different positions. This process involves focusing on questions such as: “What was the personal context that helped make it happen?” “What personal beliefs or desires helped produce the problem?” The purpose is to listen to the manifestation of what happened.

This second question on the conflict coaching guidelines is about manifestation. Again Winslade is referring to Deleuze’s philosophy of the event. Manifestation refers to the persons in the story and it is about how we might understand an event in terms of the protagonists’ “beliefs and desires” (Bowden, 2011, p. 26). How do these persons manifest their beliefs and desires in their actions?

In conversation one the participant has already made several references to how the conflict can be understood as a manifestation of the other party’s beliefs and desires: “he now sees me as competition,” (line 11); “he’s had this almost like paranoid type of reaction,” (lines 18-19); “that doesn’t necessarily give
him the full scope of the program manager’s duties,” (lines 31-33). And the conflict coach has responded to these efforts to explain the problem in terms of manifestation by emphasizing, “So you were colleagues then?” (line 27).

In lines 80 through 109 of conversation one the inquiry into the manifestation of what happened develops.

80 Participant: Ya, he called a meeting with my unit.

81 Conflict Coach: Mmm hmm

82 Participant: And wanted to let them know. This was like back towards January. He figured he would let them know his position on, since um, our program manager he let them know that he doesn’t know much about children and family services nor does he want to. And my whole unit basically functions under children and family services. And all the things that have to do with child welfare, from the federal government to state to county too and so for him to kind of put out there that I’m not going to do what the program manager used to do. He’s more of a statistical analyst supervisor so he kept up with numbers.

85 Conflict Coach: Right.

86 Participant: As opposed to we come up with outcomes and we do research on the programs that the county offers.

87 Conflict Coach: Ya.
Participant: And we audit different programs and we do all kinds of stuff with CFS, I'm sorry with Children Family Services and uh department of aging adult services and things like that.

Conflict Coach: Yes, yes

Participant: And he had said that he was no longer going to carry that out and I told him well I'm going to continue to carry that out because I actually I'm actually the vice chair for um CMPA and he kind of just like paused. And from that point on he has been involved in trying to be involved and signed up for CFS and CWDA and he doesn't share any of the information with me. And I've asked him and hey can you share this information with me and he'll say yes and he doesn't. I've asked him to share his calendar with me because I've shared my calendar with him and he doesn't. I've given him permission to see my calendar and he hasn't given me any permission to see his calendar. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The manifestation of what happens develops when the conflict coach asks specific questions regarding the conflict. The participant starts to explain the, “protagonist's,” that is, the colleague’s view of what is happening within the conflict. The colleague starts to provide underlying information as to why he does not want to be involved with certain organizations, because of his view of children and most of the things the participant values. This becomes a manifestation of the conflict because his not wanting to be involved in her areas of specific
interest underlies the conflict. Her ability to do what she desires without interference is built on her preference to be involved in these specific areas of work. The conflict is further manifested when she explains that she is in charge of the department that he has no desire to work with and the conflict leads to his ability to see her calendar but his refusal to give his calendar to her.

In the second piece of transcription the manifestation of what happened occurs in lines 110 through 142. The participant discusses the viewpoint of her sister in the position of a desire for her mother’s stuff and the participant continues explain the manifestation of what happened between her and her sister.

110 Participant: And [sister’s name] feels strongly that being the executor of
111 the will gives her the right to kind of do whatever [sister’s name] wants
112 with Mom’s stuff.
113 Conflict coach: I see.
114 Participant: And without Mom’s knowledge of it or without her consent.
115 Conflict coach: Yes.
116 Participant: And I don’t feel that way. I feel pretty strongly that mom’s still
117 alive and she’s still in her right mind and she should what is hers is her,
118 and it’s all over this one thing that could be extremely valuable.
119 Conflict coach: Ok.
Participant: And [sister’s name] has an opinion about it and a couple other siblings have an opinion that it should be sold and uh I feel that it’s moms and if she doesn’t want to sell it then she doesn’t have to sell it. Now my mom she doesn’t have a lot of money and so she understands that she’s choosing to hold onto her stuff to live the life that she wants to live or she could sell this item and live really well. But that’s her choice and so [sister’s name] and I. See my sister lives in Thailand and we’re really close but I love her, and so she comes here every summer but she was here and she feels that this thing should be sold and that she was going to talk to one of my other siblings about doing that.

Conflict coach: Yes.

Participant: And I said I don’t think that’s right. You know I think that you have to let mom make her own decisions and she’s not gone.

Conflict coach: So that happened this summer?

Participant: Now this happened before, but this just happened this month she was just here.

Conflict coach: So this particular conversation just happened.

Participant: Yeah, yeah so we had had that conversation and then we had a family gathering and I knew she was going to talk to my other sibling at that gathering and I calmly said [sister’s name] please have mom’s um desires at hand you know don’t do what she doesn’t want done, just respect her wishes.
Conflict coach: Yeah. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

What are made manifest in this piece of conversation is the participant’s concerns, wishes and hopes, particularly for her mother. Understanding these wishes and how they clash with her sister’s wishes helps the conflict coach to make sense of what has been producing the conflict. That is the purpose of this section of the conflict coaching process.

Listen to the Signification of What Happened

In the conflict coaching guidelines, the third element of developing an understanding the events of the conflict involves the conflict coach listening for and inquiring into the signification of events. Again Winslade is drawing from Deleuze’s philosophy of the event. Signification refers to the relationship between what happened and its “conceptual and logical implications” (Bowden, p. 27). Signification is about the meanings people are making and the influences on the generation of meaning. The guidelines suggest asking about how what happened is related to the logic embedded in the discourses that might be governing people’s understanding of events. The guidelines ask, “What discourses, chains of meaning were implicated in the problem?” This is a purpose of listening at this stage and it may also serve as a purpose behind deliberate inquiry. The guidelines say, “Listen to the signification of what happened.”
Participant: And there’s already been two people who I’ve had to go to human resources about because of the words that they used. And so I told them that once you say that then I have to document that and take it up, and they were fine with that but.

Conflict Coach: Once you say what?

Participant: That they’ve been harassed. That they feel like he is bullying them.

Conflict Coach: Those are words that are kind of red flag words.

Participant: Yeah, that he uh, those are words that as a supervisor it turns the conversation you’re just venting to now I have to …

Conflict Coach: Have to act on that.

Participant: Right, I have to act on that. Um, two situations now which creates an awkwardness between him and I, because I technically have to write up my colleague, slash boss, and that in itself has caused you know kind of a wedge between us and um but at the same time we’re both trying to hold a unit together.

Conflict Coach: hmm.

Participant: And I’m really fishing around on how to get connected to some of these things because he’s not giving me this information and now all the information obviously all goes through him because people are saying oh now that you’re program manager is gone, use this person to um as the person the point of contact.
Conflict Coach: Yes.

Participant: Everyone uses him as the point of contact, but he doesn’t deliver that, what’s needed or what they want or questions or information to the unit.

Conflict Coach: hmm.

Participant: So all of us are kind of like, feeling like, what are you doing in that office? What’s going on? We don’t even know at this point why legislature, research and quality support services are together, because he’s not holding the two together.

Conflict Coach: Yes, ok.

Participant: So that’s a lot.

Conflict Coach: So that’s yeah ok that is a lot. So those key words. So the key words I’ve heard you mention are he’s co-supervisor with you.

Participant: Mmm hmm.

Conflict Coach: Which is kind of like equal status right?

(Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In this section the conflict coach is listening to the signification of events when asking in line 147, “Once you say what?” From this question the participant begins to explore what is significant in the current conflict in relation to some concepts that are governing the field of relations between people. In line 148 to 149 these concepts are specified as harassment and bullying: “That they’ve been harassed. That they feel like he is bullying them.” Since these terms indicate a
relational context, the participant can be said to be organizing her view of the current conflict through the discourse of harassment and bullying. The implication is that she is experiencing domination in a power relation in which someone is trying to force her to do something she is unwilling to do.

This is an example of a signification that produces a certain range of responses. It involves an analysis of a power relation which is built upon an existing power differential, because one party is assuming the position of the boss. The signification involved in concepts like harassment and bullying places a particular interpretation over this power relation. The conflict coach in line 150 acknowledges the implications of this signification when he says, “Those are words that are kind of red flag words.” Repeating these words allows the participant time to contemplate and reflect upon the interaction between this signification and the denotative events in the conflict. These meanings work to produce the events of a conflict a particular format.

The participant acknowledges the implications of this signification and responds to it by saying:

I have to act on that. Um two situations now which creates an awkwardness between him and I because I technically have to write up my colleague, slash boss. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In other words, “harassment,” (line 148-149) is a word that, when uttered, has consequences that have to be responded to. It positions people in a formal obligation to act in a certain way. The result is:
That in itself has caused you know kind of a wedge between us and um but at the same time we’re both trying to hold a unit together. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The signification of the term, “wedge,” is that the current department used to work effectively as a team and still continues without the influence of the boss, but when he affects this environment a “wedge” is created which separates the formerly united department. This may be a localized example of what Foucault refers to as a “dividing practice.” The effect is that everyone is positioned on either side of a designated conflict in the workplace.

Listening to the Series of Events

According to Gilles Deleuze (1990), an event occurs always as part of a series of events (or within a narrative of events). A conflict then does not arise from nowhere. It is always a product of such a series. The events continue to occur throughout the conflict narrative in this series. Each change produces another reference to the prior events in the series. The series of events links individual events together in an explanatory sequence. Understanding this sequence, therefore, helps the conflict coach to appreciate how each event contributes to the development of the conflict narrative. A narrative is an organized version of the simple chronological sequence of a story.

The guidelines to narrative conflict coaching invite the conflict coach to help the participant explore the current conflict in relation to her personal
narrative. The conflict coach assists the participant in exploring the various aspects of the conflict and the factors that have affected the conflict and the participant’s narrative. The conflict coach guides the participant through the process in order to show places in the narrative where they were able to resolve a conflict in the past and how this can be applied to the current conflict. The participant and conflict coach begin to create an alternative story where the conflict is no longer present.

So how is this task evident in the transcribed conversations? We have already seen, in the beginning of conversation two above, that the conflict coach asked the participant to explain the current conflict in terms of time. He continues to listen to the series of events by asking about the temporal sequence of events. For instance he asks in line 71, “So that happened this summer?” The sequence of events is continued in the following segment of conversation.

180 Participant: and it was very calm you know … I wasn’t going to make a big
deal, but that apparently really upset her, because later on we were all
kind of, everybody else was sitting at a table and I just came up and said
hey what’s going on and …
184 Conflict Coach: Yeah.
185 Participant: And [name of sister] gave a comeback that you know was not
uh, it was real short, a real short comeback about well aren’t we being
miss bossy here? And I just thought and I just thought uh …
188 Conflict Coach: To you?
Participant: Yeah to me and I just thought you know ok duly noted and
how’s everybody doing you know and even my brother who came later on,
was like man what was that all about? And I said you know I don’t know.
You know I don’t know, but so, but so, I wanted to kind of talk about it and
[name of sister’s] the type that she just uh, she just won’t there just no
collision resolution. It’s just she’ll drop it and she’ll put on a happy face and
you know we’ll go on with our lives. And I know that about her and but just
this week, Monday or Tuesday, um Mom calls or I called mom and she
said now I just talk to [name of sister] and [name of sister] really want’s
this thing transferred to your house. And um you know for safe keeping
and I said what do you want mom? And she said well I want it at my house
and I said then that’s what’s going to happen. You know I’m not having it
at my house, if that’s what you want it’s yours then you keep it. But it’s still
going on overseas you know, that, this conflict. Of you know until mom’s
gone her stuff is her stuff and if it gets stolen, it gets stolen. You know, but
[name of sister] feels that it’s just so valuable that she doesn’t want to
tempt fate. So anyways that was the conflict and I love [name of sister] we
get along very well most of the time except when you know well dealing
with mom. And mom’s stuff and I feel that at times she’s controlling of my
mother and controlling of her my mother’s stuff and I think my mother’s an
adult she’s not … she doesn’t have dementia or anything else she might
be a little you know eccentric. And you know that’s ok but that that that’s
the conflict it’s just between my sister and I.

Conflict Coach: Ok, so it came to a sort of a crisis if you like at this time
when you had the family gathering.

Participant: Right.

Conflict Coach: And then there was this little remark that took place you
know about you and …

Participant: mmm hmm.

Conflict Coach: in front of your brother and somebody else.

Participant: yeah yeah in quite of a number of people.

Conflict Coach: Quite a number of people so it wasn’t just you two.

Participant: yeah right.

Conflict Coach: so what happened after that because you said your sister
doesn’t like to resolve anything? I’m interested in what evolved, what
happened at that moment.

Participant: Well I, what happened at that moment was I just, I didn’t want
to get into it I mean I said duly noted and …

Conflict Coach: yes.

Participant: that I can be bossy and then I went on with my conversation
you know how are you guys doing and what’s going on? Um and we just
kind of dropped it and then later on probably I don’t know within 15 or 20
minutes she came back, she had gotten up to you know do something and
I followed her and said you know [name of sister], I didn’t mean to offend you by my comment but please respect mom’s wishes. And she just said nope never mind I heard ya. I heard ya. So she wouldn’t engage in any of that she was she was a little short … (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The conflict coach begins to build upon the series of events in order to gain a better understanding of where the conflict is leading in line 222 to 224, by asking,

So what happened after that because you said your sister doesn’t like to resolve anything? I’m interested in what evolved, what happened at that moment. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Attention was given to a key event in the series when the conflict coach responded with, “Ok, so it came to a sort of a crisis if you like at this time when you had the family gathering.” This comment registers how a single event differs from other events in a series, even though they may be linked. The participant eventually continued to enunciate the series of events with:

…that I can be bossy and then I went on with my conversation you know how are you guys doing and what’s going on? Um and we just kind of dropped it and then later on probably I don’t know within 15 or 20 minutes she came back, she had gotten up to you know do something and I followed her and said you know [name of sister] I didn’t mean to offend you by my comment but please respect mom’s wishes. And she just said
nope never mind I heard ya. I heard ya. So she wouldn’t engage in any of that she was she was a little short. (line 228 to 235) (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

In this way the conflict is traced through a series of interactions, and each event in the series of events continues to be explored. The conflict coach focuses on asking questions to establish how what happened is part of this series. The series of events in this transcript began with the participant saying:

… And it was very calm you know. I wasn’t going to make a big deal, but that apparently really upset her, because later on we were all kind of, everybody else was sitting at a table, and I just came up and said hey what’s going on… (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

So the conversation began with a discussion regarding the conflict. It continued with the sister’s response to the confrontation by the participant. Her comment, “… well aren’t we being miss bossy here?” is the next event in the series. But this is followed by refusal to engage. Even such a non-event can be said to be an event in itself, however. It keeps the conflict narrative evolving. As the participant says, “… there’s just no conflict resolution … she’ll put on a happy face and you know we’ll go on with our lives.” (Transcript 1, October, 2013)

The series of events continued with an interaction around an item of value that her mother has in her house. Three sisters are in disagreement about what should be done. The disengagement of one sister from conflict resolution makes it difficult to agree on what should happen with this item. The participant wants to
involve her mother in this decision: “… and I said what do you want mom? And she said well I want it at my house and I said then that’s what’s going to happen.” This is justified by saying, “… until mom’s gone her stuff is her stuff and if it gets stolen, it gets stolen.” The speaker’s sister disagrees: “but [name of sister] feels that it’s just so valuable that she doesn’t want to tempt fate.” (Transcript 1, October, 2013)

After outlining this series of interactions, the participant wraps up the sequence by saying, “… that’s the conflict, it’s just between my sister and I.” The series of events has moved from approaching the sister regarding the conflict, to a disengagement of the sister from resolving the conflict which led to the discussion of where the item should go and who should decide. The conflict coach’s comment about events coming “to a sort of a crisis” marks out the significance of a key event in the series. The conflict coach pursues further exploration of the series of events by asking, “….so what happened after that, because you said your sister doesn’t like to resolve anything? I’m interested in what evolved, what happened at that moment?” The participant’s response indicates that the conversation about the series of events is now up to date and this is where the conflict lies. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)
Deconstructing the Conflict Narrative

**Double Listening**

The first element of deconstruction is listed in the conflict coaching guidelines as double listening. The process of double listening is presented as a, “Listening technique in order to listen for exceptions, gaps, contradictions, and expressions of resistance of the dominance of the conflict as well as the conflict-saturated narrative itself,” (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 34). It is a concept that builds on the notion of active listening but extends it by specifying a distinction between what is listened for. Double listening occurs where the conflict coach hears both the problem story and the solution story simultaneously, making possible a contrast between the two. The contrast makes it easier for the participant to move towards a change from the story of pain to a story of hope (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 20).

Conflict coach: And if you, if you look at it all, and if you look at that sort of series of things that have happened. Um, my sense is that what’s happening that this doesn’t fit with how you want to be in your life and do your professional work and, I’m wondering if I can ask you to speak to that. What is it about this whole situation this series of events that is kind of um, creating this sense of challenge for you? (Transcript 1, August, 2013)
The practice of double listening involves listening to the sense the person makes of the series of events. The conflict coach is chunking events in the series together as well as focusing on the question of, “How does it fit with you and the person you are trying to be in life?”

This occurs in when the conflict coach states,

And if you, if you look at it all and if you look at that sort of series of things that have happened. Um, my sense is that, what’s happening, this doesn’t fit with how you want to be in your life and do your professional work and, I’m wondering if I can ask you to speak to that. What is it about this whole situation this series of events that is kind of um, creating this sense of challenge for you? (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

This is an example of double listening because it draws out a contradiction between the denotative account of what has been happening and the person's preferences for how things might happen. It also amounts to a contrast between events in the conflict story and the manifestation of the participant's beliefs and desires. The participant supplements the question the conflict coach asks by confirming what the conflict coach has heard.

Participant: Well you’re right about that, it doesn’t fit with my style of supervising.

Conflict coach: Ok.
Participant: And my style of supervising is one you um, you should, whatever you expect from the people you’re supervising you should be willing to do it yourself.

Conflict coach: You should be willing to do it yourself. Yes, well ok.

Participant: Also um, inviting people out, coaching, mentoring, developing skills. Things like that. I’m huge on and so to have one of my people to follow me to a meeting or I have even invited a few of them to the Children’s Network Conference, um, just things like that, having them um really get their face out there and learn more about what it is that they’re doing even though they only have, you know they basically only collect that data it’s still my hopes that they would want to know.

(Transcript 1, August, 2013)

What is emerging here is a distinction between the story of what happened and the story of what the participant would prefer. This distinction is not yet fully developed but a gap is opened up. It opens as a result of the conflict coach listening for a distinction and inquiring about how accurate what he has heard is.

In the second conversation an example of double listening occurs in the following exchange:

Conflict coach: ok, would it, would it therefore be the case that your relationship with [sister’s name] that when things kind of get difficult or
tricky or that things almost go back to the way things were when you were young?

Participant: yeah, yeah I think so.

Conflict coach: so um

Participant: so whereas I would want to say come on let’s just sit down and talk about this

Conflict coach: yes

Participant: you know she doesn’t you know she just doesn’t want to go there.

Conflict coach: and you’re left to just almost grasp at thin air almost?

Participant: almost yes that is a feeling. That is a good feeling, yeah it’s like … because you want, I want a deeper relationship with her.

(Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Here the contrast is between what has been happening in the participant’s relationship with her sister and what she would rather see happening (the “deeper relationship”). The former story is referenced first to how things were as children and the participant adds in the piece she would prefer which is more like “let’s just sit down and talk about this”(lines 256-257). The preferred story is the one the conflict coach refers to as the one she is “grasping at” (line 261) and the participant confirms that this story represents a “good feeling” (line 262) (Transcript 2, October, 2013).
Naming the Problem Story

Naming the problem story is a process where a conflict coach joins with the participant in finding a name for the problem story in externalizing language. The shared process prevents the conflict coach from attributing any negativity to the participant instead of the problem. We have already seen the conflict coach begin this process of externalizing and naming the problem story in line 150 with:

Those are words that are kind of red flag words. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

Here the words are separated from the person who utters them and they are assumed to have a certain amount of power or influence on people’s actions.

The participant begins to name the problem story in line 139 when stating, “That they’ve been harassed. That they feel like he is bullying them.” In line 148 to 149th participant begins to name the problem as “bullying” which begins the process of leading to externalizing the problem. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

Naming the problem story begins the externalization of the conflict. The conflict coach states in line 150, “Those are words that are kind of red flag words.” The focus on the words being used leads the participant towards naming the problem story a second time. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The participant responds to the conflict coach with another name for the problem story:

Right, I have to act on that. Um two situations now which creates an awkwardness between him and I because I technically have to write up
my colleague, slash boss and that in itself has caused you know kind of a wedge between us and um but at the same time we’re both trying to hold a unit together. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The problem story has shifted from “bullying” to a “wedge” between the participant and the colleague. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In the same piece of transcript the participant continues to name the problem story as “sibling rivalry” in line 275. In line 264 the conflict coach externalizes the problem story, naming it as “authority.” What is occurring within the conflict is attributed to the effect “authority” has, which externalizes the problem from the participant and it becomes something that is no longer part of the participant but separate. The conflict coach invites the participant to name the problem story when supplementing the conversation with, “I don’t know if you would call it an outright argument or it’s not quite like that it’s something else.” The purpose of this inquiry was to invite the naming of the problem. When the conflict coach asked, “I don’t know if you would call it an outright argument,” the participant was then moved in an exploration of what she would call the problem or conflict in order to begin the externalization process.

264 Conflict coach: Yeah, yeah. That’s what authority does right?
265 Participant: Right. So I’ve got myself caught up and I feel just wrong, like I shouldn’t have done that.
266 Conflict coach: Yeah, yeah.
Participant: Then you know you get talking and can’t stop yourself sometimes and maybe I said too much, maybe he just wanted one answer. I don’t know so.

Conflict coach: So, you’re talking about some of the effects of this whole thing here. I don’t know if you would call it an outright argument or it’s not quite like that it’s something else.

Participant: It’s a um, it’s almost like a sibling, um, um

Conflict coach: Sibling rivalry?

Participant: Yeah I almost want to say it’s like a, like a that or it’s almost about attention. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In the second conversation the participant begins to name the problem story as tension.

Participant: because at least we know and it’s not a guessing game, but with [name of sister] I don’t really know where she’s coming from. Because I don’t, she won’t talk about it. Um there’s um there’s tension. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The conflict coach and participant join in order to name the problem story as tension. Soon however “anguish” is added to the list of names. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Participant: sometimes yeah, you know sometimes it’s just um it’s an anguish and I love her I don’t like to be you know divided.
Conflict Coach: yes, yes hmmm. Anguish hmm; anguish is a word that comes to mind?

Participant: yes.

Conflict Coach: mmm hmm, and what kind of…

Participant: and you know, you know I'm not a fighter. You know I don't like conflict, I don't.

Conflict Coach: mmm hmm, yeah, yeah.

Participant: it can have somatic effects on me, so I…

Conflict Coach: so it goes inside your body and you feel the anguish and the sick feeling inside.

Participant: yeah, yeah. And you know sometimes I'll go run and do something physical to try and manage that. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

In other words, the name continues to evolve from “tension” to “anguish” (lines 278 -291). The conflict coach continues to externalize the problem from a feeling instead of an attribute or problem that is part of the participant (lines 288-289): “So it goes inside your body and you feel the anguish and the sick feeling inside.” The word, “it” here is a pronoun rather than a proper name, but it serves the purpose of keeping the problem in the third person. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Exploring Assumptions

The next step in the process is to explore assumptions, which means the conflict coach begins inquiring into the background assumptions that a speaker
has been working from. The participant also begins to explore the other person’s assumptions in response to the inquiry of the conflict coach into these background assumptions that the other party in the conflict might be working from.

In the first conversation, the assumptions are explored when the participant begins to describe the boss’s viewpoint of competition. She says,

And a Master’s degree, those types of things. And he has his Bachelor’s degree and I have my Master’s degree and so I’m thinking he sees me as competition … So I guess he sees everyone as competition. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The conflict coach explores further by asking,

So, my next question I had in mind was something like … what made this get so big … into such a big challenge sort of so quickly? What were the conditions that sort of enabled that to happen? (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The participant responds by describing the boss in terms of authority, “Well, he was given the authority.” (Transcript 1, August, 2013).

When the participant says, “I don’t know how he feels about me now; having attending meeting with him and the assistant director,” the conflict coach asks, “What would you guess that he’d be thinking?” This is a direct inquiry into
what the person imagines the other party to be assuming. The conversation continues:

Participant: Oh I think he’s livid. He’s not showing it. But I think he’s pissed.

Conflict coach: Ok.

Participant: Because um that was his way of …

Conflict coach: And he would imagine this is about him?

(Transcript 1, August, 2013).

What are being described are the speaker’s assumptions about what is in the mind of the other party. For example, the boss is described as livid, “Oh I think he’s livid. He’s not showing it. But I think he’s pissed.” (lines 292-293, Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In the second conversation, the participant describes her sister’s need to be loved by controlling the situation (line 299-300). This too is an assumption.

Participant: I think, I think the one issue with mom and her things is more of um, is more of a I think the bigger picture is would be [sister’s] need to, I think [sister] controls things to feel loved.

Conflict coach: ok

Participant: um, and I, and I think that is something that knowing the way we were raised, with all of our different issues, that and all of the five kids

Conflict coach: yes yes
Participant: and the distance and the different things that we’ve all had to
go through, for affirmation to feel loved. I think that this is just something
that [sister] feels that when she can give to others that’s affirming, and
there’s nothing wrong with that …
but I think that for her she, she, and I don’t think its conscious I think it’s a
very subconscious thing that she, when she can give to others and when
she can control situations so that she feels others are being cared for, that
gives her a sense of meaning, um, which we all need.
(Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Assumptions held by someone else are being referenced but this time
they are given a home in the “subconscious” (line 310). Her sister’s unspoken
need to give herself a “sense of meaning” is assumed to underlie the problem
story (Transcript 2, October, 2013).

Externalize the Problem and Effects

In the above piece of transcription the conflict coach is building on the
externalizing of the problem and the mapping of the effects of the problem. It
ends with a statement about what the person would prefer. This is contrasted
with the effects of the problem story. The participant says:

But on the other hand I was thinking to myself this guy is so concerned
about getting the program manager job that he can’t even see straight. He
can’t even see the bigger picture. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)
The word “but” is an early indicator of a different story beginning. The preferred story is referred to as “seeing straight” and “seeing the bigger picture.” It is a reference to a more inclusive viewpoint that is less focused in on the conflict story. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The conflict coach responds,

So you’ve got this what you described before as a sibling rivalry going on, even though that doesn’t describe how you would like to behave, it ends up being what you get caught up or pulled by or affected by… right?

(Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The response sharpens the sense of difference between the two stories. It can be said to pry them slightly apart. Another way to say this is that it differentiates the two stories. In itself it invites the participant to “see the bigger picture” since that is the viewpoint it is spoken from. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In conversation two also, the counter story opens with establishing such a contrast.

313 Participant: so where as I would want to say come on let's just sit down and talk about this... you know she doesn’t you know she just doesn’t want to go there.

316 Conflict coach: and you’re left to just almost grasp at thin air almost?
Participant: almost yes … that is a feeling. That is a good feeling, yeah it’s like because you want, I want a deeper relationship with her and you know … that comes through, you know we all, and conflict brings that about.

Conflict coach: Right, right.

Participant: Well but she’s um I don’t know I don’t know. She doesn’t want to talk about it even to the point that I don’t know if she’s just she just won’t talk about conflict like that.

Conflict coach: yes yes ok. So it’s not like, it would be possible to have sort of like kind of a conversation that you would prefer to have which would kind of like work through the issues of what people are being and what’s important and reach some sort of agreement or understanding is that right?

Participant: mmm hmm. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The contrast that is established then is between the conversation that happened and the conversation that the participant would prefer. This is referred to as “let’s just sit down and talking about this,” suggesting a conversation that moves towards resolution rather than towards the continuation of the tension.

(Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Mapping the Effects

In the next piece of transcription the conversation moves from externalizing the problem story to mapping the effects of the problem story. Now the conflict coach starts to use the name of the problem in order to emphasize
that it has been externalized and then begins to ask about “its” effects on the participant. The goal of the conflict coach asking about the effects of the problem is to begin to increase a sense of importance of the damage the conflict is causing for the participant (Winslade & Williams, 2012). According to Michael White (2005):

     Mapping of the effects/influence of the problem through the various domains of living in which complications are identified (home, workplace, school, peer contexts; familial relationships, one’s relationship with oneself, friendships; purposes, hopes, dreams, aspirations and values; life’s horizons, one’s future possibilities, etc. (p. 5)

As a result, the effects continue to influence the problem in these different areas of life (White, 2005). The purpose of mapping the effects of the conversation is to, “invite a noticing of the range and depth of the effects of a problem that have never been brought together before,” (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 22). The purpose is to increase the motivation of a participant to change what is happening in the conflict when he or she starts to notice the extent of its effects and its emotional impact (Winslade & Williams, 2012). The following segment of conversation comes from conversation two.

Conflict Coach: so what’s the result of that … what’s the effect of that kind of style of handling things?
Participant: Or not handling them you mean?
Conflict Coach: Yeah or I mean, I wasn’t making a judgment of whether they’re handling things or not handling things.
Participant: right.
Conflict Coach: but that’s the way it goes.
Participant: but what, so is your question what’s the effect on me when she just shuts down?
Conflict Coach: on you, on them, on your mom, on your husband, on anybody?
Participant: um there’s um there’s tension.
Conflict Coach: yes.
Participant: definitely, between [name of sister] and I.
Conflict Coach: so it creates tension?
Participant: It creates tension, with um, with my mom it creates tension with her as well, knowing that her kids aren’t getting along. Without seeing eye to eye…
Conflict Coach: so it kind of reverberates back on her and it affects her … right?
Participant: it does it affects her. It does yeah.
Conflict Coach: yeah.
Participant: you know but then it seems to blow over and we’re not talking about it and we’re not talking about it and you know you get distracted with
other things and then things are okay until the next time it comes up and
you know like when like earlier in the week, this thing needs to be at my
house and you know.
Conflict Coach: right ok.
Participant: I’m not.
Conflict Coach: so it blows over but it doesn’t go away it comes back
again, right?
Participant: Right.
Conflict Coach: Any other effects it has on anyone else? On you?
Participant: on anyone else? Well I think that everybody who witnessed
our brief conversation there, you know …
Conflict Coach: yes.
Participant: then people wonder, you know, what’s going on with that?
Conflict Coach: yeah.
Participant: um, it’s the … the conflict resolution style has definitely
affected all five of us children.
Conflict Coach: ok.
Participant: um big time.
Conflict Coach: ok how?
Participant: well my one sister lives clear across the country and doesn’t
really want anything to do with anybody and …
Conflict Coach: ok.

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Participant: you know she’s just kind of had enough of the family and my um, you know it’s polarizing.

Conflict Coach: yes ok.

Participant: you know I’ve got a couple, you know I’ve got two siblings that well my one sister lives way over there and I’ve got two siblings that feel that they can do with mom’s stuff what they want to do.

Conflict Coach: yeah.

Participant: with her best interest in mind, but to me it’s not in her best interest, if that’s not what she wants. And another sister and myself that feel that it’s mom’s stuff and mom can do what she wants with her stuff. But we’ve never sat down and talked to it.

Conflict Coach: so it’s polarizing things between people in the family, right?

Participant: mmm hmm, yeah.

Conflict Coach: so what about you, because you said that there’s tension with your relationship with [name of sister], what’s the effect on you personally?

Participant: well physically I can feel sick, you know, over it.

Conflict Coach: hmmm.

Participant: I don’t like conflict.

Conflict Coach: hmm, yes.
Participant: and when there is conflict I just, I just at least try and work it out so at least we’re understanding where, you know, each other is coming from.

Conflict Coach: yes.

Participant: because at least we know and it’s not a guessing game, but with [name of sister] I don’t really know where she’s coming from, because I don’t … she won’t talk about it.

Conflict Coach: right.

Participant: she won’t say I feel this is better because, or you know it’s just like, I’m just not going to talk about it.

Conflict Coach: so you’re left feeling sick?

Participant: sometimes yeah, you know sometimes it’s just um it’s an anguish and I love her I don’t like to be you know divided.

Conflict Coach: yes, yes hmmm. Anguish hmmm … anguish is a word that comes to mind?

Participant: yes.

Conflict Coach: mmm hmmm, and what kind of…

Participant: and you know, you know I’m not a fighter. You know I don’t like conflict, I don’t.

Conflict Coach: mmm hmmm, yeah, yeah.

Participant: it can have somatic effects on me, so I …
Conflict Coach: so it goes inside your body and you feel the anguish and the sick feeling inside.

Participant: yeah, yeah. And you know sometimes I'll go run and do something physical to try and manage that.

Conflict Coach: to work it out.

Participant: yeah to try and manage that.

Conflict Coach: mmm.

Participant: but the initial is ... it's more of a sick feeling.

Conflict Coach: yeah yeah ok. And what would you say would be how you um respond to the effects of that? When all of this like happens, like what do you do, how do you try to handle yourself or handle things with other people?

Participant: I think that probably, that probably the gut reaction is to internalize it.

Conflict Coach: yeah, hmm.

Participant: but I know that's not healthy and so um, so.

Conflict Coach: so you, so you prefer not to do that right?

Participant: yeah the emotions come, so the emotions come, but I, but I, but I kind of have to sort things out well I, how did this happen and what just happened?

Conflict Coach: yes
Participant: and why am I feeling sick and what can I do about that and what does this mean in the big picture? (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The conflict coach begins to map the effects by asking, “So what’s the result of that what’s the effect of that kind of style of handling things?” A clarification is added (lines 339-340), “... On you, on them, on your mom, on your husband, on anybody,” which encourages the participant to explore the effects from all possible viewpoints. The following questions are also involved in mapping the effects of the problem: “… so it creates tension?” (line 344); “… so it kind of reverberates back on her and it affects her, right?”; “… Any other effects it has on anyone else? On you?”; “… so it’s polarizing things between people in the family, right?” (lines 387-388); “… so what about you, because you said that there’s tension with your relationship with [name of sister], what’s the effect on you personally?” (lines 390-392); “… so you’re left feeling sick?” (line 407).
(Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The participant speaks in response to these inquiries by talking about how the effects of the conflict impact her in a variety of ways. She feels tension which is an unwelcome, because she expresses her dislike of conflict. The effects are also relational when she says, “Well my one sister lives clear across the country and doesn’t really want anything to do with anybody,” (lines 373-374). Other effects noted are somatic, “Well physically I can feel sick. You know over it,” and emotional, “Sometimes yeah, you know sometimes it’s just um it’s an anguish
and I love her … I don’t like to be, you know, divided,” (lines 408-409).

(Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The conflict coach’s inquiry into the effects of the problem has thus been responded to with the noting of several different kinds of effects.

In the first conversation, the conflict coach and participant also begin to map the effects of the conflict:

Participant: Yeah, it’s annoying for me and I’m at the point now that when we’re in meetings, because now the assistant director has invited me to their meetings. And I still don’t understand why the assistant director would ask me that. And I almost feel now that maybe I caught myself up by even saying anything negative.

Conflict coach: So, it’s like this whole problem almost got you into saying and doing things that you would not normally do and think twice, and would not fit with who you think of yourself as.

Participant: Right, because if I wanted this to be out I would have told someone already. So, when the … assistant director of human services, which is his boss, asked me that and I didn’t have anything nice to say, I just kind of felt like I was catching myself up in that conversation.

Conflict coach: Yeah, yeah.

Participant: And you know I talked to someone and she was saying hey, and you know I’m a manager and if someone came and talked to me. She
said if I called someone in my office and said what do you think about so
and so. I already have an idea in my head and I’m asking you to confirm it
and she said so you know you’re fine. But like for me the type of person I
am, I don’t like to go to someone else and talk down about someone else,
another value that’s not helpful, unless there’s going to be something
helpful that comes out of it maybe.
Conflict coach: So, is it fair enough to say, [participant’s name], that it
bothers you when you’ve found yourself doing what you don’t like to do,
almost.
Participant: right, right.
Conflict coach: Is that right?
Participant: Right and then because these people are in positions that are
higher than me, my boss, I can’t say no I’m not going to answer that
question.
Conflict coach: Yeah, yeah. That’s what authority does right?
Participant: Right. So I’ve got myself caught up and I feel just wrong, like I
shouldn’t have done that.
Conflict coach: Yeah, yeah.
Participant: Then you know you get talking and can’t stop yourself
sometimes and maybe I said too much, maybe he just wanted one
answer. I don’t know so.
In this conversation, the effects mentioned focused on the participant’s actions and the fact that these contradict what she values. She says:

Yeah, it’s annoying for me and I’m at the point now that when we’re in meetings, because now the assistant director has invited me to their meetings. And I still don’t understand why the assistant director would ask me that. And I almost feel now that maybe I caught myself up by even saying anything negative. (lines 441-445, Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The conflict coach responds by ascribing her actions to an effect of the externalized problem, rather than assuming that her actions speak for her own preferences:

So, it’s like this whole problem almost got you into saying and doing things that you would not normally do and think twice, and would not fit with who you think of yourself as and those kinds of things. (lines 522-524, Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The participant is willing to confirm this construction too:

And you know I talked to someone ... She said if I called someone in my office and said what do you think about so and so. I already have an idea in my head and I’m asking you to confirm it and she said so you know you’re fine. But like for me the type of person I am, I don’t like to go to someone else and talk down about someone else, another value that’s not
helpful, unless there’s going to be something helpful that comes out of it maybe. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The conflict coach in response paraphrases this statement to clarify it,

So, is it fair enough to say [participant] that it bothers you when you’ve found yourself doing what you don’t like to do, almost. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

This is also another example of double listening. The participant agrees enthusiastically, “Right, right,” (line 320) and adds, “... and then because these people are in positions that are higher than me, my boss, I can’t say no I’m not going to answer that question,” (lines 467-469, Transcript 1, August, 2013).

The conflict coach again ascribes this effect to the problem story, rather than to the person, saying, “That’s what authority does right?” (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The participant again agrees immediately, “Right,” (line 464) and adds, “So I’ve got myself caught up and I feel just wrong, like I shouldn’t have done that ...” and, “Then you know you get talking and can’t stop yourself sometimes and maybe I said too much, maybe he just wanted one answer” (lines 474-476). The conflict coach continues:

So you’ve got this what you described before as a sibling rivalry going on, even though that doesn’t describe how you would like to behave, it ends up being what you get caught up or pulled by or affected by right?

(Transcript 1, August, 2013)
This time the conflict is externalized as “sibling rivalry” and the participant agrees, whereupon the conflict coach persists in asking about the effects of the conflict by asking, “What else does it do?” (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

Participant: The thing is I’d like to move up in the county and you know build on my career there and I’m sitting with the H.S. director not knowing what he’s thinking of what’s coming out of my mouth and how he’s going to see that as me being able to solve my own problems or. You know I don’t know how he sees that even though he initially asked the question, you never know if you just caught yourself up in your own web type of thing. So, I don’t know what this does for me as far as my relationships with human services and moving up effect you know he may say yeah I’ve had talks with [participant] and she doesn’t get along well with others. You know you just never know what could come out of it. And so I would hate for it to become a blemish effect on my so far so good work ability with the county.

Conflict coach: It could interfere with what you were hoping for in your career and you’re wondering if what you have said so far could be interpreted that way even if it’s not.

Participant: Right

Conflict coach: Anything intended that way, it could just get interpreted that way. Anything else?
Participant: Well it’s definitely um, it’s making me um, I’m not insecure but I’m more watchful of what I say, what I do. How I do it when I do it. I just don’t know what direction; I don’t know what anyone is thinking. I don’t know what’s being discussed about me. I don’t know. And I have some people that are definitely on my side, but I’ve had the director of CFS talk to me and she was like I’m going to go to an above source and things like that. So I’ve had some things that have played well in my part, but at the same time you just never know what position is going to open up to you.

You know who knows who or whatever and I just don’t you know need any bad marks or saying or…

Conflict coach: When you get that opportunity. Right?

Participant: Right and it just further pisses him off, because he can’t find a way to control me.

Conflict coach: And what does that do for you when it pisses him off?

Participant: Well I’ve learned how to be quiet. I’ve learned that less is more.

Conflict coach: Ok.

Participant: So, I just return to whatever I was doing and I don’t necessarily feed into it.

Conflict coach: And you don’t want to just push him further at that point?

Participant: Right.

Conflict coach: So you just have learned to be quiet.
Participant: Yeah, it’s annoying for me and I’m at the point now that when
we’re in meetings, because now the assistant director has invited me to
their meetings. And I still don’t understand why the assistant director
would ask me that. And I almost feel now that maybe I caught myself up
by even saying anything negative.

Conflict coach: So, it’s like this whole problem almost got you into saying
and doing things that you would not normally do and think twice, and
would not fit with who you think of yourself as and those kinds of things.

(Transcript 1, August, 2013)

What is exemplified here is the way in which conflict can invite people into
self-monitoring and being vigilant about others’ surveillance of them. Foucault
(1980) would explain this as a phenomenon of modern power. The final comment
by the conflict coach summarizes the conversation that has gone before and
reiterates the externalizing logic and the extended list of the effects of the conflict
on the participant. This list has included: “fear of a blemish on my record within
the career setting,” “more watchful,” “learned to be quiet, less is more,” “it’s
annoying,” and so on. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)
Evaluating the Conflict Story and its Effects

The process of mapping the effects eventually leads to the next step in the conflict coaching process which is evaluating the problem and its effects. This is the next step in the guidelines for conflict coaching. The purpose of this inquiry is to focus on the problem’s effects on people’s lives, rather than on the problem as inside the person. The result becomes creating a distance between the person and problem (White, 2005). The purpose of evaluating the conflict story and its effects is to explore, “the influence of the problem, its operation, when and where it has been the most or least influential, and over what period of time,” (Mann, 2002, p. 2). In this step the conflict coach, “… invites a justification of the evaluation. The purpose of inviting the justification of the evaluation is for the participant to evaluate the effects in regards to their values, beliefs and intentions,” (Mann, 2002, p. 2). This inquiry begins the process of opening a counter story, because the problem is no longer represented as part of the person but has become externalized and, therefore, space is opened up in which the counter story can take root. In the second conversation, the conflict coach begins the evaluation of the problem and its effects by asking:

And what would you say would be how you um respond to the effects of that? When all of this like happens, like what do you do, how do you try to
handle yourself or handle things with other people? (lines 426-429, Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The participant responds with, “I think that probably, that probably the gut reaction is to internalize it,” (lines 430-431). This statement provides a direct effect on the participant based on the conflict and further when stating in lines 433, “but I know that’s not healthy.” (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The conflict coach supplements with, “so you, so you prefer not to do that right?” (lines 434). The evaluation of the effects continue when the participant responds with, “Yeah the emotions come, so the emotions come, but I, but I, but I kind of have to sort things out well I, how did this happen and what just happened?” (lines 434-437, Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Conflict coach: So, why is that important to you? I’m just interested to know why that’s important.

Participant: It’s important to because we supervise two units that have to work together and if we can’t be professional and we end up arguing or being inappropriate again one it can affect my career advancement because that type of behavior will for sure be reported up in our next to the H.S. assistant director. SO I wouldn’t want that to

Conflict coach: But it’s more than that right. That’s just one reason. It’s more than just your career.

Participant: Yeah and then two it’s just not worth it to me.
Conflict coach: Like personally it’s not worth it?

Participant: It’s personally not worth it. He’s just a guy I work with and yeah I do spend a lot of time at work but I have so many other things outside of work that I do that I’m a part of or responsible for or whatever. And I have so many connections The bigger picture of the arc of my life. She repositions herself in that. with the county that do matter, that are positive, that are role models that I would be unwarranted from myself to give him any type of attention that would cause...

Conflict coach: Not give him that much power of you and let you take it home. Is that right that you actually stop it from being something that would bother you from coming home?

Participant: Yeah it bothers me to the extent that, like I said, like I’m trying to think what does the assistant director where is this going to end up? What are these meetings that we’re having every month? What do I do in these meetings to remain professional? You know those types of things. It bothers me to that extent … but at the same time I know that, if, I you know, setting rules for ourself. I know that if I stay within my rules that it’s gotten this far within the county just within seven years so it has to continue to work. So, I have to stay within those professional boundaries that I’ve set for myself within the county.

Conflict coach: So is that fair enough that that’s your goal in this situation is to stay within your rules and not be dictated by his?
Participant: Mmm hmm

Conflict coach: And stay focused on your belief in a professional relationship.

Participant: Mmm Hmm

Conflict coach: Stay strong in yourself and teach him things about how he’s coming across. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The justification of the effects of the problem story typically begins with questioning such as, “Are you ok with this or do you prefer something else?” In the first piece of transcript the conflict coach asks, “What does it give you to sort of think about and how you conduct things and conduct yourself?” (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The participant responds by naming a value she holds dear, “To be kind,” and adds, “To watch what I say” and further adds, “to not jump to conclusions and all the things I tell myself because, I um I think words are extremely powerful.” The conversation continues:

Conflict coach: and you would like to use the power of your words for um… Participant: or the power of not of my words. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The evaluation of the conflict and its effects has thus directly led into an expression of the kinds of values that the participant holds to be important. This opens up the possible counter story.
Counter Story

The counter story further emerges at a point in the conversation where the conflict coach begins to invite the other person’s story into the conversation. In the second conversation (lines 583 to 584) the conflict coach begins to open the counter story with, “Ok, ok and your relationship with your mom is different and also I’m hearing a difference in how you handle things, is that right?” (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

This is part of the counter story because it asks about a change in the relationship with the participant’s mom from earlier in her life and also from earlier in the conversation. The participant has already explained how she handles conflict in her life with her husband in a different way than she has in the past.

The counter story is further explored when the conflict coach asks,

So, yeah like I’m interested in how what sort of you said like, when you grew up, conflict resolution didn’t happen in our family. Like what, like what sort, how would you describe what did happen? (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

This is part of the counter story because conflict resolution did not happen within the family growing up, but she has changed from the past and created a present and future in which she has knowledge of what was not there in her past knowledge of how to resolve conflict in an effective way. He then asks, “What’s
been the impact on you and [name of sister] and your whole relationship understanding of things?” (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Participant: but when it comes to give and take on situations I don’t think there is a lot of give and take in these situations.

Conflict coach: ok.

Participant: and especially because you know she and my mom are very close.

Conflict coach: mmm hmm.

Participant: and I, I hesitate to say closer than her and I because you know we just have a real different relationship.

Conflict coach: yeah.

Participant: but they, they are very close and there were years when [name of sister] you know took care of mom when my dad left and she was left all alone and my mom has lived overseas with [name of sister] multiple times and … and, you know, so there is that relationship, you know, that I think [name of sister] probably feels that she knows what’s best for mom and therefore she’s going to do that. You know it’s really um, that’s really what I think it is.

Conflict coach: ok, ok and your relationship with your mom is different and also I’m hearing a difference in how you handle things, is that right?

Participant: probably yes and yes on both accounts.
Conflict coach: So, yeah like I’m interested in how what sort of you said like, when you grew up conflict resolution didn’t happen in our family like what, like what sort, how would you describe what did happen?

Participant: My parent’s relationship was um, when it was good it was very good and when it was bad it was very bad. And ... and so I ... I grew up seeing my parents fight often and my dad ... well they divorced and well they actually never really divorced until ten years ago.

Conflict Coach: ok.

Participant: but um every few years they would split and dad would leave and then they would always get back together and ... and maybe I just want to hold her and hand and say, you know what, it’s ok. We’re going to, we’re going to be a unit and we’re going to get through this and them um, you know I would try to be very careful with what I say.

Conflict coach: right, anything else? Anything else you would say or would do?

Participant: well I would ask Diane if I could share, give her my perspective?

Conflict coach: ok.

Participant: of why I think this is important.

Conflict coach: so you’d ask her instead of overpowering her will,

Participant: yeah.

Conflict coach: right that’s one thing?
Participant: yeah, yeah I would ask.

Conflict coach: ok, and what else? Where would you go from there? What if she said yes and what if she said no?

Participant: well she’s said no in the past.

Conflict coach: uh huh.

Participant: um, and I don’t know I think sometimes just sharing what I believe isn’t enough to make her change her mind.

Conflict coach: right.

Participant: that’s not, that’s not, I’m not really out to change her mind with the mom issue. You know I just want …

Conflict coach: right, but in a way you’re wanting to express what’s important to you, rather than to change her mind. Or stay true to what’s important to you, is that right?

Participant: well if you mean the conflict comes up again?

Conflict coach: yeah.

Participant: well I guess that’s … that’s I would want. I would hope that maybe if she sees a different perspective besides her own.

Conflict coach: yeah.

Participant: maybe she would consider mom’s perspective.

Conflict coach: ok ok.

Participant: in this situation.
Conflict coach: right so that’s what your biggest hope would be? About what would happen?

Participant: yeah, for this specific situation. Yes.

Conflict coach: right right and if that were to happen what would that mean to you?

Participant: well, what would that mean to me? That would, I don’t know if I could put a label on an emotion, I mean it’s not like I would be giddy or happy. It’s just I would feel heard. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The participant here is asked to stretch her perspective to become more inclusive of her sister’s views. She responds with a modest but definite shift in her own perspective. She is willing to offer reassurance: “We’re going to get through this.” She is willing to show her sister the respect of asking permission to share her views. She is willing to listen to her sister. These are all small pieces of difference. In addition the participant speaks about working harder to understand her sister’s story, “… but they, they are very close and there were years when [name of sister] you know took care of mom when my dad left and she was left all alone and my mom has lived overseas with [name of sister] multiple times,” (lines 576-579). This is an indication of a change in the story from a position of conflict to a position of recognizing the other party. The recognition continues:

Participant: yeah, I think so I think so because you know she has a history of kind of doing what she wants and getting her way or and what she
wants. And it, it I hate it I don’t want it to sound like she’s a bad person because she’s not … and you know so there is that relationship you know that I think [name of sister] probably feels that she knows what’s best for mom and therefore she’s going to do that. You know it’s really um, that’s really what I think it is. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

There is also an emphasis on what she and her sister share in terms of family history as she speaks of their parents’ relationship struggles.

Participant: I didn’t know, I mean, I really thought that conflict resolution meant Chinese food in the fridge and Baskin Robbins in the freezer. You know if there was Chinese food and Baskin Robbins I knew they made up Conflict Coach: (laughs)

Participant: I didn’t know how but I mean to the point that when I got married I really questioned whether my husband loved me because he didn’t bring me Baskin Robbins, and that was my understanding of, and we didn’t fight. My husband and I didn’t fight but it was so engrained in me that that’s the way you would show love or that’s the way that conflict got resolved.

Conflict Coach: yeah, yeah.

Participant: and I know it’s funny but so, so with [name of sister], so when I met my husband um on one of our first dates we went out in the car and he said well you know since we’re going to take a long drive well I’m going to check the oil and he pulled the oil stick out and there was no oil. And he
said oh well we need to put some oil in and I thought to myself oh my
gosh, this is not my dad; my dad would have blown a fuse. I mean he
would have just gone off and told me I could never drive anywhere unless
I get the car and the 16 point you know check over and I mean it shocked
me and so I knew from that first date that this guy wasn’t my dad and so
this relationship was not going to be like my parents’ relationship and so
we’ve just learned you know how to get along and through conflict to just
sit down and say look I don’t agree with you.

Conflict Coach: so you’ve developed some ways of handling the
difference, just from your husband being a different person and from what
you’ve learned along the way and you’re …

Participant: and from growing up.

Conflict Coach: your relationship?

Participant: right and I don’t know, I don’t live with [name of sister] and so
I don’t know what they go through, but I’ve heard from others who have
lived with them that they don’t have that type of ability you know or
knowledge to talk things out. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The participant supplements the inquiry into the counter story when
changing position in the conversation from a position of conflict to a position of
love and support in view of her sister when stating (lines 640-653), “and you
know so there is that relationship you know that I think [name of sister] probably
feels that she knows what’s best for mom and therefore she’s going to do that.
You know it's really um, that's really what I think it is.” The scope of the perspective from which the relationship is now being viewed is much larger. It is one from which differences between different kinds of relationships can be noticed and appreciated rather than just experienced from the inside. A significant connection occurs with the participant when comparing a position of conflict with her father and making the connection that the position of her current husband was so different than her father and therefore a positive view of a man which was different than the position in the past. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

… and so I knew from that first date that this guy wasn’t my dad and so this relationship was not going to be like my parents relationship and so we’ve just learned you know how to get along and through conflict to just sit down and say look I don’t agree with you. (Lines 779-782, Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The counter story is moving away from the conflict story and towards the story of resolution (Winslade & Williams, 2012). “The story is named, ‘counter story,’ within the field of narrative counseling. It runs counter to the direction of “the conflict story” (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 27). The conflict coach is using the double listening tools in order to recognize pieces of the preferred story. The counter story is developed through this exploration because it is a point in the story where the conflict was not present.
The conflict coach tries to open up the counter story by asking more about the participant’s bigger picture understanding of conflict as a result of these experiences, “What’s been the impact on you and [name of sister] and your whole relationship understanding of things?” The participant explains what conflict was like in the past and then contrasts it with what she has learned since. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The conflict coach acknowledges this difference by keeping this line of conversation going, with, “So you’ve developed some ways of handling the difference, just from your husband being a different person and from what you’ve learned along the way,” (lines 667-669). This continues to build the counter story by recognizing that there are points in the story where the participant was able to deal with the conflict in a different way than what was modeled as a child. The participant responds in line 670, “and from growing up.” In line 671 the conflict coach inquires further into, “your relationship?” (Transcript 2, October, 2013) The participant explores the other person’s story regarding conflict:

Right and I don’t know, I don’t live with [name of sister] and so I don’t know what they go through, but I’ve heard from others who have lived with them that they don’t have that type of ability you know or knowledge to talk things out. (lines 672-675, Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Winslade & Williams (2012) explain that, “The counter story can be developed further by exploring people’s reasons for not wanting a conflict to
worsen and for preferring something else. In the process conversations can open up about peoples cherished values, personal commitments and cultural resources,” (p. 27). Some of the questions that might be used are: “What might the other person be hoping for?” “What might he/she prefer?” The purpose is to extend the counter story. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Conflict Coach: So it’s not like, it would be possible to have sort of like kind of a conversation that you would prefer to have, which would kind of like work through the issues of what people are being and what’s important and reach some sort of agreement or understanding, is that right?

Conflict Coach: and so when you think about that when [name of sister] comes assuming that it’s going to come to something at that point, right?

Participant: (nods).

Conflict Coach: Like I’m interested in how you’re thinking about how you will handle that? How will you conduct yourself in that, in that situation?

Participant: Hopefully calmly.

Conflict Coach: Ok that’s a word that you used before right?

Participant: yeah, yeah you know think before I speak.

Conflict Coach: so what does calmly mean to you? Well because … I’ve got a sense of what it would mean to me, but I’m interested in what …

Participant: well really um, breathing.

Conflict Coach: breathing?
Participant: breathing, keeping my volume down.

Conflict Coach: uh huh.

Participant: trying to just not get more serious, you know not getting upset or anxious.

Conflict Coach: yes.

Participant: that you know that she has a different opinion than I do. About what should happen?

Conflict Coach: right. So do you have things that you say to yourself?

Participant: yeah, yeah I do.

Conflict Coach: what do you say?

Participant: um besides a prayer?

Conflict Coach: yes?

Participant: just that … breathe.

Conflict Coach: breathe?

Participant: keep calm. Don’t, don’t you know jump to conclusions.

Conflict Coach: don’t jump to conclusions.

Participant: you know we’re going to work this out.

Conflict Coach: don’t react?

Participant: don’t’ react, yes. Just those coaching things.

Conflict Coach: yes.

Participant: you know just breathe. Be calm.

Conflict Coach: and the prayer? What’s that like?
Participant: Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me.

Conflict Coach: ok.

Participant: you know that’s, help me behave how I should behave.

Conflict Coach: ok. Right. So you kind of appeal to your faith and your beliefs?

Participant: I do, yes.

Conflict Coach: and what does that do for you in that moment?

Participant: to appeal to my faith?

Conflict Coach: yeah.

Participant: well, my faith centers me.

Conflict Coach: ok.

Participant: you know it's, it's gives me you know a purpose and a meaning and you know a perspective.

Conflict Coach: right.

Participant: and it, I need perspective when there's conflict.

Conflict Coach: right.

Participant: and I need to know, you know often times I will see the bark and beetles on the tree without you know seeing the forest. And you know that's a downfall of mine.

Conflict Coach: ok.

Participant: and you know I need to be able to see the big picture.
Conflict Coach: and having perspective means having seen forest as well as the bark on the trees?

Participant: absolutely, absolutely and having that perspective generally calms me down because, the conflicts usually are just little fires that really aren’t, the conflicts many times are not the issue.

Conflict Coach: ok, what is the issue then?

Participant: the issue then ...

Conflict Coach: if you get that perspective what do you see?

Participant: with [name of sister]?

Conflict Coach: yes, yes.

Participant: I think, I think the one issue with mom and her things is more of um, is more of a I think the bigger picture is would be [name of sister]'s need to, I think [name of sister] controls things to feel loved.

Conflict Coach: ok.

Participant: um, and I, and I think that is something that knowing the way we were raised, with all of our different issues, that and all of the five kids Conflict Coach: yes, yes.

Participant: and the distance and the different things that we’ve all had to go through, for affirmation to feel loved. I think that this is just something that [name of sister] feels that when she can give to others that’s affirming, and there’s nothing wrong with that.

Conflict Coach: no.
Participan: I’m not, that’s not a criticism at all.

Conflict Coach: no, no.

Participant: but I think that, I think that.

Conflict Coach: in fact if I’m understanding, right, you would want [name of sister] to feel loved?

Participant: Absolutely!

Conflict Coach: yeah.

Participant: absolutely.

Conflict Coach: yeah and you would want her to feel like she has an important role in the family.

Participant: absolutely, absolutely.

Conflict Coach: yeah, yeah, right.

Participant: but I think that for her she, she, and I don’t think it’s conscious.

I think it’s a very subconscious thing that she, when she can give to others and when she can control situations so that she feels others are being cared for, that gives her a sense of meaning, um, which we all need.

(Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The counter story is further explored in lines 324 to 328 when the conflict coach asks:

So it’s not like, it would be possible to have sort of like kind of a conversation that you would prefer to have which would kind of like work
through the issues of what people are being and what’s important and reach some sort of agreement or understanding, is that right?

In addition the conflict coach says, “… and so when you think about that when [name of sister] comes assuming that it’s going to come to something at that point, right?”

The participant responds with a nod. The conflict coach further extends the counter story when stating,

“Like I’m interested in how you’re thinking about how you will handle that? How will you conduct yourself in that, in that situation?” The participant states in response in lines…686, “hopefully calmly.”

The conflict coach continues with, “Ok that’s a word that you used before right?”

The participant responds with, “yeah, yeah you know think before I speak.” This is significant because it has changed how the participant has been shown what conflict looks and like and using a different strategy that is more effective in dealing with the conflict. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Unique Outcomes

Exploring the effects of the problem may lead to the discovery of unique outcomes (Morgan, 2000), which can be found in moments when the problem story did not affect the participant’s life in a specific situation. A useful question
would be, “How are these hopes/preferences being expressed?” The purpose is to explore the unique outcomes where the conflict is not present and, therefore, unique to the current conflict story. A unique outcome occurs, for example, in the following moment:

Participant: I didn’t know how but I mean to the point that when I got married I really questioned whether my husband loved me because he didn’t bring me Baskin Robbins, and that was my understanding of, and we didn’t fight. My husband and I didn’t fight but it was so engrained in me that that’s the way you would show love or that’s the way that conflict got resolved … and so I knew from that first date that this guy wasn’t my dad and so this relationship was not going to be like my parents relationship and so we’ve just learned you know how to get along and through conflict to just sit down and say look I don’t agree with you. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

A unique outcome occurs where the conflict is dealt with in a way that was different from what happened in her family growing up. In the past the conflict explained (lines 775-778) was expressed as:

I really questioned whether my husband loved me because he didn’t bring me Baskin Robbins, and that was my understanding of, and we didn’t fight. My husband and I didn’t fight but it was so engrained in me that
that’s the way you would show love or that’s the way that conflict got resolved. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

This is a unique outcome from the past that changed the way the conflict is resolved in the participant’s experience. The challenge now is to apply it to the current conflict.

**Anchor the Counter Story in Value System**

When anchoring the counter story in the value system the conflict coach begins to ask questions about values that are important to the participant. The conflict coach and participant explore these values in order to develop the counter story. The conflict coach asks how the preferred way of handling the conflict fits with the person’s values.

In the first conversation the participant voices a time where strength was present and compassion and, when being challenged in the past, people were compassionate towards her, even when she was not compassionate towards others. Instead of continuing to focus on the failure, the conflict coach decides to focus the counter story on the inclusion of the value of compassion as an added dimension of how she might manage the conflict situation in future. In the following transcription this process is explored:

Participant: I’m compassionate enough and that I can find compassionate at a time at odds. When it’s somebody who is against me.
Conflict Coach: yeah, yeah, when it's not easy to feel compassion.

Participant: it’s not easy to feel compassion you know when someone is not treating you the best.

Conflict Coach: uh huh.

Participant: so I feel like you know sometimes I need to think of let’s not forget there were times when you were not nice.

With regard to the value of compassion, the conflict coach inquires further, “What is it like to think of yourself in that way?”

The participant responds with:

Well um it’s a good thing because I wasn’t always the one who was a compassionate person. However people show compassion towards me. So I feel like you know sometimes I need to think of let’s not forget there were times when you were not nice. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

The participant values compassion and instead of continuing to focus on the conflict decides to show her colleague compassion which is a value in the counter story. She remembers the experience of being shown compassion as instructive. In this way the counter story is anchored in the value system of the participant. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In the second conversation, the counter story is also anchored in the participant’s value system when the conflict coach responds to the participant’s reference to her faith, “So you kind of appeal to your faith and your beliefs?” The
conflict coach proceeds to ask, “... and what does that do for you in that moment?” (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The reply is that, “My faith centers me. It gives me you know a purpose and a meaning and you know a perspective. And it, I need perspective when there’s conflict.” (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The conflict coach continues to be curious at this moment, rather than taking what is said at face value. He inquires into the differences created by this shift in perspective.

The participant comes up with several answers: “keep calm”; “don’t ... jump to conclusions”; offering reassurance that, “we’re going to work this out”; “don’t react”; and “breathe.” The specific words of the prayer are invoked, “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me ... Help me behave how I should behave.” (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

This participant values her faith and gains strength through prayer, which is also anchored in her value system. It helps the participant see the whole picture of the conflict in order to gain perspective. She comments:

Often times I will see the bark and beetles on the tree without you know seeing the forest. And you know that’s a downfall of mine ... and you know I need to be able to see the big picture.

Conflict Coach: and having perspective means having seen forest as well as the bark on the trees? Participant: absolutely, absolutely and having that perspective generally calms me down because, the conflicts usually
are just little fires that really aren’t, the conflicts many times are not the issue. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

Trace the History of These Values

Tracing the history of the values that are embedded in the counter story focuses on asking about how the previously stated preferred values have been acted upon in the past. What is their history? How have they been useful in the past? The aim is to strengthen the sense that these values are consistent with what someone stands for in life and to make it more likely that they will be acted upon.

Conflict Coach: and the prayer? What’s that like?
Participant: Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me.
Conflict Coach: ok
Participant: you know that’s, help me behave how I should behave.
Conflict Coach: ok. Right. So you kind of appeal to your faith and your beliefs?
Participant: I do, yes.
Conflict Coach: and what does that do for you in that moment?
Participant: to appeal to my faith?
Conflict Coach: yeah,
Participant: well, my faith centers me.
Conflict Coach: ok
Participant: you know it’s, it’s gives me you know a purpose and a meaning and you know a perspective.

Conflict Coach: right

Participant: and it, I need perspective when there’s conflict.

Conflict Coach: right.

Participant: and I need to know, you know often times I will see the bark and beetles on the tree without you know seeing the forest. And you know that’s a downfall of mine.

Conflict Coach: ok

Participant: and you know I need to be able to see the big picture.

Conflict Coach: and having perspective means having seen forest as well as the bark on the trees?

Participant: absolutely, absolutely and having that perspective generally calms me down because, the conflicts usually are just little fires that really aren’t, the conflicts many times are not the issue.

Conflict Coach: ok, what is the issue then?

Participant: the issue then

Conflict Coach: if you get that perspective what do you see?

Participant: with [name of sister]?

Conflict Coach: yes, yes.
Participant: I think, I think the one issue with mom and her things is more of um, is more of a I think the bigger picture is would be [name of sister]'s need to, I think [name of sister] controls things to feel loved.

Conflict Coach: ok

Participant: um, and I, and I think that is something that knowing the way we were raised, with all of our different issues, that and all of the five kids

Conflict Coach: yes, yes.

Participant: and the distance and the different things that we’ve all had to go through, for affirmation to feel loved. I think that this is just something that [name of sister] feels that when she can give to others that’s affirming, and there’s nothing wrong with that.

Conflict Coach: no,

Participant: I’m not, that’s not a criticism at all.

Conflict Coach: no, no.

Participant: but I think that, I think that.

Conflict Coach: in fact if I’m understanding right, you would want [name of sister] to feel loved?

Participant: Absolutely!

Conflict Coach: yeah

Participant: absolutely

Conflict Coach: yeah and you would want her to feel like she has an important role in the family.
Participant: absolutely, absolutely.
Conflict Coach: yeah yeah right.
Participant: but I think that for her she, she, and I don’t think its conscious I think it’s a very subconscious thing that she, when she can give to others and when she can control situations so that she feels others are being cared for, that gives her a sense of meaning, um, which we all need.
Conflict Coach: yes of course. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

When the participant begins to trace the history of the participant’s values in relation to other conflicts in the past the stories in these examples remain some vague. This aspect of the conflict coaching guidelines is not strongly developed in the two transcribed conversations. In another conversation specific events in the past might be important to recall in greater detail.

Extend Values Into the Future

Extending these values into the future focuses on asking about how the person would act in future in this conflict situation if he or she were to apply his or her preferred values to the situation. Here is how this exchange developed in conversation one:

Conflict Coach: One last thing I want to ask you [name of participant] and that is what are you going to take away from this conversation that we’ve had?
Participant: Um, I guess that I'll take away one that I do have the support of other people throughout the county … or compassionate or whatever and people still stood by you and were compassionate. And all of those things and this is kind of like a returning of that favor that other people did for me.

Conflict Coach: wow that’s lovely.

Participant: so that's kind of why I'm the way I am now.

Conflict Coach: so what you’re describing there is a path that you’ve been on in your own life.

Participant: mmm hmm.

Conflict Coach: learning a discovery, a development in your own life that’s actually helping you to deal with situations with somebody else at this point. Right?

Participant: Right and it's worked in a lot of different situations.

Conflict Coach: yeah yeah because you’ve actually developed and learned the skills of how to do this. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In the transcription the conflict coach and participant explored extending the value of compassion into the future. It is paired with the value of reciprocity and understood as something to be returned to others because the participant has been on the receiving end of it.

The analysis of the transcripts provided information from each counseling conversation in which the questioning techniques utilized in the conflict coaching
process assisted both participants in reaching a place of difference in perspective in relation to the conflict story. This led to an in-depth analysis of discursive positioning from statements early in each of the conversations and also from late in each conversation indicated positioning shifts in the direction of creating an alternative narrative into which the participants might live. It is therefore argued that the guidelines for a conflict coaching process are adaptable in at least two different areas of life.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Findings

In this chapter I will discuss a summary of the findings on the conflict coaching process. The purpose is to show the effectiveness of narrative conflict coaching questioning techniques. Furthermore, an explanation of the contributions to the field will be included. Finally, the limitations of the project and findings will be discussed as well suggestions for future research.

The research question was: “How is narrative conflict coaching helpful in conflict resolution?” The research question was answered by using transcriptions of counseling conversations and tracing the effects of these questions in the conversation.

The literature within the field of narrative conflict coaching provides support for the questioning techniques and the purpose. It is a relatively small literature but here I was able to trace how specific questions were supplemented by participant’s responses such that movement in thinking took place in the direction intended. Conflict coaching does not seek to reach a resolution to the conflict, because that would necessarily involve the other party to the conflict.
What it does aim to do is to assist one party to think through the kind of person he or she wants to present in the conflict situation.

This is achieved by asking a series of questions that guide a person through a process of consideration. The questioning progresses through various stages. It begins with inviting the participant to make sense of what is happening and why it is happening. It guides a person through a deconstructive inquiry that illuminates the situation in a new way and it shines a spotlight on possible openings to a counter story to the story of the conflict. The intention is to assist the participant to move past some of the negative effects of the conflict or at least to reach a point of understanding which renders the conflict powerless with regard to the participant’s ongoing story of relationship with the other party.

This is a qualitative study and contains no attempt to make claims on the basis of statistical validity.

The validity of qualitative designs is the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meanings between the participants and the researcher. Thus, the researcher and participants agree on the description or composition of events, and especially the meanings of these events. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006 p. 324)

Therefore, what I was looking for were signs of such agreement or disagreement between the participants and conflict coach on the meanings of the various events. Towards the end of each of the two conflict coaching
conversations, each participant was asked their view on the helpfulness of the process that had just occurred. This is what they said, first of all from conversation two:

Conflict coach: I’m just interested in um asking first before we do that, um what’s it been like to have this sort of conversation and what have you been experiencing while we’ve been talking about it?
Participant: you know I think it’s good to have conversations because it, it again it brings me down to ok what’s the reality, what, you know the bigger picture.
Conflict coach: yeah, yeah
Participant: is the conflict the bigger picture no it’s not the bigger picture is the relationship with my mom and [sister’s name] is.
Conflict coach: right ok.
Participant: and so those are the things that I want to preserve.
Conflict coach: so it’s important for you to keep your focus on the bigger picture. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

The participant is looking at the conflict from the position of the bigger picture and not solely from within the immediate conflict. From this different position, she can see more clearly the significance of overall scope of the relationship with her mother and sister, rather than being enmeshed in the detail of the conflict over the mother’s things. This response by the participant to the process provides an affirmation to the conflict coach that the process of
conversation was effective and helpful in facilitating a shift in positioning, at least in this conversation. The hope is that the participant will be able to return to this position of larger scope when confronted by future conflict, especially in relationship with her sister.

This same process occurs in the first conversation in the following transcription:

Participant: yeah that and the fact that I do have the strength to
Conflict coach: to stand on
Participant: to stand on and I’m compassionate enough and that I can find compassionate at a time at odds. When it’s somebody who is against me
Conflict coach: yeah, yeah, when it’s not easy to feel compassion.
Participant: it’s not easy to feel compassion you know when someone is not treating you the best.
Conflict coach: what’s it like to think of yourself in that way?
Participant: well um it’s a good thing because I wasn’t always the one who was compassionate person however people show compassion towards me.
Conflict coach: uh huh.
Participant: so I feel like you know sometimes I need to think of let’s not forget there were times when you were not nice.
Conflict coach: yeah, yeah.
Participant: or compassionate or whatever and people still stood by you and were compassionate. And all of those things and this is kind of like a returning of that favor that other people did for me.

Conflict coach: wow that’s lovely

Participant: so that’s kind of why I’m the way I am now

Conflict coach: so what you’re describing there is a path that you’ve been on in your own life

Participant: mmm hmm

Conflict coach: learning a discovery a development in your own life that’s actually helping you to deal with situations with somebody else at this point. Right?

Participant: right and it’s worked in a lot of different situations.

Conflict coach: yeah, yeah because you’ve actually developed and learned the skills of how to do this.

Participant: mm hmm.

Conflict coach: that’s nice.

Participant: yeah I’m getting better but it is I’m definitely and it’s nice it feels good for me to not get upset because sometimes people just don’t know and I think we think sometimes people should know but they should know what you know and we think everyone’s common sense is the same and sometimes people just don’t know. And so that helps me because you
know he just may not know what’s going on or how he’s acting. And so if I can offer him some type of help.

Conflict coach: then that’s good for him, and feels good for you yeah yeah.

Participant: Yeah. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

From the above, it is clear that the literature on positioning theory provides another way of understanding the effects of the conflict coaching process. It focuses on the discursive positions a person takes up in relation to a discourse as it is manifest in a relationship context and asks us to pay attention to the ways in which such positions are constantly changing in the moment of a conversation. Even though a discourse might be relatively constant and stable, people’s positions in relation to it are fluid. Personal subjective responses constantly change in response to shifts in relationships and the actions and utterances of other people (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Therefore, we can see that the discursive positions of a person are responsive to conversational or relationship influences as well as to the overarching social discourse. It allows us to see cultural contexts as both dynamically in flux and also as relatively stable (Winslade, 2005).

The differences between the dominant discursive positions and other viewpoints open the possibility that people can also begin to resist the dominant discourse. A person can decide to take up a position call in the terms offered by the dominant culture or can refuse it and take up a contradictory position. The point here is that the individual person has enough agency to create a position
that they desire, even though this choice is always still influenced by the dominant discourse. This agency is more likely to become possible when the work being done by the dominant discourse is made more obvious and is no longer hidden. Winslade (2005) says:

The possibility of contradiction of discursive positioning is necessary for the possibility of change. If we could not at times refuse the positions we are offered, then we would be determined by the discursive worlds in which we live. We would have no room to make choices, to take stands, or to protest injustice. In other words, we need the possibility of contradiction in order to exercise agency. (p. 355)

The current study supports this view derived from positioning theory. I now need to show this by demonstrating how the participants were able to make changes to their discursive positions in relation to the conflict through the conflict coaching conversation and in response to narrative questions. I shall do this for both conversations by contrasting a piece of transcript from early in the conversation with a piece from later in the conversation and analyzing the difference in discursive positioning.

In the piece of transcription from the first conversation the participant says:

My boss currently and ... we used to be co-supervisors, and when the program manager retired he is acting program manager ... so now he’s
my boss. And because he’s wanting the program manager’s position he
now sees me as competition … The program manager retired. So he went
from being my supervisor. I mean he went from being my co-supervisor to
… because there was two…. And there’s already been two people who
I’ve had to go to human resources about because of the words that they
used. And so I told them that once you say that then I have to document
that and take it up, and they were fine with that but.

Conflict coach: Once you say what?

Participant: That they’ve been harassed. That they feel like he is bullying
them. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In terms of discursive positioning, we can see in this piece that the role of
the participant in relation to the other party to the conflict is technically an equal
one as co-supervisor, even though he has been acting temporarily in a
managerial way. But positions are different from roles. The position that the other
party has been taking up is that of boss, as someone in charge. The conflict
arises in part because the participant does not accept the position she is offered
as subject to his authority. As the conversation continues, her position develops
from not accepting his position calls as someone in a subject position in relation
to his authority to a description of a power relation as “competition”, and then to a
description of his actions as “harassment” and “bullying.” The trajectory of her
thinking about the conflict is traced in this way as moving towards a more
polarized relation. Now let me look at a piece of transcription from later in the same conversation.

Participant: You know I’m at the point where I think this man doesn’t even know what he’s doing and they put him in this position to act as a program manager and he wants nothing to do with child welfare. So not only is he suffering from you know whatever else is going on he’s also being asked to look very smart in a child welfare position and that’s not something he’s passionate about. He doesn’t care about it. He’s said that. And he’s even at the point where you know he’s said some things to me about it being too much for him, but I’ve offered him my help. I’ve even said, “Hey [name], if you can’t make this meeting because you have this going on I’ll go for you.” Well his response was, “Oh no no I don’t want you to go that way I can tell the assistant director that there is so much going on here that we need a program manager because I’m missing meetings.” And I’m like, “But you could just send me.”

Conflict coach: So actually stand for the things that you stand for. The professional stands, the commitments you have. The beliefs, the values you have and when you do that it sort of puts you in a stronger position of yourself so you don’t feel like you have to, you can feel sorry for him, you even feel compassion for him … And that you’re not somehow dictated by his behavior.

Participant: Right, mmm hmm.
Conflict coach: So what’s it like to think about it that way?

Participant: Well for me to think about it that way it keeps me, it makes me want to help him.

Participant: And so I’m just one of those people that believe that things happen when they happen and if it works for you, you’re going to get it.

Conflict coach: So, thinking about things in this way as you’ve been doing allows you to kind of be you know a little relaxed about the sense of pressure.

Participant: Yeah very relaxed.

Conflict coach: And like is that like a feeling of strength in you? About how you stand for yourself in these, this kind of situation? This whole problem with [name]

Participant: It’s a huge amount of strength in a lot of situations, just because I don’t ever feel the need to compete with people. I don’t ever feel the need to not mentor someone.

Conflict coach: And instead what you have to stand on is this position of strength that you can identify. It sounds like on some occasions it might be challenging to find it but most of the time you manage to find it. Is that right?

Participant: yeah that and the fact that I do have the strength to …

Conflict coach: to stand on…
Participant: to stand on and I’m compassionate enough and that I can find compassionate at a time at odds. When it’s somebody who is against me

Conflict coach: yeah yeah when it’s not easy to feel compassion.

Participant: it’s not easy to feel compassion you know when someone is not treating you the best.

Conflict coach: what’s it like to think of yourself in that way?

Participant: well um it’s a good thing because I wasn’t always the one who was compassionate person however people show compassion towards me. (Transcript 1, August, 2013)

In terms of discursive positioning, in this piece of transcript, we can see that the participant is still concerned that the co-supervisor is creating conflict by positioning her in places that interfere with her work in specific areas that are essential to her job. The participant cannot do her job efficiently if she is unable to attend the training, and this issue creates conflict between her and her co-supervisor (now acting manager). But rather than continuing to become fixed into a more polarized position, the participant takes a step toward a different position. The conflict coach asks the participant to describe events through the lens of the participant’s values and professional commitments. He continues by specifically bringing attention to the participant’s position of strength, rather than to how she is simply subject to his position calls. The participant now starts to speak about how she feels compassion for the other party and asserts for herself the position of refusing to be dictated to by his behavior. She is even able to contemplate
positioning herself in a place where she can help him. This is a shift from seeing herself as in a competitive relationship. As a result she starts to relax and not feel so much pressure.

What is different from the first exchange is that the participant has shifted her position with regard to how she can think about the relationship. In the beginning she was speaking mainly about how she was subject to his positioning as in charge. This position focused her attention mainly on a conflict or power struggle and pitched her into a relationship based on competition. In the latter conversation, we can see that she has opened up some new positions from which to relate to him. She does not give up her refusal to accept his positioning of her a managed subject, but she can also relate to him from some new value positions – ones that include a concept like compassion. She experiences this as a position of strength, which is markedly different from being simply subject to his authority as something like a victim.

Now let me turn to the other conversation. One again, I will start with a piece of transcript from early in the conversation and contrast it with a piece from later in the conversation. Here is the first piece:

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Participant: and it was very calm you know … I wasn’t going to make a big deal, but that apparently really upset her, because later on we were all kind of, everybody else was sitting at a table and I just came up and said hey what’s going on and …
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Conflict Coach: Yeah.

Participant: And [name of sister] gave a comeback that you know was not uh, it was real short, a real short comeback about well aren’t we being miss bossy here? And I just thought and I just thought uh …

Conflict Coach: To you?

Participant: Yeah to me and I just thought you know ok duly noted and how’s everybody doing you know and even my brother who came later on, was like man what was that all about? And I said you know I don’t know. You know I don’t know, but so, but so, I wanted to kind of talk about it and [name of sister]’s the type that she just uh, she just won’t … there’s just no conflict resolution. It’s just she’ll drop it and she’ll put on a happy face and you know we’ll go on with our lives. And I know that about her and but just this week, Monday or Tuesday, um mom calls or I called mom and she said now I just talk to [name of sister] and [name of sister] really want’s this thing transferred to your house. And um you know for safe-keeping and I said what do you want mom? And she said well I want it at my house and I said then that’s what’s going to happen. You know I’m not having it at my house, if that’s what you want it’s yours then you keep it. But it’s still going on overseas you know, that, this conflict. You know until mom’s gone her stuff is her stuff and if it gets stolen, it gets stolen. You know, but [name of sister] feels that it’s just so valuable that she doesn’t want to tempt fate. So anyways that was the conflict and I love [name of sister] we
get along very well most of the time except when you know well dealing
with mom. And mom’s stuff. And I feel that at times she’s controlling of my
mother and controlling of her my mother’s stuff and I think my mother’s an
adult she’s not … she doesn’t have dementia or anything else, she might
be a little, you know, eccentric. And you know that’s ok but that … that …
that’s the conflict … it’s just between my sister and I.

(Transcript 2, October, 2013)

In terms of discursive positioning, we can see in this piece that the
participant begins from an effort to establish a calm viewpoint from which to
discuss the situation with their mom, but then this is challenged when her sister
begins to label her as, “bossy.” “Bossy” is most often a description that fits within
a gendered discourse – it is usually reserved for women to describe a way of
interacting that departs from the sanctioned norms for women as more passive
and deferential. It signals that the woman is not behaving as a “normal” woman
should. The participant appears to be careful not to take up any position in
response that might appear aggressive and “bossy” and thus confirm the
description, but she is still unhappy with being positioned in this way. In the
participant’s view her sister’s approach amounts to not dealing with the conflict at
all. The conflict between the two sisters is a struggle for power over who will have
the right to most influence their mother’s actions. In response she tells the
conflict coach that her sister is “controlling.” This is a term that comes from the
same gendered discourse (men are seldom criticized for being controlling or
accused of being “control freaks” – such terms have a more critical implication when describing women). The participant is concerned to play down the conflict (“I love my sister.”) and to avoid overreacting (“I just thought you know ok duly noted.” and, “I wanted to kind of talk about it.”) but she still refers to her sister as a “type” and goes on to complain about her “controlling” actions. The participant is clearly frustrated (even though it is a muted frustration), because she feels powerless to address the conflict. Her positioning continues to change when the conversation focuses on the mother and the participant takes up a position of support for her mom’s views, in preference to any overpowering of her will. The participant is viewing the conflict as a power struggle between her and her sister.

Now let me look at a piece of transcription from later in the same conversation.

1027    Participant: well, my faith centers me.
1028    Conflict coach: ok
1029    Participant: you know it’s, it’s gives me you know a purpose and a
1030               meaning and you know a perspective.
1031    Conflict coach: right
1032    Participant: and it, I need perspective when there’s conflict.
1033    Participant: I think, I think the one issue with mom and her things is more
1034               of um, is more of a I think the bigger picture is would be [sister’s name]’s
1035               need to, I think [sister’s name] controls things to feel loved … I would hope
that one day she could feel whole and loved just for who she is … and maybe I just want to hold her and hand and say, you know what, it’s ok. We’re going to, we’re going to be a unit and we’re going to get through this and them um, you know I would try to be very careful with what I say … I would ask [sister’s name] if I could share, give her my perspective?

Conflict coach: ok.

Participant: of why I think this is important.

Conflict coach: so you’d ask her instead of overpowering her will,

Participant: well she’s said no in the past.

Conflict coach: uh huh

Participant: um, and I don’t know I think sometimes just sharing what I believe isn’t enough to make her change her mind.

Conflict coach: right

Participant: that’s not, that’s not, I’m not really out to change her mind with the mom issue. You know I just want …

Conflict coach: right, but in a way you’re wanting to express what’s important to you rather than to change her mind. Or stay true to what’s important to you is that right? Is that …

Participant: well I guess that’s … that’s … I would want … I would hope that maybe if she sees a different perspective besides her own.

Conflict coach: yeah
Participant: maybe she would consider mom’s perspective … in this situation.

Conflict coach: right so that’s what your biggest hope would be? … and if that were to happen what would that mean to you?

Participant: well, what would that mean to me? That would, I don’t know if I could put a label on an emotion, I mean it’s not like I would be giddy or happy. It’s just I would feel heard.

Participant: I would feel, I would feel more at peace that my mother was heard.

Conflict coach: yes, ok.

Participant: you know that’s because, you know I’m fighting for her in this situation. I don’t really care if [sister’s name] cares about how I feel, I want her, because the conflict, I guess the real conflict is between [sister’s name’s] will and my mom’s will. And I’m standing up for what my mom wants and I want [sister’s name] to understand what my mom wants and … and if she could hear that then I would feel ok mom’s been heard.

Conflict coach: and that would give you some sense of…? Peace?

Participant: um yeah, yeah, I guess you could say, I don’t know if peace is the best word. It would give me a sense of um, I guess peace, just the feeling that mom was heard.
Conflict coach: yeah and yeah the peace in the relational sense, and also
… the peace in the feelings within yourself. That something has gone the
way that you had hoped. (Transcript 2, October, 2013)

In terms of discursive positioning, in this piece of transcript, we can see
that the participant shifts to a different place from which to view the conflict. From
this perspective she can see the bigger picture instead of just the specific
conflict. She suggests that the other party has a need to control things to feel
loved and that she should use the power of not using her words in the conflict
and just listen to her sister’s concerns. The conflict coach supplements the
position of the participant by asking if she would ask her sister instead of
overpowering her will and not wanting to change the sister’s mind. It is a subtle
positional shift that she is articulating that involves stepping out of an antagonistic
stance and reminding herself to listen to her sister and letting go of any attempt
to persuade her sister to her own point of view.

What is different from the first exchange is that the participant has
positioned herself as willing to explore the needs of her sister from her sister’s
point of view. This will not necessarily change either party’s beliefs about what is
right for their mother, but it might affect the conflict by giving the other person
(her sister) the chance to feel heard and understood. As part of the bigger picture
the participant regards this as a more important outcome than achieving
agreement over their mother.
Discourse analysis addresses the social reality that is produced and made real through discourse. The social interactions are now able to be understood in relation to the meanings found in the discourse (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Discourses are shared and social and are created through interactions between social groups and are influenced by societal structures (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Dominant discourses are embedded within the social context and continuously change based on the social influences. The groups that control power and privilege within a society benefit from the dominant discourse and often work to perpetuate it because, “… dominant discourses reflect prevailing ideology, including popular norms, values, and beliefs,” (Winslade, 2008). Discourse can be hidden and difficult to identify and resist and it can be expected to be defended when it is identified (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999, p. 352). The relationship between text, discourse and context are explored within the social constructionist view (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). The current project identified some of the discourses referenced within the conflict and also how the participants positioned themselves in relation to these discourses.

Narrative questioning involves a focus on a person’s identity story and value system as well as an emphasis on understanding the effects of problems on an individual’s life. Narrative practice views the problem as separate from the person and often involves taking a participant’s story and, “re-authoring,” or “re-storying conversations” (Morgan, 2000, p.5). A story consists of different plot elements organized in a coherent way in order to understand the entire picture.
As Morgan comments, a narrative involves events, linked in sequence, across time, and according to a plot. The participants explored the current conflict through a narrative conversation and later reached a point in an alternative story where the conflict would no longer have control.

Now it is time to outline a narrative approach to conflict coaching. Winslade and Williams (2012) describe it like this:

A narrative approach to conflict coaching starts from the assumption that conflict is embedded in competing narratives about what has happened. It also assumes that these narratives will be shaped by a process of selection from out of the range of possible plot elements and that there are always possible narratives that can be developed other than the conflict-saturated one. The conflict narrative that dominates will likely be held in place by power relations of some kind, particularly as expressed through some dominant discourse. In the shadows of the dominant story will always exist some other possible stories, some of which the person consulting the conflict coach will prefer to what has been happening. The aim of the conflict coaching will be to help the person separate himself from the dominant conflict-saturated story and grow some preferred story of relationship with the other party.
The assumption is that a relationship change will occur if this
narrative shift takes place. (p. 34)

Summary of the Findings

In this study I was able to show that the conflict coaching process provides an effective way for a conflict-saturated story to shift to a preferred counter story. The questioning techniques that the conflict coach provides leads to a sequential process of moving through the various stages of the conflict coaching process. The questions posed provide a safe place for the participant to explore the conflict-saturated story and begin to develop a preferred counter story where the participant is able to position themselves in relation to the discourse. The conflict coaching techniques and the process for a counseling conversation pay attention to discursive positioning. As the client explores the conflict story the conflict coach listens to the series of events. As the process continues a more in-depth look at the conflict story and its effects are explored. The conflict coach moves through the various steps which may occur in a sequential order or not dependent upon what the participant explores.

The beginning of the process focuses on understanding the story of the conflict which consists of: denotation, manifestation, signification, series of events and sense. The second part of the conflict coaching focuses on deconstructing the conflict narrative through the steps of: double listening, asking
deconstructive questions, naming and externalizing the problem story, exploring assumptions, exploring the other person’s assumptions, and mapping the effects of the conflict. The third and final part of the conflict coaching process focuses on the counter story: evaluating the problem & its effects, inquiring into what the person would prefer, finding unique outcomes, anchoring the counter story in value system, tracing the history of these values, and extending these values into the future.

The conflict coach begins the process with specific questions regarding the conflict and as the participant shares the conflict story the path of the conversation begins. As the process continues the participant and conflict coach explore the conflict with based on the aforementioned questioning techniques. In order to move through the narrative both the conflict coach and participant must be willing to continue the process or the conversation will stop.

Discussion

Part of the value of what I have shown here lies in what it demonstrates: the efficacy of a method of conducting a conversation. Here are two examples of how a participant can enter a counseling conversation with a conflict and work through the problematic aspects of the conflict narrative to a point where the person is able to create a preferred counter story. It appears that utilizing the various narrative conflict coaching techniques to explore the various aspects of
the conflict helps the participant make this shift. This process is helpful for participants who need guidance in resolving conflict, whether the reason is difficulty with conflict resolution skills or the other person’s inability or unwillingness to rectify the conflict.

Limitations of the Study

However any investigation has its limits and these need to be acknowledged. This research project is in large part a descriptive study that aims to outline and document some of the questioning processes used in narrative conflict coaching. It also aims to show how these questions were responded to and therefore point to the work done by these questions. The data was collected through transcription of two different counseling conversations. The data collected was analyzed with the intention of examining narrative conflict coaching techniques in action. It was useful because it showed how each of the participants reached a point of difference of positioning in the course of constructing an alternative story in which the conflict, while still present, no longer has the same force.

The design of this study also leads to some limitations. It is basically a case study of two conversations. This is a limited sample size from which few generalized conclusions can be drawn. Both participants were women, both are graduate students, both come from one geographical region, and both were
members of a specific population (counselors or student counselors) that was aware of conflict resolution processes. The ethnic backgrounds of the two participants were Jewish and African American. How the processes would work with other people is still an open question.

Delimitations of the current study involved the fact that the topic specifically focused on narrative conflict coaching instead of encompassing other therapeutic techniques. This was delimiting to the current study because it narrowed the imitation value of the study to those who might be familiar with this approach.

Despite these limitations, the conversation processes that are demonstrated in this study appear to be adaptable for use with various conflict scenarios and can be utilized for a variety of conflict scenarios in order to create a way for a person to know how to go on. This is a more useful goal for narrative conflict coaching than resolving the conflict, because the latter necessarily involves the involvement of the other party. Narrative conflict coaching invites participants into a critical shift of perspective that appears to be the crux of both conversations analyzed here. This shift starts with the process of externalizing conversation, continues through the mapping of the effects of the externalized conflict, and proceeds into the articulation of a counter story. As the counter story is broached, participants are invited to view the conflict from a different platform, one that invokes their cherished values, sincerest hopes, and strongest
commitments. From this perspective the events of the original conflict story change in how they look.

The person goes back into the conflict situation with a sharper concern for how they want their actions to reflect how they want their life to go. This perspective may sometimes be quite different from how the dominant discourses that are governing the conflict situation are acting upon them to influence their responses. Now the petty invitations to engage in the back and forth tactics of power relations seem less attractive. They are still present but seem more trivial and less determining.

It is this shift that most strongly distinguishes a narrative approach to conflict coaching. In these two examples it can be seen in action. This is necessarily a preliminary study because the approach is new and still developing. A more extensive and definitive study of effectiveness would have been premature at this stage. On the basis of what I have shown here, narrative conflict coaching can, however, be cautiously considered a useful professional skill to develop, regardless of the context in which one works. It is therefore, worthy of further development and ongoing study.
APPENDIX A

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS
Conflict Coaching Research Project

Researcher: Ashley Pangborn

I am a second year graduate student in the Educational Counseling and Guidance Program at California State University, San Bernardino. I am conducting the Conflict Coaching Research Project with the intention of completing a research project. I am also currently a Kindergarten Teacher.

The Project

The narrative approach to conflict coaching has been developed by Dr. John Winslade. He wants to demonstrate this approach in conversations with participants. We are looking for volunteers to participate in these conversations. He will utilize conflict coaching strategies in relation to a real conflict situation you have experienced. The research will analyze closely what happens in these conversations in order to show what happens and how it happens.

Volunteers sought

If you volunteer you would need to be willing to talk about an experience of a small conflict which has happened in your recent experience. For example, suitable conflict situations might include disputes or differences of opinion with a friend, roommate, fellow employee, retailer, phone company, restaurant waiting staff, sibling, taxi driver, bank, family member, classmate, etc. We are looking for adults who can identify such an experience. No experience of conflict is too small.
to qualify. The conflict coaching strategy will aim to either a) help you identify a path forward in the conflict situation or b) develop a sustaining narrative about how you have already found such a path. We are not seeking to hold these conversations about major traumatic experiences or about entrenched major conflicts that would require more than one conversation to address. To this end, we will discuss the nature of the conflict situation with you before you are committed to participate. The conversations will take place at the San Bernardino campus.

**Expected duration of your involvement:**

One video-taped conversation of 20-50 minutes.

**Participant Confidentiality:** Your anonymity will be protected and all contributions will be kept confidential. The videos will not be shown to anyone other than the researcher and her supervising professor (Dr. Winslade). The conversations will be transcribed but the names of participants will not appear on computer document filenames. The transcripts will not include names of participants and any identifying information will be omitted. The data collected through video recording will be deleted when the Masters Research Project is accepted for formatting.

**Informed consent**

Your participation will be voluntary, and you will have the right to withdraw without penalty at any time until after the first draft of the research project has been written.

**Participation Effects:**
Due to the nature of the study, the possibility exists that recalling personal situations involving conflict might trigger unpleasant or disturbing emotions and, if needed, a professional counselor will be available. Dr. Winslade is experienced enough to handle professionally such situations and he will conduct all interviews. He will also raise the possibility of referral to the California State University San Bernardino Student Health and Psychological Counseling Center for further assistance, if required. While the aim will be to identify helpful pathways forward in difficult situations, it is possible that you may have painful feelings about conflict situations that get activated as well as positive responses to the situation you are talking about. Because of this concern, as mentioned above, conversations about major trauma or entrenched ongoing major conflicts will be screened out. Active engagement with distressing emotional content will not be the intended focus of the conversation. Rather the alleviation of worry or distress will be the focus. At the end of the conversation, participants will be invited to debrief on their experience of the conversation. The researchers will check for any ongoing concerns and, if necessary, will again have available the possibility of referral to the California State University San Bernardino Student Health and Psychological Counseling Center for further assistance if required.

**CONTACT:** For any questions about the research or about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. John Winslade, Professor in the Educational Psychology and Counseling Department at California State University San Bernardino, (909) 537-5688, jwinslad@csusb.edu.
RESULTS: A copy of the research project, when complete, will be placed in the University Library and may be read by anyone with an interest, including participants.
APPENDIX B

EMAIL INVITATION
Dear Counseling and Guidance Graduate Students,

I am a current graduate student in the program and in the process of beginning my research project. The focus of the research is on “conflict coaching.” Dr. Winslade is working with me on this project.

We are looking for volunteers to participate in this project by being interviewed about a small piece of conflict they have experienced or are currently experiencing.

Dr. Winslade will hold a conversation with each volunteer about this conflict and help discuss either a path forward in dealing with the conflict or develop an account of the path forward you have already found.

The sessions will be videotaped and used in the research thesis project and destroyed once the project has been completed. My task will be to analyze the details of the conversation and show its effects in the process.

If this sounds like something you would like to participate in, please email me at surfergurl1981@gmail.com or call at (714) 813 -8123.

This opportunity is available to volunteers at both PDC and SBC campuses.

Thank You,

Ashley Pangborn
APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
July 16, 2013

Ms. Ashley Pangborn

e/o Prof. John Winslade

Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Ms. Pangborn:

Your application to use human subjects, titled “Conflict Coaching,” has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The attached informed consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. Your application is approved for one year from July 16, 2013 through July 15, 2014. One month prior to the approval end date you need to file for a renewal if you have not completed your research. See additional requirements (Items 1 – 4) of your approval below.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

1) Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are made in your research prospectus/protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research.

2) If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,

3) To renew your protocol one month prior to the protocol's end date,

4) When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Coordinator/Compliance Analyst.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, IRB Compliance Coordinator. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillespie@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Sharon Ward, Ph.D.
Chair
Institutional Review Board

cc: Prof. John Winslade, Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling

099 537.7588 • Fax: 909.537.7028 • http://irb.csusb.edu/

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT
Conflict Coaching Research Project

Researcher: Ashley Pangborn

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the effectiveness of conflict coaching in resolving a current conflict. This study is being conducted by Ashley Pangborn under the supervision of Dr. John Winslade, Professor of Counseling, California State University San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University San Bernardino.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I have read and understand the information about the project. I have also read the informed consent document and I agree to participate in your study. I am willing to be interviewed about a personal experience of conflict.

VIDEO: I understand that the conversation will be videoed and give permission for it to be recorded.

Initials ___.

SIGNATURE: ___________________________ Date: ________
REFERENCES


Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.


