

CONFLICT HANDLING STYLES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: THE INFLUENCE OF  
CONFLICT TRAINING, PERSONALITY, AND FAMILY CONFLICT RESOLUTION

By

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Liberty University

Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was twofold; first, it was to examine the influence of personality and family conflict resolution on conflict handling styles. Second, the study aimed to investigate the impact of conflict resolution skills training on conflict handling styles, and conflict orientation of the participants. Personality was measured by Big Five Inventory (BFI), while family conflict was measure by Family Conflict Resolution scale. Conflict handling styles was measured by the Thomas-Kilmann MODE instrument, while Conflict orientation was measured by conflict orientation survey instrument. The training was carried out using a conflict handling video training. Data was collected in the middle of spring semester of 2014 in one Mid-Western public university. The total number of instruments collected from the sample during the pre-test was 359. A sample of 135 was used as the control group during the post-test and a sample of 133 was used as the experimental group during the post test. Conflict handling video training was carried out on the experimental group only. There were 91 participants who only participated in the pre-test. MANOVA indicated that there was significant influence of two BFI personalities (Extraversion and Agreeableness) on the conflict handling styles as measured by the MODE instrument. ANOVA indicated there was no impact of family conflict resolution on conflict handling styles. Further, Paired sample test between the pre and posttest indicated that conflict resolution skills training had no significant impact on conflict handling styles, and conflict orientation of the participants.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Priscilla Njeri Gitimu, who encouraged me to persevere and trust God all the way. Her support and loyalty granted me the freedom to complete this research. She offered a listening ear which helped build my thoughts throughout the dissertation writing process.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction**

Different conflict handling styles have their own advantages and disadvantages in accordance with the type of conflict and its context (Lewicki, et al., 2003). The Dual Concern Model is the most widely used approach that is used to describe styles used in conflict handling (Brockman, Nunez, & Basu, 2010). Interest based approach is also used for resolving conflicts that seek to satisfy the interests of all parties involved in a conflict (Fisher & Ury, 1991). Researchers usually evaluate the impact of conflict resolution training intervention by comparing conflict handling styles before and after intervention (Deen, 2000). Social interdependence theory indicates that ideal conditions that would result in constructive conflict resolution include a cooperative environment and disputant's skills in negotiation for a resolution (Laura, Peter, & Susan, 2007). Conflict strategies theory argues that when people are faced with conflict, they try to reach one's goal of conflict resolution and also try to maintain relationship with the opponents (Johnson & Johnson, 1997).

Conflict resolution is an important aspect of daily life. The way in which one approaches situations involving conflict is recognized as one's characteristic mode of handling conflict (Moberg, 1998). Blake and Mouton (1964) suggested five modes for conflict handling, which include directly confronting it, smoothing over the difference, avoiding it, forcing one's position, and coming to a compromise. The Big Five Inventory instrument is an acceptable personality measurement method that has been used in many studies to link personality factors to conflict handling styles (Costa & McCrae, 1995; Moberg, 2001).

Studies carried out in relation to personality and conflict handling styles have produced mixed results (Antonioni, 1998; Moberg, 2001). Some studies supported the relationship between personality and conflict handling styles while others reported a weak relationship between the two variables or personality and negotiation outcomes (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Pruitt & Cornevale, 1993; Wall & Blum, 1991). This inconsistency has been attributed to instruments that have been used in the past, but the emergence of the Big Five personality measurement has produced more promising results (Antonioni, 1998; Moberg, 2001). The current study intends to use the Big Five instrument to examine whether a strong relationship exists between personality and conflict handling styles among undergraduate college students.

Research has revealed that there is a negative effect on student learning when student and interparental conflict occurs (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Papp, & Dukewich, 2002; El-Sheikh, 1997). Studies have also demonstrated that young adults who perceive a high level of family conflict are affected negatively in other areas of life. Davies and Cummings (1994) argued that there is less likelihood of a negative effect on children and young adults if conflict resolution methods are well established in the family system. Cummings, Ballard, El-Sheikh, and Lake (1991) indicated that children who are subjected to unresolved interparental conflict display angrier reactions than those whose interparental conflict has been resolved. Poskos, Handal, and Ubinger (2010) recommend more research in this area to ascertain the effects of family conflict resolution as perceived by children, adolescent, or young adults. The aim of the present study is to establish the influence of family conflict resolution among college students in utilization of conflict handling styles when they are in a conflict. Another purpose of this study is to establish whether training students on conflict handling skills has any influence on them in choosing

conflict handling styles that are constructive in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

### **Background**

Conflict is inevitable, and researchers are exploring ways to manage it for the benefit of the parties involved (Ejaz, Igbal, & Ara, 2012). Conflict is a process which shows disagreement in two social entities (Rahim, 2002). Conflicts can be viewed as positive if they prove to be helpful in achieving the goal intended, and it can be negative if it does not add any benefit to the parties involved in the conflict (Rahim, 2002). Conflict can be used to gain a balanced view, where the management of the conflict should be to add a positive factor rather than going toward the negative aspect of it (Ejaz, Igbal, & Ara, 2012). Interpersonal conflict takes place when people perceive others as preventing them from achieving their objectives. Meeting the needs of the parties involved is an important part of establishing an effective conflict resolution mechanism. This becomes a problem when parties involved want opposing needs satisfied (Antonioni, 1998). This research wants to establish the influence that exists between personality and handling conflicts. The Big Five personalities—extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism—help measure specific traits of individual personalities. This study will investigate the influence that may exist on the five personality traits and conflict handling styles that individuals apply to establish a conflict resolution.

Conflict management has been strongly associated with both quality and satisfaction of interpersonal relationships (Cahn, 1992). Research has shown that parent-child conflict relationships have a great influence on family member's conflict handling styles later in life (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). Researchers have established that interparental conflicts have both

direct and indirect effects on childhood behavior through modeling, as well as indirectly through changes in the parent-child relationship (Cahn, 1992). Kasic, Noor, and Manneti (2011) noted that family is an important institution where young people can develop and practice necessary skills for conflict handling. There is a high probability that these home taught conflict handling styles will finally influence the way young people interact with others outside the family (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996). Young people who have learned to use constructive conflict handling styles at home may feel prepared to use similar constructive styles during conflict with other members of the community (Kasic, et al., 2011). The current study will try to establish the extent of influence on college students' conflict handling styles and those that their family members used to resolve conflict within the family settings.

Training disputants in conflict management skills can influence the ability to manage conflicts and come up with appropriate resolutions (Ramarajan, Bezrukova, Jehn, Euwema, & Kop, 2004). Training in conflict handling skills should be a combination of educational activities that are directed at improving individual skills in communicating with others and conflict negotiation tactics that will assist the person in handling conflict for the good of the parties involved (Fetherston, 1994; Wall & Druckman, 2002). Training in conflict handling skills can provide the individual with an improved sense of control over the conflict and the ability to reach an amicable resolution. This would reduce the individual egocentric reliance on negative responses that usually arise in conflicts (Ramarajan et al., 2004). The current study will investigate the influence conflict handling skill training has on college student conflict handling styles that can be applied to establish effective conflict resolution.

### **Problem Statement**

Conflict happens in normal relationships, and learning how to deal with it is important in order to maintain relationships. When conflict is handled in the correct manner, it provides an opportunity for growth and strengthens the bond between the people involved. Colleges are obligated to equip their students with skills to resolve conflict constructively. Conflicts have the potential of being either constructive or destructive in a relationship. Successful handling of conflict is a positive experience that gives the participants the opportunity to learn about themselves and others in the process of conflict resolution. Colleges are introducing conflict resolution concepts and skills into the curriculum or stand-alone courses that enable students to resolve conflicts effectively. It is important for students to know different types of conflict handling styles so as to ascertain the appropriate one to use to reach an effective resolution when in various conflicts at home, in the workplace, and in other social settings.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was twofold; first, it was to examine the influence of personality and family conflict resolution on conflict handling styles. Second, the study aimed to investigate the impact of conflict resolution skills training on conflict handling styles, and conflict orientation of the participants.

### **Significance of the Study**

Conflict is inevitable at home, school, and the workplace. It is therefore important for college students to have the skills to resolve conflicts as they prepare to join society in various capacities as workers or homemakers. Interpersonal conflicts among college students have been examined to predict why certain individuals are more prone to violence than others (Baron &

Richardson, 1994). Research has shown that most people in the United States who are criminal offenders are less than 30 years of age, and that violent crimes are committed by more 18-year-old men than by any other group (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Suping and Jing (2006) used the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model Instrument to understand and compare interpersonal conflict handling styles among college students. The finding showed that individuals have a tendency of using similar styles any time they seek conflict resolution. It also showed that a student's preference for using interpersonal conflict handling styles from high to low was compromising, collaborating, competing, accommodating, and avoiding. The study also established that there were significant differences between male and female students on competing styles of conflict resolution.

This study will try to investigate the conflict management of college students. The influence of conflict resolution training will be evaluated to find out if skills training can improve conflict handling styles among the participants. Family background and individual personality types will be investigated to observe if the training variable will influence conflict resolution handling styles in any way, regardless of individual student personality and family background.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1. Is there a statistically significant difference in how personality, as measured by BFI and family conflict resolution, as measured by FCRS, influences an individual's conflict handling style as measured by Thomas Kilman Conflict MODE instrument ?

RQ2. Is there a statistically significant difference in individual conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas Kilman Conflict Mode instrument and conflict orientation between pre-test and post-test after video training on conflict handling?

### **Hypothesis**

**H1.** There is a statistically significant difference in how individual personality as measured by BFI personality instrument influences the conflict handling styles that students use as measured by Thomas-Kilman conflict Mode Instrument.

**H2.** There is a statistically significant difference in how students' family conflict resolution as measured by Family Conflict Resolution scale influence conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument.

**H3.** There is a statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode instrument between experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-test and post-test for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

**H4.** There is a statistically significant difference in conflict orientation as measured by conflict orientation survey instrument between the experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-tests and post-tests for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

### **Null Hypothesis**

**H<sub>0</sub>1.** There is no statistically significant difference in how individual personality as measured by BFI personality instrument influences the conflict handling styles that students use as measured by Thomas-Kilman conflict Mode Instrument.

**H<sub>0</sub>2.** There is no statistically significant difference in how students' family conflict resolution as measured by Family Conflict Resolution scale influence conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument.

**H<sub>0</sub>3.** There is no statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode instrument between experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-test and post-test for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

**H<sub>0</sub>4.** There is no statistically significant difference in conflict orientation as measured by conflict orientation survey instrument between the experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-tests and post-tests for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

### **Identification of Variables**

The study will use dependent variables of conflict handling styles of students to measure how it will be influenced by independent variables of personality, family background training, and conflict orientation. The dependent variable of conflict handling styles will be measured using the Thomas-Kilmann Mode Instrument. The independent variables of personality, family conflict resolution training, and conflict orientation will be measured by the Big Five Inventory, Family Conflict Resolution Scale, and Conflict Orientation Survey instruments respectively.

### **Definitions**

***Conflict Resolution:*** This is any process that is established to resolve disputes without violence.

***Personality:*** Personality refers to unique patterns of thinking, feeling, and behavior of an individual. It involves the person's habits, traits, and characteristics that he or she possesses.



**Family Conflict Resolution:** A systematic, purposeful influence of an adult family member on children that is directed to prepare them for life. Family upbringing makes sure the children master the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary for their normal development in the family.

**The Big Five:** These are the five basic dimensions of personality which includes the following:

1. **Extraversion:** Includes characteristics such as excitability, sociability, talkativeness, and assertiveness.
2. **Agreeableness:** Includes attributes such as trust, kindness, and affection.
3. **Conscientiousness:** Includes dimensions such as a high level of thoughtfulness, goal-oriented behavior, organization, and being mindful of details.
4. **Neuroticism:** Characterized by emotional instability, anxiety, moodiness, irritability, and sadness.
5. **Openness:** Characterized by imagination and insights.

**Family Conflict Resolution Scale:** This is an instrument that is used to measure the level of conflict resolution that is practiced in the family setting by members while they are in a conflict.

**Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument:** This is the instrument that will be used to measure conflict resolution management styles of the participants.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

**Mixed Design:** Both quasi-experimental and survey designs will be used in this study. Some variables, such as personality and family upbringing, can be well captured in survey design while training variables will be measured by pre- and post-test designs.

**Lack of Random Assignment:** Lack of random assignment will make it difficult for the results of the study to be generalized to the whole population.

*Sample of Study:* A convenient sample will be used in data collection, and this makes the study limited on generalization of the results to the whole population.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The aim of conflict resolution studies is to improve relationships, prevent conflict, and lessen the intensity of those that are in existence and improve processes that lead to durable resolutions (Edmund, 2010). It is essential for correct identification for both the source and dynamics of the conflicts being identified for effective resolution to be realized (Edmund, 2010). The simple form of conflict occurs on event-based scenarios. This type of conflict can be resolved through fair negotiations between the parties involved, and third-party intervention may not be necessary. The resolution of such conflicts is often informal, as there are no hard feelings that may have developed to cause bruised emotions (Edmund, 2010).

Authentic communication is important for conflict to be resolved effectively. It is important for the parties involved to ensure they have skills and insights to resolve the conflict effectively if no outside intervention is needed (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). This requires trust, willingness to compromise, and the ability to communicate with all parties involved in an honest and effective manner (Edmund, 2010). The conflict resolution process demonstrates a procedure that the parties follow for intervention to be effective. Interveners of the conflict should possess skills that would enable the parties to come up with effective resolutions (Bodine & Crawford, 1998).

Jones (2004) indicates that conflict resolution education programs increased student academic achievement that student attitude toward school was more positive, and there was an increased student assertiveness, cooperation, and communication skill. Implementation of conflict resolution programs in schools has also contributed to students' high level of healthy

interpersonal and inter-group relations and constructive conflict resolution both at home and in the school (Hakvoort, 2010). Bodine and Crawford (1998) provide strong evidence that students who are good at conflict resolution have shown a decrease in violence, physical aggression, harassment, as well as a reduction in teacher's time spent on conflict and discipline.

Hakvoort (2010) note that conflict is used to facilitate change, development, and modification of social order that has been in existence. Bodine and Crawford (1998) present conflict as a normal part of life in the community and in the school life. Conflict can either be destructive or constructive depending on how it is handled. Developmental psychology theorists claim that conflict is important because it stimulates change in the individual, organization, or society (Hakvoort, 2002). Conflict has been recognized as a central force in developmental change for both good and bad sides of humanity. Thus, students who are in conflict are in the process of development and learning, and taking away their conflicts will eliminate their opportunities to grow and learn (Hakvoort, 2010).

Conflicts in many cases may result in violence unless resolutions are skillfully established. Violence can be classified into three categories: direct, indirect, and cultural violence, where culture can be used to justify the violence (Davies, 2004). Patfoort (2006) identifies two systems of human interaction: a violent system and non-violent system. Violence occurs when there is an imbalance of power among the disputants accompanied by misunderstandings and a breakdown of communication (Davies, 2004).

Cohen (2005) came up with a system of conflict resolutions in school environments as a pyramid with four levels. The first level at the bottom of the pyramid is known as "conflicts that never occur because of supportive school environments" (Cohen, 2005 pg 8). When conflict

arises at this level, the school community is well prepared with conflict resolution skills that will be implemented to prevent the conflict from progressing further. There are various kinds of supportive activities in the school that are geared toward conflict prevention, such as effective classroom management, a democratic school structure, engaging curriculums, morals, group dynamics, emotional awareness, appropriate communication, effective listening, a sense of value regarding education, and many others (Hakvoort, 2010).

The second level is referred to as “conflicts resolved by negotiating with each other” and also described as conflict handling (Cohen, 2005 pg 3). At this level, conflicts are handled in such a way that the outcome will be constructive and lead to growth of individuals, groups, or institutions. Students and school personnel need to be educated and provided with the tools that they need to use in resolving conflicts. Programs that are aimed at providing an understanding of the nature, dynamic of the conflict situations, and awareness to respond to conflicts ought to be offered in schools (Hakvoort, 2010). This will allow all the school personnel to be prepared to deal with conflict effectively as they seek conflict resolutions that will advance the welfare of the parties involved and the school as well.

The third level is known as “conflicts that are mediated” (Cohen, 2005). This level advocates that students and teachers sometimes need others to be mediators over their conflicts. This level acknowledges that a third party is needed in situations where those in the conflict have failed to reach an amicable resolution. The third party working as a mediator will help the parties in conflict to restart communication with each other to reach a resolution (Hakvoort, 2010). This is where we find trusted individuals in the community or in the system who can work as mediators of the two parties involved in the dispute. It is important for the parties to have

confidence in the mediators so that the resolution reached will be binding between the parties involved (Cohen, 2005).

The fourth level of the conflict pyramid involves arbitrated conflicts where those unresolved conflicts are stopped and the parties are separated (Hakvoort, 2010). This stage ensures that there is peace and harmony in the organization where conflict has taken place. Violent and hostile situations ought to be stopped before dialogue and contributions from both parties is heard. This level needs to be implemented sparingly in the education setting unless it is necessary (Cohen, 2005). The aim of working with conflicts and conflict resolution in schools is to increase knowledge, insights, and skills of how to handle conflict creatively and reduce violent situations (Hakvoort, 2010).

All people are inclined toward a sinful nature, which includes a human tendency for selfishness (Ennis, 2008). Christians have treated conflicts as something to avoid, but it is important to note that conflicts should be used as an opportunity to solve problems in a way that will honor God and benefit humanity (Ennis, 2008). Christians, on many occasions, have decided to do nothing to resolve any arising conflict. This inaction of Christians in the face of conflict makes them avoid their duty to use conflict to achieve positive results (Sande, 2000).

Ennis (2008) noted that aggressive handling of conflict is used by people who are interested in winning a conflict rather than preserving the relationship. Such attitude is demonstrated by people who view conflict as a contest and an opportunity to assert their control on others (Carter, 2002). Reconciliation should be an ideal Christian response to conflict with the aim to find a just and mutually agreeable resolution (Ennis, 2008). Sande (2000) argued that on other occasions, open discussion among people in a conflict is important for resolving it. This

discussion should be held in a manner that will facilitate healing and reconciliation in a Christian worldview.

Successful conflict mediation should result in reduction of social tension, eliminate violence, and result in productive resolutions (Carter, 2002). It has been noted that cross-cultural conflict resolution attributes to cultural differences in styles and goals of dispute resolution as well as different feelings of power that would finally affect the process and the outcome (Carter 1998). Conflict mediation is designed for people who are open about their problems and have a desire to see them end well. Disputants who are not assertive in the negotiation process may end up accepting a resolution that may not serve their needs, and this may lead to resentment and broken agreements (Carter, 2002).

Edmund (2010) identifies three types of conflicts that occur commonly in the community. First, event-based conflicts are short-term conflicts without deep roots, and they occur in the context of interpersonal or group interactions that have no established mechanism of conflict resolution. Such conflicts are resolved by dialogue, which focuses on events then identifies and clarifies the misunderstandings that have resulted due to the conflicts. In cases where a third-party facilitator is involved, he/she should utilize the skills of group members to work through the conflict and come up with a resolution.

Second, communicative-affective conflicts involve a deeper contention, which results from a longer shared history between parties. The parties involved are likely to have a considerable investment in the relationship and the resolution of the conflict. The resolution can be reached through authentic communication that will provide the parties with an understanding of the problem. The resolution of this type of conflict can be reached without outside help, but it

requires trust and willingness of the members to place the groups' interests ahead of one's own interests (Edmund, 2010).

Third, identity-based conflicts involve those that threaten personal stability such as family, belief systems, and self-conceptions. This type of conflict occurs when one of the pillars of identity is threatened. Erikson (1980) identified those pillars of human identity as: belonging; competency; continuity between past, present, and future; and value systems. This type of conflict threatens the established identities of individuals or the entire groups. It transforms the identities of all those involved in the conflict, and its resolution provides opportunities to restore fairness and sustainability (Edmund, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social learning theory states that behavior is learned from the environment through observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Children learn by observing people around them and imitate their behavior in the process of learning (Bandura, 1961). In the home setting, children are influenced by models such as parents, family friends, peers, and teachers at school. Children pay attention to these models, and they are likely to reproduce these learned behaviors later in life as they form their own personalities (Bandura, 1977).

Vygotsky's social development theory will also apply to this study. The theory advocates that social learning leads to cognitive development. It explains that students can perform a task under adult guidance or peer collaboration that they could not have performed alone (Crawford, 1996). It focuses on the connections between people and cultural contexts that influence the actions and interactions of children in the process of learning. Social cognitive theory is one of the theories that will be used to explain the mechanism of how conflict behaviors can be



transmitted from one generation to another in the family. The theory has been used in studies to examine the association between interparental interactions and negative young-adult relationship outcomes (Ehrensaft, et al., 2003; Linder & Collins, 2005).

The theory holds that imitation and modeling is one of the main mechanisms that intergenerational transmission of conflict can take place (Bandura, 1977). This indicates that children who are exposed to interparental conflicts develop the mindset of conflict behavior that will be activated in young adults and serve as the basis of their negative or positive behavioral reactions during conflicts. As positivity plays a major role in the regulation of negative effects, children who observe positive interparental conflict management will acquire better conflict management skills in their own relationships later in life (Larkin, Frazer, & Wheat, 2011).

Brack, Lassiter, Hill, and Moore (2011) discussed the Ecosystemic Complexity Theory of Conflict (ECTC) to explain the nature of most conflicts. They came up with five assumptions of the theory. First, conflict deals with patterns that originate from dynamic systems that are always changing over time. Conflict resolution professionals should be keen on the use of the emergent complex patterns that appear in different cases to negotiate for a resolution. Secondly, conflict occurs in a multilayered social field. The actual conflict occurs at the core of the system, and it is surrounded by near and distant social fields that can significantly influence the resulting resolution as explained by the Ecosystemic Complexity Theory of Conflict model (Brack, et al., 2011)

The third assumption is that conflict is unpredictable and difficult to control. Parties who are in conflict ought to be trained in skills that will help them to adapt and adjust to the conflict rather than control it (Gleick, 1987). This will enable those who are involved in the conflict to

yearn for new methods of conflict resolution among themselves and the mediators who are helping them. The other assumption is that regardless of the unpredictability of human conflict, there should be emergent patterns that may appear and offer opportunities for positive change. Those who are seeking conflict resolution should have the attitude of proactive adaptation rather than containment strategies (Highsmith, 2000). Finally, there should be the assumption that the resolution agreed to should be a mutually satisfying resolution. The resolution should not be viewed as a closure of the conflict, but rather as an integral part of a comprehensive plan of dealing with the conflict (Brack et al., 2011).

Lulofs (1994) acknowledges that theories provide foundation for understanding conflict. It has been noted that the concept of conflict can be traced back to the time of the famous Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, who believed that absence of conflict was necessary in order to have a just form of life (Baldarrama, 1988). The theories of conflict can be classified into four major categories, namely: individual characteristic theory, social process theory, formal theory, and social structural theory, and each of them have unique way of dealing with conflict (Rahim, 1992).

#### A. Individualistic Characteristic Theory

This theory examines conflict in terms of the individuals involved in it (Schellenberg, 1996). Charles Darwin (1874) came up with a theory of biological evolution that proposed that more enduring social instincts conquer the less persistent and less aggressive instincts, which may attribute to aggressive behavior (Schellenberg, 1996). The research findings on relationships between aggression and personality are not definitive, even though there are some aggressive behaviors that are likely to be correlated with some types of personalities. This has led to

researchers attributing certain personality traits as the leading cause of aggression (Schellenberg, 1996).

## B. Social Process Theories

Social process theories involve trying to satisfy another person's desire in exchange for having one's desires fulfilled. The social view of conflict theory is that conflict is something natural and that resolution could be effortless through the impersonal and indirect mechanisms of interaction (Schallenberg, 1982). A successful resolution of social conflict requires skills training and establishing facts that would lead to changes in individual perceptions of conflicts. Boulding (1962, Pg 14) defines conflict as "a situation of competition in which the parties involved are aware of the incompatibility of potential future positions, and each party involved wish to occupy a position that is incompatible with the wishes of the other party." He further noted that involved parties exchange bad things among them rather than good things. Boulding (1964) stated the four basic properties of conflict theories as (a) the parties; (b) the field of conflict; (c) the dynamics of conflict situation; and (d) conflict management. It has been noted that internal conflicts which concern goals and values that do not contradict the basic assumption upon which relationships are founded tend to be positive for the social structure of the groups involved (Coser, 1956). In addition, such social conflicts tend to help the groups to revitalize the existing norms and contribute to the emergence of new ones that will govern the groups in the future. Coser (1956) noted that it is not conflict that destroys a group or relationships, but rather rigidity itself that allows hostility which is not dealt with in a constructive manner.

### C. Social Structural Theories

These theories look at conflict by focusing on societal structure and the interests of different groups within the structure concerned. The opposition of interests between groups is the beginning point in defining social structural theories (Schellenberg, 1996). This principal is the main body of literature of conflict and conflict resolution (Baldarrama, 1988)

### **Improving Conflict Resolution**

Dysfunctional conflict resolution styles, such as personal attacks, loss of control, and withdrawal are found to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction, whereas functional conflict relationship styles such as compromise and negotiation results in building positive relationships (Marchand, 2004; Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). It has been noted that both attachment and relationship satisfaction are closely related to the ways people tackle conflicts. Securely attached individuals are assumed to have positive security-based regulation strategies. Such security-attached individuals tend to rely more on adaptive conflict-solving strategies such as compromise and integrating the other party's point of view (Creasey & Ladd, 2005). Securely attached individuals reach out to others in a controlled and de-escalating manner in the process of establishing conflict resolution (Sierau & Herzberg, 2012).

In a close relationship, anxiously attached individuals tend to use hyperactive strategies aimed at soliciting the other party's involvement, care, and support (Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). Such strategies lead to controlling behavior, which can lead to conflict escalation. Such behavior is associated with obligation behavior and the willingness to dominate conflict resolution processes (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). Individuals who possess an avoidance attachment tend to use deactivating strategies that are aimed to inhibit the quest for support and try to handle

stress alone (Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). Avoidance persons tend to distance themselves from the conflict and avoid engaging with others, and they often tend to end the conflict (Pistole & Arricale, 2003).

Conflict takes place while a struggle exists in communication between two interdependent parties over goals they perceive to be incompatible or resources they perceive to be scarce, and it is inherent in close interpersonal relationships (Moberg, 2001). Conflict management has been associated with general quality of interpersonal relationships (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). Conflict is a process that starts when individuals or groups have differences regarding interests, beliefs, values, or practices that are important to them (Mukhtar & Habib, 2010). Conflicts are inevitable, and traditionally conflict is viewed as a negative and harmful phenomenon rather than a positive, natural, and useful phenomenon that can be used to improve the well-being of the relationship (Boonsathorn, 2007). Conflict occurs at all levels, and its effects depend on how an individual handles social interactions, perceives the situation, and the method that the person chooses to manage the conflict (Mukhtar & Habib, 2010).

Conflict handling styles refer to the specific behavioral patterns that people employ when dealing with conflict (Moberg, 2001). Workplace conflicts have significant influence on employee performance, productivity, job satisfaction, commitment, and organizational turnover (Jehn, 1997). Improper conflict handling styles can make the existing conflict worse and bring about additional conflicts. It is only through the application of appropriate conflict management styles that can lead to improved performance of the organization or relationship (Weiss & Hughes, 2005). Interpersonal conflict handling styles have been differentiated into two dimensions: the extent of the individual's concern for self, and the extent of the individual's

concern for others (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). The results of the combination of the two dimensions are five specific styles of handling interpersonal conflicts.

All over the world, people are concerned with creating and maintaining peace; as a result, understanding conflicts and how to handle them helps to sustain peaceful relations (Blumberg, 1998). Conflict resolution thus becomes an important tool that can be used to promote and sustain peace among diverse cultural groups throughout the world. It is important to note that conflict and violence exist in the world both on small and large scales and this helps to understand the crucial role of an effective conflict resolution (Holt & DeVore, 2005). Dual concern theory, proposed by Blake and Mouton, suggests that individuals have two primary concerns in respect to interpersonal conflict: the desire to obtain one's own goals versus the desire to retain interpersonal relationships (Holt & DeVore, 2005). These concerns for conflict resolution have contributed to five discrete styles of resolving conflicts such as smoothing, withdrawing, compromising, problem solving, and forcing. Thus, clear understanding of these conflict handling styles can predict how individuals operating under a particular style will probably handle conflict (Blake & Mouton, 1970).

Conflict resolutions in cultures that are more individualistic prefer conflict styles of problem solving, compromising, and forcing. Such conflict handling styles involve strong verbal communication, less internal communication, and are less concerned with the needs of others (Rahim & Buntzman, 1989). On the other hand, communal cultures emphasize the needs of one's group to be more important than those of an individual, which is reflected in their conflict handling styles. Conflict resolution handling styles that are valued highly in such relationships

include smoothing and compromising; however, withdrawing can be used in these cultures in an effort to prevent embarrassment of significant others (Holt & DeVore, 2005).

Socially appropriate behavior differs among genders, and it is assumed that different genders would prefer to resolve conflicts using different styles (Shockley-Zalabak, 1981). As females have a greater value of relationships, they prefer such styles as smoothing, withdrawing, and compromising, and they are typically involved in indirect-communication strategies that are directed to diffuse the conflict (Holt & DeVore, 2005). Contrariwise, males commonly use direct-communication strategies while in a conflict and they prefer styles such as forcing, problem solving, competing, and dominating that are directed toward a specific outcome rather than a relationship (Holt & DeVore, 2005).

Oetzel (1999) noted that different conflict handling styles are used in organizational settings where superiors, peers, and subordinates are involved. Superiors in an organization are likely to prefer problem-solving, compromising, and forcing as styles of handling conflicts. Peers are predicted to be less aggressive to superiors than with each other, but more aggressive with subordinates as they try to establish a resolution to a conflict. Subordinates tend to use the least aggressive conflict handling style such as withdrawing while seeking a resolution.

Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) noted that the philosophy of conflict resolution should have two basic assumptions: that conflict is basic and inevitable, and that the resolution process can lead to different outcomes that can be either constructive or destructive. In school settings, conflict resolution strategies should be directed toward students' self-discipline practices that help them to discover and develop their own internal system of self-discipline and self-regulation. Conflict resolution skills should encourage a commitment to help and care for others,

enhance perspective-taking abilities, and improve communication and problem-solving skills (Sweeney & Carruthers, 1996).

Normally, conflict is viewed as negative and is often avoided, but teaching conflict resolution should emphasize that conflict is normal and inevitable. People can deal with conflict negatively or positively, and skills such as reflective listening, critical thinking, negotiation, and mediation should be incorporated in the training to help individuals deal with conflict in a positive manner (Sweeney & Carruthers, 1996).

The traditional view of conflict is that it is dysfunctional and represents a malfunction in the chain of command in an organization. In contrast, a more contemporary view of conflict indicates it should be a positive force in any organization if managed properly (Callanan, Benzing & Perri, 2006). Conflicts should be viewed as positive, as they can contribute to organizations adopting innovative capabilities, serves as a source of feedback, and helps management to identify problems that require attention (Pondy, 1992). Managers have thus shifted from prevention of conflict to management of conflict, and five styles of handling conflict have emerged: competing (domination), collaborating (integration), sharing (compromise), avoiding (neglect), and accommodating (appeasement) (Sorenson, Morse, & Savage, 1999).

Thomas (1983) used two dimensions to understand the five conflict handling styles. The first dimension measured an individual desire to satisfy his or her own needs with high or low desires represented by assertive and unassertive behavior. The second dimension measured the individual desires to satisfy the needs of other people and groups with behavior types ranging from uncooperative (low desire) to cooperative (high desire). Törnükü et al. (2009) note that



schools and colleges should be places where vital life skills, such as interpersonal conflict resolution skills, are introduced and acquired. The interpersonal conflicts and acts of violence that students experience in school provide them with a natural opportunity to learn non-violent conflict resolution methods. This helps students to socialize through conflict resolution processes using various conflict resolutions and peer-mediation programs that might be initiated by the school (Farrell, Meyer, Kung, & Sullivan, 2001).

Improving mediation procedures in schools would demand accommodation of diverse norms of multicultural populations within the schools and offer students assistance with the evaluation of their proposed resolutions (Carter, 2002). Conflict resolution mediators need to be from diverse groups similar to the student population in order to be able to understand the cultural dynamics of the students, and conflicts that students are experiencing should be treated as formal and informal learning opportunities by educators (Rosenberg, 2000). There should be a provision of goals that would foster cooperation and maintain a peaceful campus community. Educators should strive to achieve goals such as non-violent communication and anger-management techniques that lead disputants to establish goals that will facilitate cooperation and care of the school community at the same time (Rosenberg, 2000; Carter, 2002).

It is important for students to understand and accommodate the differences between groups. The goals of conflict resolution in schools should be for social transformation of the schools and the community where people accept and adapt to each other's needs (Carter, 2002). Rosenberg (2000) noted that educators should work to increase student productivity in conflict resolutions by creating resolutions that are just and focus on improving relationships within the school and community.

## **Conflict Resolution Training**

Managing conflicts in a constructive manner is one of the most important competencies that students need to master. Such skills will minimize the occurrence and destruction of interpersonal conflict among students in schools and colleges (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Conflicts in schools have been characterized by physical and verbal aggression, incivility, and property damage that cost tax payers billions of dollars. School officials have responded to this destructive nature of students by creating and adopting school-based conflict resolution programs that will help students learn how to handle interpersonal conflicts constructively (Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, & Schultz, 2002). Conflicts have an important role for adolescents as they help clarify personal identity, values, increase social status, promote personal growth, and generate interpersonal insights. Hence, it is an important part of growth and development among young adults and adolescents (Stevahn, et al., 2002).

Palmer and Roessler (2000), in their study of self-advocacy and conflict resolution of classroom accommodations of students with disabilities, established significant findings. First, students who went through the training were able to properly request and implement the needed classroom accommodations from their respective professors without fear or intimidation. Second, students acquired the skills to communicate their needs, and those that were directly involved with the students were well prepared to meet the accommodation requirements. This gave the service personnel time to plan and implement the accommodations as learning progressed. Finally, the students with disabilities who participated in the program were more likely to request job accommodations as an essential right established under Title 1 of the

Americans with Disabilities Act as they joined the labor markets at their respective workplaces (Palmer & Roessler, 2000).

Conflict management has continued to receive significant attention in college courses, in management training sessions, and in academics (Rahim, 2000). The growth in organizational interdependence, shift to collaborative team-based structures, increased diversity, and environmental uncertainty are all factors that can lead to higher degrees of organizational conflict (Callanan & Perri, 2006). Conflict can help in calling attention to search for solutions and improvement that can cause fundamental changes for the welfare of the organization or the parties involved (Pondy, 2002). It has been noted that individuals can have preferences for particular conflict handling styles depending on the nature and the context of the disagreement (Callanan & Perri, 2002). It is assumed that collaborating, or integrating, styles is a better method for responding to conflict, and individuals should be trained to strive for collaboration when confronted by a conflicting situation (Weingart & Jehn, 2000).

Research findings have come up with evidence that violence is largely learned and subsequently can be prevented through teaching alternatives to violence. It has also been acknowledged that factors contributing to violence are varied, and no single factor is the sole cause of violence (Eron, Gentry, & Schlegel, 1994). The core premise and skill essential to conflict resolution is the acknowledgement that conflict is inevitable and destructive only when it is handled inappropriately. The goal of conflict resolution strategies is to obtain a solution to the conflict whereby both parties involved in the conflict get what they want and avoid violence in the process (Breulin, Bryant-Edwards, & Hetherington, 2002).

Breulin, et al., (2002) discussed a conflict resolution skills-training program that offered an alternative to out-of-school suspension of high school youths involved in physical violence in the school. A statistically significant difference was observed between pre- and post-intervention in regard to school expulsions. The group of students who went through the program received no expulsion thereafter. Several other interesting trends were noted on the study. At post-intervention, all students who completed the program were four times less likely to receive another out-of-school suspension for fighting. Those students also received fewer post-intervention disciplinary actions from the school than those who did not complete the program.

Learning to avoid and resolve conflicts is an important part of becoming a productive member of society. Goldsworthy, Schwartz, Barab, and Landa (2007) noted that conflict resolution curricula should provide opportunities for learners to apply skills in a variety of settings and enable ongoing reflection. This will enable the learners to appreciate the value of the acquired conflict resolution skills. Programs addressing conflict resolution and violence prevention should be integrated into classrooms and schools as a whole (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Mitchell, & Fredrickson, 1997).

Some of the goals of conflict resolution training should be to change student attitudes and foster education that will help students deal with daily challenges when confronted with conflicts (Goldsworthy, et al., 2007). Johnson and Johnson (1994) noted three reasons that are essential for teaching students to peacefully manage conflicts. First, it makes the educational settings a safe place for students to learn. Second, it can be used to gain and hold the attention of learners and improve the quality and creativeness of problem solving. Third, it ensures that

future generations are prepared to manage conflicts constructively in careers, the community, nation, international settings, and especially within their families.

Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, and Scultz (2002) examined the effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer-mediation training among two groups of students. One group received five weeks of conflict resolution and peer-mediation training that was incorporated into the curriculum. The other used the same curriculum without conflict and mediation training. The findings of the study discovered two outstanding issues about conflict resolution and peer-mediation training. First, it was effective for trained students over their untrained peers. Students trained in these methodologies learned negotiation and peer-mediation better, applied them in their normal lives, choose integrative over disruptive approaches to negotiation, and developed a more positive attitude toward conflicts (Stavahn, et al., 2002). Second, the training program had a major impact on students' academic achievement. The integrated conflict resolution and peer-mediation that had been infused into the curriculum led to higher academic achievement, greater long-term retention of content learned, and helped in the transfer of academic learning to other subject areas (Stevahn, et al., 2002).

Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Brynt-Edward, and Hetherington (2002) carried out a study on a conflict resolution skills-training program that offered an alternative to out-of-school suspension. The finding showed that conflict resolution training was effective in reducing acts of violence among high school students. The study results of pre- and post-intervention indicated that the group that received the training had no expulsions from school from the time they received the training and in the period that followed. At post-intervention, all students who received the program were four times less likely to receive another out-of-school suspension for fighting

(Breunlin, et al., 2002). Also, the group that went through the training experienced fewer post-intervention disciplinary actions from the school than those students who did not go through the conflict resolution training program (Breunlin, et al., 2002).

Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman (2009) argued that conflict resolution is an interdisciplinary area where theory and practice are applied to resolve conflicts at domestic or international levels. Conflict resolution is about ideas, theories, and methods that can be used to improve people's understanding of conflicts and their collective responsibility to reduce violence so people can co-exist in harmony (Babbitt & Hampson, 2011). Conflict resolution is directed at changing the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of those parties that conflict with the goal to promote understanding and trust among each other (Kriesberg, 1997). A change in attitude can take place through consultative meetings, problem-solving workshops, conflict resolution training at communal levels, and developing dispute resolution systems that are applicable when considering the cultures and norms of the parties involved (Babbitt, 2006).

Problem-solving workshop training by a third party can be used to establish conflict resolution. Such workshops can be directed at ethnic, racial, or religious groups who are in hostile relationships, exploring ways to establish and cooperate in decision making (Kriesberg, 1997). Kelman (2008) and Rouhana (2000) noted reconciliation as another method of conflict resolution that can be established through trust-building activities among all those involved in the conflict. Reconciliation acknowledges the accountability for harm, some type of fairness process is established, and then creates understanding and recognition of interdependence between groups involved in the conflict (Rouhana, 2000). Reconciliation involves taking steps

toward replacing fear with non-violent coexistence, confidence building, trust, and a willingness to acknowledge the other party's point of view (Babbitt & Hampson, 2011).

One of the developmental tasks of traditional undergraduate students is learning to explore and cope with a range of emotional states as one is learning to live as an emotionally autonomous person (Allen & Land, 1999). In addition, serious conflict management problems at this stage may undermine students' psychological and academic potential, and lessons learned during conflicts may have implications for future relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). College students who exhibit confidence in their ability to control negative moods are usually skillful at conflict handling (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001). Late adolescents who express confidence in negative mood regulation are better at coping with stress and show fewer stress-related outcomes during situations involving conflict than those who are less confident (Creasey & Ladd, 2004).

Studies have shown that college students with secure attachment socially display better conflict handling behaviors or problem-solving abilities than those who are insecure. The secure college students have learned to effectively regulate negative emotions on their own, and they report high confidence regarding negative mood regulation, which translates to healthy psychological adjustments (Creasey, 2002). Insecure youths display unattractive conflict handling behavior that is accompanied by contempt and domineering behavior in relationships. Attachment processes moderate associations between negative mood regulation upon college students' personal and interpersonal adjustments to conflict in their lives (Creasey & Ladd, 2004).

## **Conflict Handling Styles**

Dincyurek and Civelek (2008) noted that conflicts are normal segments of daily life; however, many conflicts may be considered to have negative effects as they cause disagreements, stress, social chaos, and violence. The positive view of conflict is that it helps the individuals to know themselves, enhances their awareness of others, encourages change, increases energy, and they are motivated to be better problem solvers (Stevahn, 2004). People in conflict display diverse behavioral patterns to solve their conflicts. Thomas (1976) defined five styles that are exhibited by people in a conflict as they try to handle it.

First, the style of forcing can be exhibited by both or one of the parties that is in the conflict. Forcing is demonstrated when one group dominates the other party with no intention of preserving the relationship. This style is motivated by selfish ambitions in the interest of the superior party's needs. This style of handling conflict is common between two parties that are not equal when one group values satisfaction of its own interests at the expense of the other party. There is very little concern for the less-powerful party in a relationship where this style of conflict handling is practiced. Forcing as a conflict handling style may lead to animosity and hurt feelings for the parties involved (Thomas, 1976).

Another style of conflict handling is avoidance. The individual parties that use this style do not confront one another to try and come up with a resolution to the conflict (Thomas, 1976). Sometimes parties that value each other's interests use this style of avoiding the conflict or ignoring it (Karip, 1999). This is not an appropriate style for a workplace dispute as it does not deal with the core of the conflict. The parties that use this style assumes that the conflict will disappear when it is avoided (Stevahn, 2004).



Accommodation is a style that is used frequently in the sharing of differences that may exist among parties involved in a conflict (Dincyurek & Civelek, 2008). This conflict handling style is very appropriate when opposite parties consider the interests and needs of each other. One party ignores its own desires in order to fulfill the desires of the other party (Karip, 1999).

Compromise is another strategy where either of the parties abandons their initial desires, interests, and needs to seek a common ground that is agreeable to all those involved (Dincyurek & Civelek, 2008). In this style, parties seek a compromise where the parties forego certain issues to settle and achieve a resolution that will please all those involved. Collaboration is another conflict handling style used to seek a resolution (Karip, 1999). Parties in conflict use this style to solve problems by considering the needs of all the parties involved. The parties work together to establish a resolution that will be agreed upon by all those involved. This style of conflict handling is commonly used to settle conflicts since parties consider the interests and needs of all those concerned (Karip, 1999).

There is a view that individuals tend to respond to conflicting situations based on their personality or other individual factors (Callanan, Benzing, & Perri, 2006). In this view, it is believed that individuals order their responses to conflict in a hierarchical manner such that their most dominant style is the approach they would likely use in reaction to a conflict. Renwick's (1975) research findings suggested that individuals have preferences for a particular strategy and that they are likely to use that strategy to deal with a variety of disagreements. It is also assumed that collaboration style is the preferred method of responding to conflicts, and individuals should be taught or trained to use collaboration when they encounter a conflict (Weingart & Jehn, 2000).

Research has indicated that basic psychological predisposition and differences in basic personality dimensions influence the manner in which individuals approach and manage conflicts (Moberg, 2001). Similarly, predisposition toward conflict handling styles have also been linked to gender-role differences and perceptions of organizational justice (Brewer, Mitchell, & Weber, 2002; Rahim, 2000).

Another approach in the choice of conflict handling styles is the contingency view. This view upholds the need for a flexible, rational approach where the choice of how to handle the conflict is dictated by a complex set of personal, group, and organizational factors that would prefer one style over another. (Callanan & Perri, 2006; Rahim, 2001, 2002). Thomas (1977) identified conflict situations whereby one of the five conflict handling styles would be appropriate as a response due to a complex set of situational circumstances. Musser's (1982) study on choice of conflict handling strategies noted that the choice of strategy changed as the situational variables changes. Friedman, et al., (2000) noted that the nature of relationships between participants is fundamental in determining the choice of conflict handling strategies. Farmer and Roth (1998) noted that a group of characteristics has a major influence on conflict handling behaviors. It is important to note that no single approach of conflict management is appropriate for all cases. People are willing to switch out of their dominant styles based on their encounters in a conflict-producing event (Callanan & Perri, 2006). Individuals can be trained to identify important contextual factors and social cues that can help them to adjust their conflict handling styles to match the situation.

Interpersonal conflict handling styles have primarily been defined using two main dimensions, assertiveness and cooperation (Thomas, 1977). Assertiveness involves the concern

for self, and cooperation is the concern for others. People who demonstrate high concern for self are more interested in fulfilling their own needs as opposed to those who have a high concern for others. Their main interest is to fulfill the needs of the other party (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979).

Rahim (1992) developed a model of various characteristics of individuals using different conflict handling styles. Those that use collaboration styles interact with others in a win-win situation. People using this style assertively speak their needs, are open, and exchange information to examine the differences so as to reach a solution acceptable to all parties involved (Antonioni, 1998). Individuals using accommodating styles overlook their needs to satisfy the needs of the other party. This leads to a lose-win situation and is considered a self-sacrificial style, as one overlooks his/her own needs to meet the needs of the other party. This style is used by parties that have very close relationships, such as family members.

The competing styles produce a win-lose outcome, as the parties involved are aggressive and only want to ensure that their needs are met. It is commonly used by parties that are not interested in preserving the relationship. The goal of the dominant party in the conflict is to win at all costs regardless of the hurt feelings the other party may incur in the process. The avoiding conflict handling style results in a lose-lose situation as both parties refrain from communicating their needs, and thus no needs are met for either party. It is associated with withdrawal from the conflict (Rahim, 1992). The core cause of the conflict is not dealt with whenever this conflict handling style is used. The probability of the conflict to resurface is very high when this handling style is used unless the parties involved purposely terminate their common-involvement activities henceforth (Rahim, 1992).

The compromise style produces win/no-lose results. The parties involved agree on a mutually acceptable solution, and not all the needs of the parties involved are met (Antonioni, 1998). The parties involved propose to yield some ground to the other party to ensure that a compromise is realized. Both parties get a little of what they wanted whenever a compromise is established. It helps to maintain relationships, and this style is common in settling workplace disputes between employers and employees.

Folger, Poole, and Stutman (1993) demonstrated four other styles of handling conflicts: disclosiveness, activeness, flexibility, and empowerment. Disclosiveness is the measure of the extent to which participants in the conflict disclose information to the other party. This aspect of disclosiveness can help in identifying the conflict handling style that is appropriate to handle the conflict depending on the information available to both parties (Folger, et al., 1993). Activeness is concerned with the level of involvement that is shown by the participants in persisting with conflict issues. A high level of involvement by both parties may lead to establishing conflict handling styles that will benefit all those involved. Likewise, a low level of involvement may lead to conflict handling styles that are weak and not to the benefit of either party.

Flexibility indicates how much a party is willing to change positions and move in order to work out the conflict. This may lead to collaborative and compromise styles of handling conflict, as both styles demand both parties work together to come up with a solution (Folger, et al., 1993). Empowerment refers to the balance of power between those involved in the conflict. When the balance of power is fairly distributed among the parties involved, conflict handling styles that are agreed upon will benefit both parties.

Conflict handling refers to the resolution of the conflict. It involves the aspect of approach to conflict, behavior carried out to resolve the conflict, the propensity to handle conflict, and the relationship between individuals involved in the conflict (Janeja, 2011). Canary, et al., (1995) noted many strategies, tactics, and styles in handling conflicts. Strategies are the approaches used to handle conflicts and can be integrative when parties work together, distributive when parties work against each other, and avoidant when a group works in opposition to another party. Conflict styles are, “individual tendencies to manage conflict episodes in a particular way” (Canary, et al., 1995). Curall, Friedman, Tidd, and Tsai (2000) noted that conflict styles tend to be predominant at a period of time and there is a specific situation in which a person uses a style that the situation demands.

Folger, Poole, and Stutman (1997, Pg 15) defined conflict styles as, “a general expectation about how the conflict should be approached, and an attitude about how best to deal with the other party.” Thus conflict styles guide specific behaviors during a conflict and its resolution. People also tend to display choices of conflict handling styles that are consistent with conflict styles across situations (Zhang, 2007). Five styles of handling interpersonal conflicts have emerged based on degrees of assertiveness and cooperativeness in a conflict (Folger, et al., 1997; Dumlao & Botta, 2000; Zhang, 2007).

These styles include competing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, and collaborating as per the mode instrument developed by Kilmann and Thomas (1977). Competing conflict styles involve a high degree of assertiveness by one party at the expense of the other party. This style of conflict empowers one party and oppresses the other with limited chances of flexibility. This style represents the notion of an “I win, you lose” perspective. The

accommodation style involves a high level of cooperativeness and low level of assertiveness as one party places the interest of the other above its own.

The accommodation style empowers the other party by giving up control and represents the perspective of, “I lose and you win.” The avoiding style of conflict handling demonstrates low levels of both assertiveness and cooperativeness at the same time. Those that use this style may use physical or emotional threats, or they may change the topic of discussion that was contentious (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). This style of conflict handling represents an “I lose, you lose” perspective.

A compromise style of conflict handling tries to moderate the level of both assertiveness and cooperativeness while seeking conflict resolution. Those who use this style look for a solution that satisfies some concerns for all involved parties. The collaboration style involves both high levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness. This style seeks to satisfy the needs of all parties involved fully. It empowers all parties involved as they redefine their goals to be more achievable. It represents the perspective of “I win, you win” (Folger, et al., 1997; Dumlao & Botta, 2000; Zhang, 2007).

Conflict resolution practitioners must be prepared to deal with many problems and a diverse body of people in conflict resolution. Numerous studies have shown that Americans from diverse racial and ethnic groups experience conflict differently from each other and from members of other groups (Bresnahan, Donohue, Shearman, & Guan, 2009). For example, African Americans show preference towards the highly expressive, affect-laden conflict style (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). Asian Americans prefer avoidance and a use of trusted go-betweens to seek conflict resolution (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). Native Americans have

been shown to prefer restraints and the use of a third-party elder for conflict orientation (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005).

Noting these differences in conflict orientation on the basis of ethnicity, it is prudent to predict that there would also be a difference in attitudes toward conflict and a willingness to seek mediation, especially if mediators are from different groups compared to parties in the conflict (Bresnahan, et al., 2009). It is advisable for mediators to formulate culturally sensitive intervention to mitigate feeling of distance from the mediators and the parties concerned in the conflict. The approaches' individual uses to resolve interpersonal conflicts can be due to different factors such as personality traits; family origins, which would imply a social learning theory; and power inequalities (Bandura, 1986; Weitzman & Weitzman, 2006). However, studies have indicated that certain trait-like tendencies are more reliable in predicting how individuals will attempt to control a conflict, look for a solution, or avoid the conflict all together (Moberg, 2001; Noore, 2006). College-educated people in their 20s and 30s have reported feeling unskilled in dealing with interpersonal conflicts (Gardner & Lambert, 1992). Weitzman and Weitzman (2006) indicated effective conflict resolution by young people requires them to integrate their emotions, cognition, and personal skills. Hence, these findings are important for scholars, schools, and employers to recognize the social skills and try to connect them with the intellectual and relational growth of young people (Taylor, 2010).

Moberg (2001) found that personality factors measured by the five-factor model can be used to predict conflict handling styles while other research has indicated that traits such as verbal aggression and locus of control while manipulated to serve one's interest are all predictive

of conflict styles that a person can use both in the workplace as well at home (Canary, Cunningham & Cody, 1988; Noore, 2006).

Rubin (1993) showed that typically conflict strategies try to achieve at least one of the following: maximize one's outcomes and minimize another's outcome (competing), attempt to reach a win-win solution (compromise, collaboration), attempt to minimize differences (accommodating, obliging), or attempt to avoid conflict (avoidance). Wilson and Waltman (1988) argued that an individual approach to conflict handling may be influenced by his/her personality, while Putnam and Wilson (1982) argued that one's choice of conflict handling style is highly influenced by the vertical and horizontal structure of the organization and one's position in the organization. Putnam and Wilson (1982) devised an organizational conflict measurement that organizations can utilize for conflict handling strategies, which includes the following:

1. Solution Oriented: In this strategy, people use creative and integrative solutions that often involve compromise.
2. Non-confrontational: This style usually involves indirect avoidance of the issues that are causing the conflict.
3. Control: This involves persistent argument with non-verbal messages that communicate demands and compliance.

### **Personality and Conflict Management Styles**

Personality is a construct which describes the psychological type of an individual, and personality theory tries to explain how normal, healthy people differ from each other (Goel & Khan, 2012). According to the theory, people have an inherent affinity to use their minds and act



differently according to their personalities. Personality can directly be associated with quality of social interaction and relationships among people (Connolly, et al., 1987). Personality factors are very significant in explaining how individual's deals with conflicts based on their interactions on a daily basis. Dealing with conflict positively leads to agreement and helps people to maintain relationships during the tense conflict phase (King, 1999). Herkenhoff (2004) argued that people who are intelligent emotionally make good friends, good partners, and better leaders. Different features of personality as described by various personality theories are found to affect conflict handling styles used by people in various social settings (Antioni, 2007).

Antonioni (1998) concluded that personality does seem to play an important role in determining conflict behaviors. Barbuto, Phipps, and Xu (2009) indicated that there are some relationships that exist between conflict handling styles and the five dimensions of personality. Terhune (1970) revealed a strong relationship between conflict and personality traits inhibited by the parties who are in conflict. The study indicated that conflicts are more tense and tough when parties involved possess personality attributes like dominance, aggressiveness, and suspicion. However, conflicts are more manageable when concerned parties possess traits such as trust, sympathy, and open-mindedness (Goel & Khan, 2012). Terhune (1970) supported the view that some personal traits and personality attributes can predict how people will manage conflicts.

Marion (1995) carried out a study on community college administrators with the aim to establish the relationship that exists between personality types and preferred conflict handling styles. The results indicated that people who appeal to feeling personalities are likely to be less assertive and prefer cooperativeness. The results also indicated that people who favor intuition are less likely to avoid conflict but more assertive while dealing with it. Antonioni (1999) carried

out a study that used Thomas Kidman's model with the aim of discovering if the Big Five Inventory of personality can be used to predict an individual preferred conflict handling style. The results showed a strong association between conflict resolution handling styles and the personality variables used in the study. The study emphasized the importance of assessing employee personality traits and coaching them in order to enhance and develop employee conflict resolution styles that would enhance cooperation in the workplace. Habib (2010) examined nature and strength between conflict handling styles and personality types. The study showed a strong linkage between personality and the approach individuals carry out to establish conflict resolution.

Interpersonal conflicts that occur in an interactive process within a social setting are important sources of distress in daily life, and such conflicts may yield negative or positive consequences in regard to how those conflicts are solved (Park & Antonioni, 2007). Literature reveals that conflict tends to focus on either an individual personality or the situational factors that surround the person, but recent researchers view behavior as a function of both the person and environment (Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001). An individual personality affects the choice of conflict handling styles that will be used to resolve a conflict through various motivational, cognitive, and affective processes (Rahm, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001). Park and Antonioni (2007) suggested that The Big Five personality factors are likely to predict how individuals can use specific conflict handling styles.

Agreeableness is one of The Big Five personalities that are characterized by a strong motivation to maintain positive relationships with other people involved in a conflict, forgive others, and conform to demands involved in the resolution process (Kilpatrick & Johnson, 2001).

Agreeable persons usually tend to make positive attributions to provocative situations to resolve conflict. In addition, agreeable persons tend to experience more positive effects as they engage in behaviors that tend to be compatible with their personality (Moskowitz & Cote, 1995). Studies have shown that agreeable people experience more positive feelings when they get involved in cooperative behaviors rather than those that are competing. Agreeableness is a personality factor that is positively characterized by preferences for cooperation rather than competition (McCrae and Costa, 1997). Persons high in agreeableness tend to demonstrate sympathy and help other people. Antonioni (1998) indicated that agreeableness is positively related to integrating and avoiding, however negatively related to dominating.

Extraversion individuals are characterized as sociable, assertive, and positive, and they are thought to be motivated by rewards (Moberg, 2001). Gray (1981) noted the extraversion personality originates from sensitivity to reward signals, and thus they tend to use the competing style rather than accommodation or avoiding styles (Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002). Extroversion is a personality trait that is exhibited by individuals who are oriented toward working within groups, express assertiveness and dominance, and tend to be more forceful in communicating their opinions (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Individuals with high extroversion tend to possess high pro-social orientation, which leads to high concern for others, and hence they are more inclined toward integrating and compromising styles while handling conflicts (Olekalns & Smith, 1999). Antonioni (1998) indicated a positive relationship between extroversion and both integrating and dominating styles, and negative relationship between extroversion and avoiding. Moberg (2001) found positive relationships between extroversion and both confrontation and compromise.

Neuroticism is a personality characterized by being anxious, emotionally unstable, easily embarrassed, and depressed (Park & Antonioni, 2007). People who are high in neuroticism are less able to control their emotions in social interactions. It has been reported that neuroticism has a negative relationship with dominating and a positive relationship with avoiding conflict handling styles (Antonioni, 1998). Gray (1981) argued that neurotic individuals are sensitive to punishment and negative events, and they are likely to react more negatively to interpersonal conflict. As neurotic persons experience conflicts, they are likely to apply competing or avoiding styles of conflict handling (Antonioni, 1998; Moberg, 2001).

A personality of openness is related to imagination, non-conformity, and autonomy. This may lead to a direct confrontational attitude while seeking conflict resolution (McCrae & Costa, 1997; Tjosvold, 1998). People who are high in openness are likely to value competitiveness and tend to use a direct approach when resolving conflicts (Barbuto, et al., 2009). Openness individuals tend to have positive relationships with the dominating style and are usually associated with open-mindedness and reflectivity. They take other people into consideration and engage in greater divergent thinking to come up with creative solutions to the conflict (Judge, et al., 2002). Antonioni (1998) reported a positive relationship between the trait of openness and integrating styles, but a negative relationship with avoiding styles. Moberg (2001) reported positive relationships between openness to both confrontation and compromise styles.

Conscientiousness is another personality that is highly associated with industriousness, discipline, and responsibility (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Individuals with this personality tend to use competing styles as they tend to be better prepared to outperform the other parties in conflict situations (Park & Antonioni, 2007). Costa and McCrae (1985) noted that conscientious persons

also have high integrity and they may prefer collaborative styles, which would allow other parties to be satisfied with the agreed upon conflict resolution. Conscientiousness is highly related to the intellectual dimension of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Persons with high conscientiousness may be more achievement-oriented, self-motivated, and task-oriented (Barrick & Mount, 1993). Individuals high in conscientiousness are likely to view tasks as group-based responsibilities and demonstrate high levels of perseverance, impulse control, and determination while dealing with conflict (Moberg, 2001). Antonioni (1998) indicated a positive relationship between conscientiousness and integrating styles of dealing with conflicts, but negative in relation to avoiding styles. Moberg (2001) indicated a positive relationship between conscientiousness and confrontation, but negative when it comes to non-confrontation styles.

### **Influence of Family Conflict Resolution to Young Adults**

Intergenerational family conflict between parents and children is usually on the rise during early adolescence and declines by late adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 1999). This change is attributed to the way children establish their personal identities and social relationships as they grow up. The movement from home to college leads to a further loosening parental control, and this result in a decrease in overall family conflict (Lee, Su, & Yoshida, 2005).

Skinner, Edge, Altman, and Sherwood (2003) identified five strategies of coping with family conflict. These included problem solving, social support seeking, avoidance, distraction, and positive cognitive restructuring. One of the main negative effects of intergenerational family conflict is that individuals might not be using effective coping strategies to manage and resolve conflict; rather, they use those that have been established in their family history. Lazarus and

Folkman (1984) noted that according to transitional theory, effectiveness of any coping strategy is content dependent.

Research has demonstrated that children who are exposed to interparental conflict are at risk of establishing and maintaining their own healthy relationships (Toomey & Nelson, 2001). Several studies carried out examined the association between interparental conflict and the conflict management tactics of young adults. These indicated that those who witnessed interparental violence were highly predicted to display characteristics of victimization rather than perpetration of conflicts as young adults in dating relationships (Carr & VanDeusen, 2002; Ehrensaft, et al., 2003). Some studies have also demonstrated that those children who are exposed to positive interparental conflict styles such as problem solving, support, calm discussion, and verbal expression of love were less likely to suffer from negative consequences in their own relationships while dealing with conflicts (Cummings, et al., 2002; Katz & Woodin, 2002).

One of the ingredients of a fruitful interpersonal relationship is the use of positive conflict handling styles such as problem solving, humor, compromise, and apology (Cummings, et al., 2002). At the same time, negative conflict handling styles such as using threats, insults, and withdrawal are detrimental to relationships. Studies have shown that such behaviors can be transmitted across generation, as children obtain them from their families of origin and can be transmitted to later generations (Whitton, et al., 2008). Parental interpersonal conflicts act as a guide to how children will interpret the conflict within the family system (Harold, et al., 2004). Social learning theory supports the concept that behavior in the family can be modeled and carried by children through their adult relationships (Bandura, 1977). Harrington and Metzler

(1997) suggested that dysfunctions in families of origin contribute to difficulties with problem solving, communication, and distress in adult intimate relationships.

Research has demonstrated that parental conflict resolution handling styles have a major influence on the way children approach conflict resolution on their own as they appropriately model and translate parental behavior outside the home (Dodds, Atkinson, Turner, Blums, & Lendich, 1999). Grych and Fincham (1990) noted that components of intensity, content, duration, and resolution can be used to perceive interparental conflict and how children understand and cope with such conflicts. When parents are able to resolve conflict well and appropriately, this is transmitted to the children as effective models and skills for problem solving that can be used in those young people's future relationships with peers (Grych & Fincham, 1990).

Studies have found that sibling relationships have given family members opportunities to develop conflict resolution skills since siblings are the first peer-like relationships most children experience (Reese-Weber, 2000). The family forms the context in which siblings interact to develop conflict resolution skills that children will later use in life. The cognitive skills development of the adolescents influences the effectiveness of conflict resolution skills with family members (Simetana, 1989). Social learning theory demonstrates that behavior modeled by others is easily displayed in relationships, and the behavior of higher-status individuals are replicated by individuals of lower status in the relationship (Bandura, 1989). In the family setting, parental conflicts would more likely influence sibling conflict (Reese-Weber, 2000).

Studies have shown that parent-child interactions have a great influence on later family relationships when it comes to closeness and control of conflicts (Dumlao & Botta, 2000).

People first learn how to resolve interpersonal conflicts with their family members. Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring's 1998 study shows that father-adolescent conflict resolution styles have a direct relationship with sibling and couple conflict resolution styles. Research has indicated that family and peer friendships give adolescents and young adults opportunities to learn and improve social skills such as conflict resolution skills (Collins & Steinberg, 2006).

Social learning theory and coercion theory predicts an association between conflicts within the family and dysfunctional conflicts in young-adult relationships. Social learning theory predicts that behavior patterns learned in the family are practiced in young adulthood (Andrews, Foster, Capaldi, & Hops, 2000). Coercion theory predicts that infective parental conflict management styles will produce coercive, unskilled responses to family, young adult, and peer relationships (Andrews et al., 2000).

Parent-child conflict interactions have shown to influence later family relationships as a result of emotional closeness and the control of conflict (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). People first learn about conflict and how to resolve interpersonal problems within their family settings. Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Siedel, and Thomson (1993) developed a model that maintained that individuals develop internal thought patterns about their most important relationships that shape their future behaviors and interpersonal styles in predictable manner. Research measuring conflict styles has shown that individuals tend to handle different relationship conflicts in similar ways, and it is consistent across settings (Canary, et al., 1995; Sternberg & Dobson, 1987). Conflict styles predict some behaviors enacted in conflicts (Dumlao & Botta, 2000).

Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring (1998) noted that father-adolescent conflict resolution styles were related to sibling conflict resolution styles. It was believed that adolescent



conceptions of parental authority and parenting styles have a lot to do with intensity and frequency of adolescent-parent conflicts (Smetana, 1995). Dumlao (1997) noted the connection between family communication and several conflict handling styles while children were dealing with their fathers in situations involving conflict. The study found that pluralistic young adults are likely to use a higher level of conflict handling styles such as collaborating and confrontation. Conservative young people tend to use compromising styles while laissez-faire youth more often use confrontation styles of conflict handling. Protective young adults used both avoiding and accommodating styles while in a conflict situation (Dumlao, 1997).

Fitzpatrick and Koerner (1997) discuss four family types based on their conformity orientation and conversation orientation. High conformity orientation indicates that family members are expected to conform to a standard while low conformity defines family members as people with more independence. High conversation orientation allows family members to talk about issues frequently, while people with low conversation orientation do not talk about issues. Four types of families emerge from these orientations that guide how individual family members deal with conflict.

Consensual families are found where both conformity and conversation orientation are high. They are characterized by a tension between the pressure to conform to the family opinion and the desire to express individual views. Pluralistic families are those that possess high conversation and low conformity orientation. They are open to discussion and encourage participation by all members, and they do not create any pressure to conform. Protective families are high on conformity and low on conversation orientation. Such families encourage the need to conform and discourage open discussion. Laissez-faire families are low both on conformity and

conversation orientation. Such families neither value open discussion nor stress members to conform to particular ideas or beliefs.

Family members learn conflict resolution behavior from their family of origin, as it acts as the first socializing agent to its members. Fitzpatrick and Koemer (2002) noted that the way individuals deal with conflicts in their interpersonal relationships is largely by how they learned to handle conflict within their family settings.

The use of constructive conflict handling styles such as problem solving, compromise, affection, humor, and apology are key elements for successful interpersonal relationships. Also use of destructive conflict handling styles such as threats, insult and withdrawal can impair relationships (Cummings and Davies, 2002). Studies have shown that behavior can be transmitted across generations as children learn how to handle conflict and communicate needs by observing relational patterns in their families of origin. Parental interpersonal conflict sets the tone for how offspring interpret conflict within the family system (Whitton, et al., 2008; Baptist, et al., 2012). Social learning theory supports the idea that both destructive and constructive behaviors in the family can be modeled and carried forward by offspring into their adulthood relationships (Bandura, 1977).

The family of origin impacts how individuals interact in their own adult relationships, and it has been found that hostile interactions in the family of origin are more influential on adult interactions than positive engagements (Whitton, et al., 2008). Some studies have suggested that dysfunctions in the families of origin are related to difficulties with problem solving and global distress in adult relationship (Harrington & Metzler, 1997).

## **Conflict Orientation**

It is understood that while conflict is natural, it does not have to be destructive, and its roots are often the result of cultural and societal injustice (Mattingly, 2009). Each person has the power to participate in their own communities to bring about positive change. Help Increase the Peace Programs (HIPP) are workshops that help people to look deeply at societal and cultural roots of both conflict and violence and intentionally seek ways of transforming the conflict from its genesis (Mattingly, 2009). Morrison, et al., (2011) reviewed training programs that were likely to utilize constructive responses to conflict and demonstrate problem-solving behaviors that would replace destructive or conflict-escalating behaviors among students. Students who participated in the workshops seemed to be more positive about their ability to create change for themselves and the world around them. At the heart of every conflict can be misunderstandings, differing perceptions, wants and needs, and therefore conflict can be an opportunity for growth and problem solving among all those who are concerned (Morrison, et al., 2011).

Beyers (1997) noted that conflict may be handled in such a way as to create a positive outcome. Johnson (1994) proposed that conflict is inevitable and it is important to encourage constructive conflict and try to resolve negative conflict in an amicable manner. "Conflict resolution implies that it is possible to resolve conflict with no carry-over of hard feelings and with everyone agreeing that the matter has been resolved" (Simerly, 1998). On the other hand, conflict handling implies that one can learn to manage conflicts with productive results. The reality is that situations of conflict may remain and influence our ability to overcome future conflicts. Educational settings should attempt to establish effective ways to help conflicting

parties learn to manage their conflicts and come up with productive outcomes for all those concerned (Simerly, 1998).

### The Conflict Process

Robbins (1988) described conflict as a process that involves four separate but inter-connected stages. The four steps include: (1) potential opposition, (2) cognition and personalization, 3) behavior, and 4) outcome.

#### Stage 1: Potential Opposition

The first stage of conflict in the process is the presence of an atmosphere that will enable conflict to arise. Some of the conditions that may lead to conflicts at this stage can be grouped into three major categories: communication, structure, and personal variables. The communication variable represents opposing forces that come from misunderstandings and noise within the communication channels from those who are involved in the conflict (Robbins, 1988). The structure involves variables and the degree of routine in a task that is being accomplished by those in conflict. The personal variables include personality types and differences of those who are in conflict.

#### Stage 2: Cognition and Personalization

If the conditions that are exhibited in stage one are allowed to persist, then the conflict process enters the stage of cognition and personalization. The beginning conflict conditions can lead to conflict when one or more of the parties involved are affected by the conflict (Robbins, 1998). “Felt conflict” occurs when individuals involved in the conflict become emotionally affected by the proceedings of the conflict, and “perceived conflict” takes place when individuals

involved are aware of the conditions that started the conflict. Perceived conflict does not suggest that conflicts are personalized by those who are aware of its existence (Robbins, 1988).

### Stage 3: Behavior

At this stage, conflict handling behaviors such as conflict resolution methods and conflict management are started. Steps are taken to address the conflict, and appropriate conflict handling styles are applied to come up with amicable conflict resolutions for the parties involved.

### Stage 4: Outcomes

The main goal of conflict resolution would be to improve the quality of decisions, stimulate creativity, and provide the medium through which problems are solved. These contribute to the constructive conflict outcome (Robbins, 1988). On the other hand, a dysfunctional outcome of conflict may lead to a reduction of individual or group effectiveness, reduced cohesiveness, and increased fighting among the members. This has a negative impact on the individual and group's ability to realize their objective of amicable conflict resolution for the good of all the parties involved (Robbins, 1988).

Bush and Floger (1994) noted that one's orientation toward conflict has a direct correlation to how it is handled and its general outcome. An individual orientation toward conflict gives him/her a sense of what conflict entails, enables one to explain, and identifies the process of seeking a resolution. Second, it gives the person concerned the view of what the ideal response to the conflict should be and prescribes how to reach a successful conflict resolution (Bush & Floger, 1994).

Rahim (1992) outlined four levels at which conflict occurs. The four types of conflict outlined include:

1. Intrapersonal Conflict - This type is also known as intra-individual conflict. It takes place when members of an organization are required to perform tasks and roles that match their expertise.
2. Interpersonal Conflict - This is the conflict that arises due to disagreements and incompatibilities that may occur between individuals who have been interacting to achieve certain objectives.
3. Intragroup Conflict - This type of conflict involves incompatibilities among members of a group in regard to goals, functions, or required activities. Intragroup conflict only takes place when a majority of the members of the group are totally involved and concerned with the conflict.
4. Intergroup Conflict - This type of conflict refers to the collective disagreement between two or more subsections of the group in connection with the necessary task or activity to be performed. Additionally, resources may be shared within the sub-group.

Bisno (1988) stated the importance of the recognition of the type of conflict that is taking place in an organization or in a group in order to make appropriate and strategic decisions in the process of handling the conflict. Blake and Mouton (1964) presented a framework that classified the style of conflict handling that suited particular situations. The five styles that can be used include forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. Blakes and Mouton suggested that specific styles may be appropriate depending on the situation that is under conflict. Filley, House, and Kerr (1976) suggested that problem solving is the most effective style and it take place when parties involved perceive each other as having the power to fight, but both prefer to cooperate to establish a resolution to the conflict. Green (1984) concluded that all

five conflict handling styles are potentially useful, but people should be encouraged to develop their understanding of appropriate uses for each conflict handling behavior. Rahim (1992) outlined some situations in which each of Blake and Mouton's styles can be appropriate or inappropriate to use:

1. Problem Solving: This style is appropriate when issues that are conflicted are complex, better ideas need to be generated, and commitment is needed from both parties for a resolution to be reached. On the other hand, this style is inappropriate when the problem is simple; this conflict handling style requires an immediate decision, and when one or more parties are not concerned about the outcome of the conflict, that is not possible.
2. Smoothing: This style is appropriate when the initiating person believes that he/she was wrong and when the conflict issues are important to the other party. It is also appropriate when the initiating person is willing to give up something in exchange for something else from the other party. It is an appropriate style of handling conflicts in order to preserve relationships. However, this style is inappropriate when issues are important to the initiating party, when immediate decisions are urgently needed, and when other parties involved in the conflict are unconcerned about the outcome.
3. Forcing: This style of handling conflict is appropriate when the conflict issues are trivial and a quick decision is required. It is also appropriate to use when an unpopular course of action is to be implemented or a subordinate lacks expertise in reference to the issues at hand. It is inappropriate to use this style of handling conflicts when the issues are complex and both parties are equally powerful in their influence over the matter of

concern. It is also inappropriate to apply this style if the decision has to be applied quickly and the junior party possesses some degree of competency regarding the issues.

4. **Withdrawing:** This style is appropriate when the issues concerned are trivial and dysfunctional effects of confronting the other party outweigh the significance of the resolution that may be obtained. It is an inappropriate method to apply when issues concerned are important to the initiating party; parties are ready to defer on the issues, and the issues must be resolved immediately.
5. **Compromising:** The style is appropriate when the goals of all parties are mutually important. It is also used where all parties involved are equally powerful and they are unable to reach a consensus about the problem. This style is inappropriate to use when one party is more powerful than the other and issues involved are more complex and require a problem-solving approach.

Thomas and Kilmann (1986) built on Blakes and Mouton's work and created a two-dimensional model of conflict handling behavior. The model was used to assess individual behavior in conflict situations where the authors' claimed that a person's behavior could be described along two basic dimensions: assertiveness, "the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his own concern," and cooperativeness, "the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other party's concerns" (Thomas & Kilmann, 1986). These two dimensions of behavior have been used to define five specific styles of handling conflicts while in search of a resolution. The styles include competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.



Rahim (1992) developed a model that gave credit to the two dimensions that were used by Thomas and Kilmann, based on the degree to which a person wants to satisfy his concern and the degree to which a person wants to satisfy the concerns of others. The model consists of five styles on handling conflict, which include:

1. Integrating: This style involves high concern for both self and others and requires collaboration between the parties involved in the conflict. The parties can establish a resolution easily by enhancing and supporting an open exchange of information and examining their differences on a regular basis while in the process establishing an agreeable resolution.
2. Obligating: This style has the aspects of low concern for self and high concern for others. The style attempts to play down the differences and emphasize common aspects of the parties with an objective of avoiding further conflict.
3. Dominating: This style is based on high concern for self and low concern for others. The style is highly associated with a “win-lose” approach regardless of the pain or difficulties the other party incurs. The dominating party attempts to achieve its objectives and ignores the needs of the other party.
4. Avoiding: The style of avoidance is associated with withdrawing. The parties using this style have a low concern for both self and others. It may be demonstrated by behaviors such as postponing issues to later dates or withdrawing from potentially harmful situations.
5. Compromising: This style is associated with a high concern for both self and others. It is a style that applies a “win-win” approach to the conflict, as the main objective is to

ensure that concerns of all parties involved are catered to in order to reach an amicable resolution. It is important to note that no single method of conflict handling is appropriate for all types of conflict and any of them can be used appropriately depending on the issues at hand.

### **Research Summary**

The present study will investigate the influence that exists between personality types and family conflict resolution in determining undergraduate students' choices of conflict handling styles. A quasi-experimental study will be carried out to measure the effects of intervention (training) in the choice of conflict handling styles. Four instruments will be used to collect data from the participants. The Big Five instrument will measure the personality of the participants while the Family Conflict Resolution Scale will capture the conflict resolution level participants experience in the family. A conflict orientation survey and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument will measure the variable of training and conflict handling styles respectively.

Descriptive statistics will be used to describe the distribution, central tendencies, and dispersion of the variables in the study. Graphics, charts, and tables will be used during data analysis to find the relationship of the independent and dependent variables in the study. An ANOVA will be conducted to test the difference between the two group means after the intervention (training) has been carried out. Finally, a paired samples t test will be carried out to measure the effect on training in student choice of conflict handling styles. The mean, standard deviation, and standard error of conflict handling styles will be taken into account for the analysis (Price, 2000). The correlation between each of the pairs of the variables will be reported during pre-test and post-test to analyze the effect on the treatment.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The study will examine the influence of training, family conflict resolution, personality, and conflict orientation on conflict handling styles of undergraduate students. A convenient sample of college students will be used in the study that will take place in a medium-sized public university. The participants of the study will be from different majors of study, and both traditional and non-traditional students will be included in the sample. The sample will be composed of students from all years of study in the college which includes freshmen, sophomore, juniors and seniors. A combination of four research instruments will be used in the data-collection process. The Big Five Inventory instrument will measure participants' personalities. The Family Conflict Resolution Scale instrument will measure the level of conflict resolution that participants acquired from their family of origin. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument will be used to measure participant conflict handling styles. Finally, a conflict orientation instrument will be used to measure participants' predispositions to conflict.

### **Research Design**

This research will be quantitative and will utilize both survey and quasi-experimental designs for data analysis. The survey design will be used to provide information about the participant's independent variables of personality and family conflict resolution. The Big Five Inventory and family conflict resolution instruments will be used to collect data on participants' personality and family conflict resolutions respectively. Participants of the study will respond to two different surveys on personality and family conflict resolution levels. Both independent variables of personality and family conflict resolution that are obtained from these surveys will

be used to determine the influence they have on participants' choices of conflict handling styles. The third instrument will be used to collect data on the dependent variable of conflict handling styles that participants use to manage conflict.

The quasi-experimental design will also be used to collect data on a third independent variable of training. The study will use a pre-test and post-test design with a control group to measure the potential effects of the training session (intervention) on students to determine conflict handling styles participants use to establish a resolution. The pre-test will be conducted on both groups to establish conflict handling styles that participants use on interpersonal and organizational conflict resolution. Then intervention in the form of training session will be carried out on the experimental group. The post-test will be used to measure the effects of the training session and on conflict handling styles. It is likely that the experimental group will use higher ordered, positive, and more constructive conflict handling styles than the control group.

### **Research Questions**

RQ - Is there a statistically significant difference in how personality as measured by BFI and family conflict resolution as measured by FCRS, influence an individual's conflict handling style as measured by Thomas Kilman Conflict MODE instrument ?

RQ2. Is there a statistically significance difference in individual conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas Kilman Conflict Mode instrument and conflict orientation between pre-test and post-test after video training on conflict handling?

### **Hypothesis**

**H1.** There is a statistically significant difference in how individual personality as measured by BFI personality instrument influences the conflict handling styles that students use as measured by Thomas-Kilman conflict Mode Instrument.

**H2.** There is a statistically significant difference in how students' family conflict resolution as measured by Family Conflict Resolution scale influence conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument.

**H3.** There is a statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode instrument between experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-test and post-test for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

**H4.** There is a statistically significant difference in conflict orientation as measured by conflict orientation survey instrument between the experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-tests and post-tests for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

### **Null Hypothesis**

**H<sub>0</sub>1.** There is no statistically significant difference in how individual personality as measured by BFI personality instrument influences the conflict handling styles that students use as measured by Thomas-Kilman conflict Mode Instrument.

**H<sub>0</sub>2.** There is no statistically significant difference in how students' family conflict resolution as measured by Family Conflict Resolution scale influence conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument.

**H<sub>0</sub>3.** There is no statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode instrument between experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-test and post-test for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

**H<sub>0</sub>4.** There is no statistically significant difference in conflict orientation as measured by conflict orientation survey instrument between the experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-tests and post-tests for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

### **Setting of the Study**

The study will be conducted in an urban public university in Northeastern Ohio. The university has a total student population of 14,483 students, and 13,303 of them are undergraduate students. Enrollment by gender indicates that 47% of the students are male and 53% are female. Enrollment by race/ethnicity by percentage shows that Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander are 1%, Black or African American—17%, Hispanic/Latino—3%, White—72%, Two or More Races—1%, and Non-Resident Alien—1.0%. Attendance status of the students is 78% full-time and 22% part-time. The campus has all majors that are typically found in medium-sized campuses apart from majors in law and medicine.

### **Participants**

Participants in the study will be undergraduate students from different majors in the institution, and they will be recruited from their classes for participation. The institution has about 13,303 undergraduates enrolled in the 2011-2012 academic year who will be the population of this study. Gender distribution of undergraduate students is 47% male and 53% female. At the school, 6.6% of the undergraduate students live in college housing and 93.4% of

the students live off campus. Enrollment by race/ethnicity by percentage shows that Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander are 1%, Black or African American—17%, Hispanic/Latino—3%, White—72%, Two or More Races—1%, and Non-Resident Alien—1.0%. Attendance status of the students is 78% full-time and 22% part-time.

Participants in the study will be undergraduate students who will be recruited from different majors of study. The researcher will work with professors, who will be asked for permission for data to be collected from students in their classrooms. Student monitors/ research assistants will facilitate data collection during the professor's classroom time. Participant of the study will be both traditional and non-traditional students who have been enrolled in various programs of study on the campus. There will be a consent letter that will accompany the surveys for the participants to consent to data collected.

### **Instrumentation**

Four instruments will be used to collect data. The Thomas-Kilmann MODE instrument (MODE) will be used to measure participant's conflict handling styles. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) will be used to measure participant's personality. The Family Conflict Resolution Scale (FCRS) will be used to measure family conflict resolution. Lastly, A Conflict Orientation Survey will be used to measure participant's conflict orientation.

#### *1. Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument*

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE instrument measures conflict handling styles of individuals. The MODE instrument allocates individuals into two dimensions – assertiveness and cooperativeness in assessing conflict (Thomas, 1976). Assertiveness attempts to satisfy one's own concerns, while cooperativeness attempts to satisfy the concern of others. Five modes on

managing differences to satisfy one's own and others were identified and located on the assertiveness and cooperativeness axes (Womack, 1988). The five modes of managing conflict that the instrument uses include the following:

- i. Collaborating: Assertive and cooperative, people using this mode try mutual problem solving to satisfy both parties.
- ii. Compromising: Individual using this mode is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperation. They try to exchange concessions to resolve conflict.
- iii. Competing: Persons using this mode are assertive and uncooperative and they try to win their own position.
- iv. Accommodating: Individuals who use this mode are unassertive and cooperative; they try to satisfy other's people goals.
- v. Avoiding: People using this mode are unassertive and uncooperative. They usually postpone or avoid any unpleasant issues when dealing with others.

The MODE instrument consists of 30 paired items, which makes a total of 60 statements. Participants are asked to choose the response from each pair that statement that best describes the way one usually behave in conflict situations (Womack, 1988). Participants are encouraged to select the response they would likely use when it is a typical behavior (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). An example of an item is -

- A. I promise a middle ground.
- B. I am nearly always concerned with satisfying all our wishes.

Each score ranges from 0 to 12. for the middle and low quartile of the scores. The scores of 3 or below would be for competing and accommodating, scores of 4 or below would be for



avoiding and compromising, while the scores of 5 or below would be collaborating (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The top quartile scores would range from 8-12 for avoiding, 9-12 for competing and compromising, 7-12 for accommodating, and 10-12 for collaborating (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The MODE instrument has reported higher internal reliabilities in the studies with smaller sample sizes (Womack, 1988). The instrument showed .60 alpha coefficient for the MODE and test-retest reliability reflect stability of scores measured for the same population at different times (Womack, 1988).

## *2. Conflict Orientation Instrument*

The Conflict Orientation Instrument measures an individual's orientation towards conflict. Conflict orientation is defined as how one conducts himself/herself in hypothetical conflict scenarios (Warters, 1999). The theory guiding the Orientation Instrument is derived from Morton Deutsch's work of positive and negative conflict (Warters, 1999). In general people demonstrate a positive orientation or negative orientation to conflict. Positively oriented individuals demonstrate non-violent methods of conflict resolution that might include talking, cooperating, caring, and thinking about the relationship. On the other hand, negatively oriented individuals demonstrate violent methods of conflict resolution that might include the use of physical force, humiliation, or shaming (Warters, 1999).

The instrument has both a pre- and a post-test survey section included. Both pre- and post-test surveys ask the same questions but in a different order. The pre-test survey is administered before the training of conflict resolution is conducted. Post-test survey should be administered a couple of days after training ends or right at the end of training. The instrument takes approximately 5 minutes to fill. An example of an item in the Conflict Orientation Survey

is – “I am careful to avoid attacking a person’s intelligence when I critique their ideas.” The responses were on a Likert scale as follows; 1-Never True, 2- Rarely, 3-Sometimes True, 4 – Often, 5- Always True.

To control response bias, some items in the instrument have been inverted, whereby a rating of "1" reflects a "higher" score rather than a rating of "5". Therefore, when analyzing the survey data, the response ratings for any inverted items must be reversed so that all scores end up going in the same direction (i.e., so that a rating of "5" has a parallel meaning for all subscales). Yield of high scores in the survey is an indicator of a positive orientation and low scores is an indicator of negative orientation. It is hoped that after training sessions, those individuals with a low pre-test score would move higher on the scale, indicating a shift in the way they approach conflict, from negative to positive.

All the values for the twelve (12) items are added together to create a sum score for the each participant. The highest score possible is 60 and the lowest score possible is 12. Both the pre- and post- surveys should be added to obtain the sum of each. The average score is computed by dividing the total score by 12 for both the pre- and post-test surveys. The highest possible average is 5 and the lowest 1. The pre-test average score is subtracted from the post-test average score with the assumption that pre-test scores will be lower than post-test scores. The difference between the two scores can therefore be attributed to the training.

Reliability and validity has been conducted on the instrument. Face validity was addressed by having the instrument reviewed by conflict resolution trainers and had an 80% agreement rate (Warters, 1995). Chronbach’s alpha, a measure of internal validity, was reported as .74 (Warters, 1995).

The results provide an understanding of how conflict management trainers may approach conflict. The results are useful for evaluating the effectiveness of training with respect to attitude change about conflict situations (Warters, 1999). It is also useful for the selection of the training materials in a conflict resolution situation (Warders, 1999).

### *3. Big Five Inventory Instrument*

The Big Five Instrument was developed by Lewis Goldberg. This 44-item inventory measures an individual on the Big Five Factors of personality (Goldberg, 1993). The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a self-report inventory designed to measure The Five dimensions and consists of short phrases with relatively accessible vocabulary. The personality dimension measured includes:

- i. Extraversion: Which encompasses traits such as talkativeness, energetic, and Assertiveness.
- ii. Agreeableness: Has traits such as sympathetic, kindness and affectionate
- iii. Conscientiousness: With traits such as being organized, thorough and playful.
- iv. Neuroticism: Traits such as being tense, moody and anxious.
- v. Openness: That includes traits such as having interest, imaginative and Insightful.

A sample that used the BFI instrument in the U.S and Canada reported the alpha reliability of the BFI scales ranging from .75 to .90 and average above .80. Three month test-retest reliabilities ranged from .80 to .90 with a mean of .85 (Rammstedt & John, 2005; 2007). Hampson and Goldberg (2006) in a middle-age sample found a mean test-retest stability of .74, with stability correlations of .79 for Extraversion and Openness and about .70 for Agreeableness,

Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism. The validity evidence of the instrument includes significant convergent and divergent relations with other Big Five Instruments as well as with peer rating (Rammstedt & John, 2005; 2007).

The five subscales in the instrument includes Extraversion (8 items), Agreeableness (9 items), Conscientiousness (9 items), Neuroticism (8 items), and Openness (10 items) (Worrell & Cross, Williams, 2004). All items consist of short phrases, e.g. “Is talkative,” that are based on typical trait related to each construct (John & Srivastava, 1999) and are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly). The Subscale scores were made by reverse scoring of specified items, summing the ratings for the items on each subscale, and dividing by the total number of items to obtain a mean score. John and Srivastava (1999) study reported alpha reliabilities from .75 to .80 for subscales and 3-month test-retest reliabilities from .80 to .90. Validity coefficients that were corrected for attenuation averaged .91 for Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, .88 for Neuroticism, and .83 for Openness (John & Srivastava, 1999).

#### *4. Family Conflict Resolution Scale (FCRS)*

Family conflict resolution scale was developed by Tyler Roskos, Paul Handal and Megan Ubinger ( Roskos, Handal and Ubinger, 2010). Other instruments such as Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos , 1986) and the children’s perceptions of Interparental Conflict scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) have been established to measure family conflict but they do lack the family conflict resolution factor. Family Conflict Resolution Scale was developed as a measure to sensitively measure family conflict resolution, allowing for clarification of the potential relationship between family conflict resolution and psychological adjustment (Roskos,

Handal and Ubinger, 2010). The Family Conflict Resolution Scale (FCRS) was developed as a measure to assess conflict resolution within the family. The items were developed through a literature search that yielded and tapped the construct of conflict resolution from other family conflict instruments such as Children perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale (Grych et al., 1992), the Family Environment Scale and Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, et al., 1996).

The items constructed had content validity and the 18 items were reviewed and compiled to appropriately measure family conflict resolution (Roskos, Handal and Ubinger, 2010). Of the total 18 items, 17 of them were to provide a total score for family conflict resolution. Fourteen (14) items were answered using a true/false response format. An example of such items would ask, "In my family, when we have an argument we usually work it out." The items 15, 16, and 17 are answered using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "never" to 7 "always". For example item 15 states "we tend to avoid each other's when we have disagreement". The ranges of scores were 0-32, with the higher score indicating higher levels of conflict resolution (Roskos, Handal and Ubinger, 2010). The last item on the measure required the participants to choose the category (avoidance of the problem, excessive yelling, fighting and/or arguing or resolution and /or satisfactorily solved) that best describe how participants families handled disagreements.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was established to determine the internal consistency of the FCRS and the results was  $\alpha = .87$ . This indicated that the items that made up the FCRS have high internal consistency reliability (Roskos, Handal and Ubinger, 2010). On perceived family conflict, the instrument indicated that family conflict was significantly correlated with measures of psychological maladjustment and negatively correlated with a measure of life satisfaction.

Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the construct validity of the FCRS. The results indicated a statistically significant negative correlation ( $R = -.68$ ) between family conflict and family conflict resolution (Roskos, Handal and Ubinger, 2010). The results clearly suggest that family conflict and family conflict resolution are related but at distinct constructs. To examine item content of The FCRS, principal component analysis yielded two factors: positive/neutral resolution and negative resolution. High score on the FCRS was an indication of high level of positive resolution and low scores indicated high levels of negative resolution (Roskos, Handal and Ubinger, 2010).

### **Procedures**

After the researcher obtains the IRB approval for the study, data will be collected from convenient samples of students in their classrooms. The researcher will work with specific professors in the university who will help to facilitate the data collection in their classroom. The principal investigator will approach professors that are known to him for permission for data to be collected from their classes during their class time. The researcher will use both email and office visits to professors in the college to request for permission for data to be collected from their classroom. Data will be collected in two phases in the classrooms of professors who will be asked for permission for data to be collected from their classrooms.

Student monitor/ research assistants will facilitate data collection in classrooms. The student monitors/ research assistants will have the script to explain to the participants the process of data collection. In the first phase of data collection, all participants from varied years of study will respond to the survey questions consisting of the four instruments used in the study. Participants will respond to the Big Five Inventory and Family Conflict Resolution Scale (FCRS)

to collect data on participants' personalities and family conflict resolution surveys. Participants will also respond to the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument and Conflict Orientation pre-test survey during the first phase of data collection.

Participants will thereafter be divided into two groups, experimental and control groups. The principle investigator will decide the classes that will participate in the training depending on those who responded to the pre-test data collection. Conflict resolution training will be carried out to the experimental group through video training. The Thomas-Kilmann training video will be used to train participants on conflict resolution. The student monitor/ research assistant will show the video to the class using a computer and a projector. The data will be collected from both the control and experimental group using both the Thomas-Kilmann mode instrument and post-test conflict orientation survey one week after responding to the first survey questionnaire. The data will be used to measure participant's conflict orientation and their mode to handle conflict after the training. There will be a span of one week to allow training to take place between pre-test and post-test sessions.

### **Data Analysis**

SPSS will be used to organize the data for effective analysis. Descriptive statistics will be used to describe the data, Frequency distribution and percentile ranks for single variables will be used in the analysis (Cronk, 2012). This will help in obtaining the central tendency of the variables in the study. It will also be used to determine the distribution of the scores for the study and the range in which the scores appear. Correlation in relationships of variables will be investigated among all variables in the study. Independent variables of personality and family

conflict resolution will be correlated against dependent variables of student conflict handling styles.

Inferential statistics will be used in making inferences about the hypothesis according to the data collected (Cronk, 2012). The researcher will use inferential statistics to come up with conclusions about the general population. Inferential statistics will be used to help the researcher generally describe the study beyond the data to the target population, in this case the college students. Finally, statistical significance will be conducted to determine the probability that observed results of the study will be due to the influence of the independent variables. A measure that will yield  $p > .05$  level of significance will lead to acceptance of the null hypotheses of the study as it indicates that the observed results have over a 95% probability of being influenced by independent variables.

For H1 and H<sub>01</sub>, a Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE styles as the dependent variables (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating) and each of the five personalities as measured by BFI personality instrument (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness) as the factor or independent variable. Where a significant effect was found, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted as a follow-up procedure. MANOVA, a multivariate test was appropriate because it looks at many dependent variables at once, and hence avoids causing a Type 1 error inflation caused by several univariate tests like ANOVA (Cronk, 2012).

For H2 and H<sub>02</sub>, a One Way ANOVA was conducted with the Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE styles as the dependent variables (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding,



and Accommodating) and the Family Conflict Resolution scale totals as the factor or the independent variable. This analysis measured whether there is a statistically significant difference in how participants' family conflict resolution totals impacts the MODE conflict handling styles.

For H3 and H<sub>03</sub>, a paired samples T- test was conducted to compare the mean differences between the MODE Conflict handling styles totals before and after conflict handling video training. The paired sample t-test assessed if there was any statistical significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. The paired sample t-test was an appropriate test because it compared the means of two scores from related samples (Cronk, 2012). To gain further insight on the impact of training or no training on the MODE conflict styles, frequencies on the percentage of participants' change in the MODE styles totals was conducted.

For H4 and H<sub>04</sub>, a paired samples T- test was conducted to compare the mean differences between the conflict orientation totals before and after conflict handling video training. The paired sample t-test assessed if there was any statistical significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. The paired sample t-test was an appropriate test because it compared the means of two scores from related samples (Cronk, 2012). To gain further insight on the impact of training or no training on the conflict orientation totals of participants, frequencies on the percentage of participants' change in the conflict orientation totals was conducted.

## **Results**

The conflict orientation survey will utilize the pre-test and post-test to collect data after conflict handling training has been carried out between the pre-test and post-test. If the results indicate that students' conflict orientation can be altered through training in conflict handling styles, the study would then suggest that institutions of higher learning should incorporate conflict handling skills training in their courses as they prepare students for their respective roles in the larger society.

The Big Five Inventory instrument will be used to measure how participants' personalities influence their choice of conflict handling styles. The results obtained from this study will help to determine whether the choices of participants' conflict handling styles are pre-determined by their personalities. It will also try to categorize individual personalities with the preferred conflict handling styles.

The Family Conflict Resolution Scale will be used to measure the influence of each participant's family in his/her choice of conflict handling styles. Family has a major influence on the socialization of its members. The results of this study will try to verify if it is also true in regards to the choice of conflict handling styles. The results of the study can advocate that families should put more effort to influencing the conflict handling skills of its members to be responsible citizen in society and the workplace while dealing with conflict.

## **Anonymous Data Collection**

Data will be collected anonymously, and the process will be fully voluntary. Participants will be issued with a consent letter during the data collection to let them know their participation in this study is totally voluntary and one may withdraw at any time without any negative

consequences. If one wishes to withdraw at any time during the study, it will not affect the participant's course grade or anything else related to them being a student at Youngstown State University. The principal investigator will recruit a student monitor/Research assistant to administer the survey during data collection. There will be a label that will be attached to the each survey with a matching numbers with the survey. Participants will be required to write their name on the label.

The identifying labels will be put in a sealed envelope and stored by the administrative assistant of the department of Human Ecology in Youngstown State University during the period between pre-test and post-test in a locked store room where nobody will have access to it. The principal investigator will only get the survey with an anonymous number to enable him to match pre-test surveys and post-test surveys for the same participants.

During post-test surveys, participant will be issued with the label they used during the pre-test with identifying information and the anonymous number that will be used to match the pre-test and post-test surveys. Participants will be required to write the numbers at the top right hand side of the post-test survey. Participants will be allowed to keep the identifying label after the surveys are collected to ensure anonymity. The principal investigator will only have surveys with anonymous numbers that will help to facilitate matching the pre-test and post-test surveys.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Method

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was twofold; first, it was to examine the influence of personality and family conflict resolution on conflict handling styles. Second, the study aimed to investigate the impact of conflict resolution skills training on conflict handling styles, and conflict orientation of the participants. Personality was measured by the Big Five Inventory (BFI), while family conflict was measured by the Family Conflict Resolution Scale (FCRS). Conflict handling styles was measured by the Thomas-Kilman MODE instrument, while Conflict orientation was measured by the conflict orientation survey instrument. The training was carried out using a conflict handling video training.

Data was collected in the middle of the spring semester of 2014 in a Mid-Western public university. The total number of participants during the pre-test was 359 (completed the MODE, BFI, FCRS, & Pre -Orientation). During the post-test, the total participants were 268 (completed MODE, Post Orientation), with 135 participants used as the control group (no training video shown after one week) and 133 participants was used as the experimental group (Conflict handling video shown after one week).

Study results are presented in three sections: (a) Participants demographics data, (b) Instrument reliability data, and (c) Results according to research questions and hypotheses.

#### Participants Demographic Information

The demographic characteristic of the sample are described in Table 1. About 91 participants who participated at the beginning of the study did not participate on post data

collection, as some decided not to continue with the study and others did not turn up during post-test. The mean age of the participants was 20 years, with the youngest being 17 and the oldest being 58 years. The majority of the participants were female in both groups at the beginning and during post data collection, forming about 60% for both groups.

In focusing on the year in college in reference to classification, the sophomores formed the majority of the participants, over 33% in both groups, followed by juniors with 24 % and seniors with 11% on both groups. Caucasians formed about 73% of the participants in both groups, followed by African American who formed 16% of the participants. Most of the participants were from the Criminal Justice major with about 22% followed by Nursing with 11% of the participants. About 20% of the participants did not declare their major of study in both groups.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Analysis of Participants*

	Beginning Participants (N= 359) and %	Post Participants (N=268) and %
Age		
Mean	22.06	22.35
Median	20.00	20.00
Mode	20.00	20.00
Std. Deviation	7.05	7.25
Range	58.00	58.00
Gender		
Females	212 (59.1%)	168 (62.7%)
Males	143 (39.8%)	98 (36.6%)
No Answer	4 (1.1%)	2 (0.7%)

Table 1 (continued)

	Beginning Participants (N= 359) and %	Post Participants (N=268) and %
<b>Class Levels</b>		
Freshmen	105 (29.2%)	72 (26.9%)
Sophomores	120 (33.4%)	90 (33.6%)
Juniors	86 (24.0%)	67 (25%)
Seniors	40 (11.1%)	34 (12.7%)
No. Answer	7 (1.9%)	4 (1.5%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
African American	60 (16.7%)	43 (16.0%)
Caucasian	262 (73.0%)	199 (74.3%)
Latino	11(3.1%)	6 (2.2%)
Others	15 (4.2%)	12 (4.5%)
No Answer	5 (1.4%)	3 (1.1%)
<b>Education Major</b>		
Criminal Justice	86 (24.0%)	61 (22.8%)
Nursing	40 (11.0%)	31 (11.6%)
Exercise Science	16(4.5%)	10 (3.7%)
Psychology	16(4.5%)	10 (3.7 %)
Education	14 (3.9%)	13 (4.9%)
Engineering	12 (3.3%)	8 (3.0%)
Merchandising	10 (2.8%)	10 (3.7%)
No. Major	72 (21.1%)	56 (20.9%)
Others	93 (24.9%)	69 (25.7%)-

### Descriptive Analysis of the Instruments

Four instruments were used in this study and their Crochbach Alpha, Range, Means and Standard Deviation were calculated. The MODE instrument had four subscales each with 12

items; The Competing subscale Cronbach Alpha of 0.72, a range of 12, a mean of 4.98, and a S.D of 2.85. The Collaborating subscale Cronbach Alpha of 0.38, a range of 12, a mean of 5.42, and a S.D of 2.07. The Compromising subscale Cronbach Alpha of 0.48, a range of 12, a mean of 6.55, and a S.D of 2.14. The Avoiding subscale Cronbach Alpha of 0.41, a range of 12, a mean of 6.69, and a S.D of 2.12. The Accomodating subscale Cronbach Alpha of 0.45, a range of 11, a mean of 6.35, and a S.D of 2.21.

The BFI Instrument had 4 subsales. The Extraversion subscale had eight items, a Cronbach Alpha of 0.85, a range of 3.63, a mean of 3.37, and a S.D of 0.79. The Agreeableness subscale had nine items, a Cronbach Alpha of 0.64, a range of 7.89, a mean of 4.00, and a S.D of 0.65. The Conscientiousness subscale had nine items, a Cronbach Alpha of 0.72, a range of 2.89, a mean of 3.80, and a S.D of 0.57. The Neuroticism subscale had eight items, a Cronbach Alpha of 0.82, a range of 3.75, a mean of 2.90, and a S.D of 0.77. The Openness subscale had ten items, a Cronbach Alpha of 0.72, a range of 2.90, a mean of 3.52 ,and a S.D of 0.55.

The FCRS instrument had 17 items, a Cronbach Alpha of 0.86, a range of 31, a mean of 24.78 ,and a S.D of 6.78. The Conflict pre-orientation scale had 12 items, a Cronbach Alpha of 0.71, a range of 2.83, a mean of 3.94 ,and a S.D of 0.45. The Conflict post-orientation scale had 12 items, a Cronbach Alpha of 0.56, a range of 1.92, a mean of 3.60 ,and a S.D of 0.39.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Analysis of the Instruments*

Instrument	No. Items	Cronbach Alpha	Range	Mean	S.D
<b>MODE</b>					
Competing	12	0.717	12	4.98	2.85
Collaborating	12	0.375	12	5.42	2.07
Compromising	12	0.478	12	6.55	2.14
Avoiding	12	0.409	12	6.69	2.12
Accommodating	12	0.452	11	6.35	2.21
<b>BFI</b>					
Extraversion	8	0.845	3.63	3.37	0.79
Agreeableness	9	0.64	7.89	4.00	0.65
Conscientiousness	9	0.72	2.89	3.80	0.57
Neuroticism	8	0.82	3.75	2.90	0.77
Openness	10	0.72	2.90	3.52	0.55
<b>FCRS</b>					
FCRS	17	0.86	31	24.78	6.78
<b>CONFLICT ORIENTATION</b>					
Pre-Orientation	12	0.709	2.83	3.94	0.45
Post-Orientation	12	0.560	1.92	3.60	0.39

### Results According to Research Questions and Hypothesis

The Research questions and hypothesis are stated and data presented. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for all statistical tests.



### Research Question 1

RQ1. Is there a statistically significant difference in how personality as measured by BFI and family conflict resolution as measured by FCRS, influence an individual's conflict handling style as measured by Thomas Kilmann Conflict MODE instrument ?

Research question 1 was the basis for H1, H<sub>01</sub>, H2 and H<sub>02</sub>.

#### **Influence of BFI personality on MODE conflict handling styles.**

H 1. There is a statistically significant difference in how individual personalities as measured by BFI personality instrument influence the conflict handling styles that students use as measured by Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE Instrument.

**H<sub>01</sub>**. There is no statistically significant difference in how individual personality as measured by BFI personality instrument influences the conflict handling styles that students use as measured by Thomas-Kilmann conflict Mode Instrument.

A Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE styles as the dependent variables ( Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating) and each of the five personalities as measured by BFI personality instrument ( Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness) as the factor or independent variable. A significant effect was found for Extraversion and Agreeableness. For Extraversion ( $\Lambda(108, 1296) = .645, p = .006$ ). For Agreeableness ( $\Lambda(112, 1293) = .632, p = .004$ ). Therefore analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted as a follow-up procedure.

However, no significant effect was found for Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness. For Conscientiousness ( $\Lambda(104, 1295) = .711, p > .05$ ). For Neuroticism ( $\Lambda(116, 1290) = .687, p > .05$ ). For Openness ( $\Lambda(108, 1298) = .690, p > .05$ ).

Table 3

*MANOVA of Big Five Inventory (BFI) by Conflict Handling MODE*

<b>Multivariate Tests<sup>a</sup></b>						
<b>Effect</b>	<b>Wilks' Lambda</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Hypothesis df</b>	<b>Error df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Extraversion		.645	1.402	108.000	1296.623	.006*
Agreeableness		.632	1.414	112.000	1293.357	.004*
Conscientiousness		.711	1.116	104.000	1295.835	.207
Neuroticism		.687	1.100	116.000	1290.018	.228
Openness		.690	1.172	108.000	1298.000	.114

\*significant  $p < 0.05$

A One Way ANOVA was conducted with Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE styles as the dependent variables ( Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating) and the two BFI personalities that showed significant effect in the MANOVA (Extraversion and Agreeableness) as the factor or independent variable.

For the Extraversion BFI subscale, the one-way ANOVA yielded a significant difference for the competing subscale ( $F(27, 330) = 2.02, p < .05$ . For the Collaborating subscale ( $F(27, 329) = 1.10, p > .05$ . For the Compromising subscale ( $F(27, 330) = 1.04, p > .05$ . For the Avoiding subscale ( $F(27, 329) = 2.17, p < .05$ . For the Accommodating subscale ( $F(27, 330) = 1.11, p > .05$ .

For the Agreeableness BFI subscale, the one-way ANOVA yielded a significant difference for the competing subscale ( $F(28, 329) = 1.77, p < .05$ . For the Collaborating subscale ( $F(28, 328) = 1.31, p > .05$ . For the Compromising subscale ( $F(28, 329) = 1.48, p > .05$ . For the

Avoiding subscale ( $F(28, 328) = 0.84, p > .05$ . For the Accommodating subscale ( $F(28, 329) = 1.67, p < .05$ .

The above results are summarized on Table 4. For the extraversion personality, there was a statistically significant difference in how individual personalities as measured by BFI influenced the conflict handling styles for competing and avoiding. For the agreeableness personality, there was a statistically significant difference in how individual personalities as measured by BFI influenced the conflict handling styles for competing and accommodating.

Table 4

*ANOVA of Big Five Inventory (BFI) by Conflict Handling MODE*

BFI Subscales	MODE Subscales	df Between group –up Within Group- Down	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Extraversion	Competing	27 330	15.168	2.018	.002*
	Collaboration	27 329	4.662	1.098	.340
	Compromising	27 330	4.768	1.042	.410
	Avoiding	27 329	8.975	2.172	.001*
	Accommodating	27 330	5.395	1.109	.327
Agreeableness	Competing	28 329	13.484	1.766	.011*
	Collaboration	28 328	5.459	1.307	.142
	Compromising	28 329	6.535	1.477	.060
	Avoiding	28 328	3.834	.841	.701

	Accommodating	28 329	7.767	1.666	.021*
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**Influence of family conflict resolution on MODE conflict handling styles.**

**H 2.** There is a statistically significant difference in how students' family conflict resolution as measured by Family Conflict Resolution scale influence conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE Instrument.

**H<sub>0</sub>2.** There is no statistically significant difference in how students' family conflict resolution as measured by Family Conflict Resolution scale influence conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

A One Way ANOVA was conducted with the Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE styles as the dependent variables (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating) and the Family Conflict Resolution scale totals as the factor or the independent variable. The one-way ANOVA yielded the following results: For the competing subscale ( $F(31, 326) = 0.81, p > .05$ . For the Collaborating subscale ( $F(31, 325) = 0.69, p > .05$ . For the Compromising subscale ( $F(31, 326) = 1.05, p > .05$ . For the Avoiding subscale ( $F(31, 325) = 0.99, p > .05$ . For the Accommodating subscale ( $F(31, 326) = 0.66, p > .05$ .

The above results are summarized on Table 5, and they indicate that there was no statistically significant difference in how participants' family conflict resolution totals impacted the MODE conflict handling styles.

Table 5  
*ANOVA Family Conflict Resolution by MODE*

	df Between group –up  Within Group- Down	Mean Square	F	Sig.
COMPETING	31 326	6.639	.806	.761
COLLABORATING	31 325	3.040	.691	.893
COMPROMISING	31 326	4.806	1.052	.396
AVOIDING	31 325	4.448	.987	.490
ACCOMMODATING	31 326	3.342	.661	.918

### Research Question 2

RQ 2. Is there a statistically significant difference in individual conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode instrument and conflict orientation between pre-test and post-test after video training on conflict handling?

Research question 2 was the basis for H3, H<sub>0</sub>3, H4 and H<sub>0</sub>4

### Impact of conflict handling video training on MODE conflict handling styles

**H 3.** There is a statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode instrument between experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-test and post-test for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

H<sub>03</sub> There is no statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode instrument between experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-test and post-test for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

A paired samples T- test was conducted to compare the mean differences between the MODE. Conflict handling styles totals before and after conflict handling video training. There was a one week interval between the pre and post testing. The conflict handling video training was shown to the experimental group only, while the control group did not receive any video training. The subscale of competing indicated that the results were explicitly the same for both pre-test and post-test. For the collaborating subscale, the mean for precollaborating was 5.56 (*sd* = 2.19), and the mean for postcollaborating was 5.60 (*sd* = 2.18). No significant difference from precollaborating to postcollaborating was found ( $t(130) = 1.029, p > .05$ ). For the compromising subscale, the mean for precompromising was 6.74 (*sd* = 2.27), and the mean for postcompromising was 6.70 (*sd* = 2.29). No significant difference from precompromising to postcompromising was found ( $t(131) = 1.029, p > .05$ ). For the avoiding subscale, the mean for preavoiding was 6.63 (*sd* = 2.32), and the mean for postavoiding was 6.63 (*sd* = 2.31). No significant difference from preavoiding to postavoiding was found ( $t(130) = .000, p > .05$ ). For the accommodating subscale, the mean for preaccommodating was 6.30 (*sd* = 2.33), and the mean for postaccommodating was 6.30 (*sd* = 2.29). No significant difference from preaccommodating to postaccommodating was found ( $t(131) = .000, p > .05$ ).

The results of the paired sample t-test on table 6 summarize the results above and shows that there was no statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles an all five subscales on Conflict MODE handling even after the video training on conflict handling.

Table 6

*Paired Sample t-test on training impact and MODE conflict handling styles*

Training Group Paired Samples Statistics						
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Pair 1	PreCOMPETING	4.765 <sup>a</sup>	132	2.852	—	—
	POSTCOMPETING	4.765 <sup>a</sup>	132	2.852		
Pair 2	PreCOLLABORATING	5.557	131	2.188	1.029	.305
	POSTCOLLABORATING	5.603	131	2.165		
Pair 3	PreCOMPROMISING	6.742	132	2.267	1.029	.305
	POSTCOMPROMISING	6.697	132	2.292		
Pair 4	PreAVOIDING	6.634	131	2.318	.000	1.000
	POSTAVOIDING	6.634	131	2.305		
Pair 5	PreACCOMMODATING	6.303	132	2.325	.000	1.000
	POSTACCOMMODATING	6.303	132	2.285		
a. The correlation and t cannot be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.						

Another paired sample t-test was carried on the control group that had no video training. The subscale of competing indicated that the results were explicitly the same for both pre-test and post-test. For the collaborating subscale, the mean for precollaborating was 5.37 ( $sd = 2.09$ ), and the mean for postcollaborating was 5.36 ( $sd = 2.20$ ). No significant difference from precollaborating to postcollaborating was found ( $t(134) = 0.160$ ,  $p > .05$ ). For the compromising subscale, the mean for precompromising was 6.34 ( $sd = 1.98$ ), and the mean for

postcompromising was 6.36( $sd = 2.01$ ). No significant difference from precompromising to postcompromising was found ( $t(134) = 0.160, p > .05$ ). For the avoiding subscale, the mean for preavoiding was 6.95 ( $sd = 2.06$ ), and the mean for postavoiding was 6.95 ( $sd = 2.06$ ). No significant difference from preavoiding to postavoiding was found ( $t(134) = .000, p > .05$ ). For the accommodating subscale, the mean for preaccommodating was 6.50 ( $sd = 2.07$ ), and the mean for postaccommodating was 6.50 ( $sd = 2.11$ ). No significant difference from preaccommodating to postaccommodating was found ( $t(134) = .000, p > .05$ ). The above results are summarized on table 7 and they indicated that there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test for the control group.

Table 7

*Paired sample t-test on NO Training impact on MODE conflict handling styles*

No Training Paired Samples Statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig (2 tailed)
Pair 1	PreCOMPETING	4.830 <sup>a</sup>	135	2.670	-	-	-
	POSTCOMPETING	4.830 <sup>a</sup>	135	2.670			
Pair 2	PreCOLLABORATING	5.370	135	2.087	.160	134	.873
	POSTCOLLABORATING	5.363	135	2.198			
Pair 3	PreCOMPROMISING	6.356	135	1.983	.160	134	.873
	POSTCOMPROMISING	6.363	132	2.006			
Pair 4	PreAVOIDING	6.948	135	2.005	.000	134	1.000
	POSTAVOIDING	6.948	135	2.064			
Pair 5	PreACCOMMODATING	6.496	135	2.070	.000	134	1.000
	POSTACCOMMODATING	6.496	135	2.109			
a. The correlation and t cannot be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.							

To gain further insight on the impact of training or no training on the MODE conflict styles, frequencies on the percentage of participants' change in the MODE styles totals was



conducted. Table 8 shows how participants of both the experimental and control group increased, maintained or decreased their MODE sores on different subscales after post-test.

On the subscale of collaboration, experimental group indicated, 15% increase in their scores, 72.9% maintained the same scores and 10.5% decreased the scores after training. On the same subscale on control group, 14.1% increased their scores, 71.1 % maintained their scores while 14.8% reduced their scores during post-test.

Table 8  
*MODE conflict handling styles changes before and after training/no training in %*

		Increase (N) (%)	No Change (N) (%)	Decrease (N) (%)
COLLABORATING	Training	20 (15.0)	97 (72.9)	14 (10.5)
	No Training	19 (14.1)	96 (71.1)	20 (14.8)
COMPROMISING	Training	14 (10.5)	98 (73.7)	20 (15.0)
	No Training	20 (14.8)	96 (71.1)	19 (14.1)
AVOIDING	Training	19 (14.3)	93 (69.9)	19 (14.3)
	No Training	23 (17.0)	89 (65.9)	23 (17.0)
ACCOMMODATING	Training	19 (14.3)	94 (70.7)	19 (14.3)
	No Training	23 (17.0)	89 (65.9)	23 (17.0)

### **Impact of conflict handling video training on Conflict Orientation**

**H4.** There is a statistically significant difference in conflict orientation as measured by conflict orientation survey instrument between the experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-tests and post-tests for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

**H<sub>0</sub>4.** There is no statistically significant difference in conflict orientation as measured by conflict orientation survey instrument between the experimental and control groups as

reflected by the pre-tests and post-tests for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

A paired samples T- test was conducted to compare the mean differences between the conflict orientation totals before and after conflict handling video training. There was a one week interval between the pre and post testing. The conflict handling video training was shown to the experimental group only, while the control group did not receive any video training.

For the training pair (experimental group), the preorientation mean was 3.93 ( $sd = 0.45$ ), and the mean for postorientation was 3.60 ( $sd = 0.38$ ). No significant difference from preavoiding to postavoiding was found ( $t(131) = 12.66$ ,  $p=.000$ ). For the no-training pair (control group), the preorientation mean was 4.00 ( $sd = 0.47$ ), and the mean for postorientation was 3.60 ( $sd = 0.41$ ). No significant difference from preavoiding to postavoiding was found ( $t(133) = 14.63$ ,  $p=.000$ ). The results of paired sample t-test summarized on table 9 indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in both experimental and control groups after the post-test. The mean of the experimental group decreased significantly from 3.93 during pre-test to 3.60 after post-test. The mean of the control group also decreased significantly from 4.00 during pre-test to 3.60 after Post-test. Since the decrease was in both the experimental and control group, then the decrease cannot be ascribed to the training.

Table 9  
*Paired sample t-test on Training impact on Conflict Orientation totals*

		Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
Training Pair	PREOREINTATION	3.929	132	.449	12.661	131	.000
	POSTORIENTATION	3.598	132	.379			
	PREOREINTATION	4.003	134	.469			

No Training Pair (Control)	POSTORIENTATION				14.633	133	.000
		3.602	134	.412			

To gain further insight on the impact of training or no training on the conflict orientation totals of participants, frequencies on the percentage of participants' change in the conflict orientation totals was conducted. Table 10 shows how participants of both the experimental and control group increased, maintained or decreased their conflict orientation scores after post-test.

Results of conflict orientation on table 10 indicated that both the experimental and control had a significant change in conflict orientation. Both groups registered a decrease in conflict orientation that was almost the same regardless of the training. Experimental group showed a decrease of 85.6% in conflict orientation during the post test, while the control group showed a decrease of 87.3% in conflict orientation after post-test. The Experimental group indicated an increase of 9.8% in conflict orientation while control group indicated an increase of 6.7% in conflict orientation. About 4% indicated no change in conflict orientation on experimental group compared to 6% on control group after the post-test.

Table 10  
*Pre and Post Conflict Orientation % Change for both control and experimental group*

		Increase (%)	No Change (%)	Decrease (%)
	Training (Experimental)			

PRE-ORIENTATION minus POST-ORIENTATION	Group) N=133	9.8	4.5	85.6
	No Training (Control Group) N=135	6.7	6	87.3

### Summary of Results

MANOVA indicated that there was significant influence of two BFI personalities (Extraversion and Agreeableness) on the conflict handling styles as measured by the MODE instrument. ANOVA indicated there was no impact of family conflict resolution on conflict handling styles. Further, Paired sample test between the pre and posttest indicated that conflict resolution skills training had no significant impact on conflict handling styles, and conflict orientation of the participants.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

#### **Summary of the study**

The purpose of this study was twofold; first it was to examine the influence of personality and family conflict resolution on conflict handling styles. Second, the study aimed to investigate the impact of conflict resolution skills training on conflict handling styles, and conflict orientation of the participants.

A review of literature revealed that conflict is inevitable in any relationship and establishing an amicable resolution is important for healthy relationships. The study aimed to unravel some understanding of different factors that may influence an individual choice of conflict handling style. Four instruments were used in this study. The Thomas-Kilmann MODE instrument (MODE) was used to measure participant's conflict handling styles. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) was used to measure participant's personality. Family Conflict Resolution Scale (FCRS) was used to measure family conflict resolution and the Conflict Orientation Survey was used to measure participant's conflict orientation.

The study was conducted in a medium size public university in the mid-western part of the United States. A sample of 359 undergraduates from different majors and year of study participated in the pre-test phase of data collection. Participants responded to Thomas-Kilmann MODE instrument (MODE) instrument, The Big Five Inventory (BFI) Instrument, Family Conflict Resolution Scale (FCRS) instrument and Conflict Orientation Survey. During the post-test 268 participants responded to the Thomas-Kilmann MODE instrument (MODE) - and the Conflict Orientation Survey. Half of the post-test participants were the

experimental group, and they were shown the conflict handling training video, while the other half was the control group and they did not watch the training video. About 91 of the participants who responded during the pre-test did not show up during the post-test. This is about 25% of the study dropout, which is typical in most studies. There was an interval of one week between the pre-test and post-test where video conflict resolution was carried on the experimental group.

### **Summary of the Findings and Conclusions**

The findings of this study were based on the following research questions, hypotheses and Null hypotheses listed in Chapter 1. Using the analysis reported in Chapter 4, these questions are answered and hypotheses rejected or accepted so as to establish foundation for the conclusions. There were two research questions, four hypotheses, and four Null Hypotheses. Hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of confidence.

### **Influence of BFI personality on MODE conflict handling styles**

The first research question was the basis for the first and second hypotheses and Null Hypotheses.

- RQ1 Is there a statistically significant difference in how personality as measured by BFI and family conflict resolution as measured by FCRS, influence an individual's conflict handling style as measured by Thomas Kilmann Conflict MODE instrument ?
- H1 There is a statistically significant difference in how individual personalities as measured by BFI personality instrument influence the conflict handling styles that students use as measured by Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE Instrument.

H<sub>01</sub> There is no statistically significant difference in how individual personalities as measured by BFI personality instrument influence the conflict handling styles that students use as measured by Thomas-Kilmann conflict Mode Instrument.

The MANOVA indicated that there was significant influence of two BFI personalities (Extraversion and Agreeableness) on the conflict handling styles as measured by the MODE instrument. Results of the ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference in some subscales of personality and some conflict handling styles. Precisely, Extraversion showed statistically significant difference on Competing and Avoiding styles of handling conflict. Agreeableness was statistically significance to Competing and Accommodating styles. The results thus made H1 and H<sub>01</sub> to be partially accepted.

This evidence supports research findings that indicate some personality tends to influence the choice of conflict handling styles. Extraversion individuals are characterized as sociable, assertive, and positive, and they are thought to be motivated by rewards (Moberg, 2001). Gray (1981) noted the extraversion personality originates from sensitivity to reward signals, and thus they tend to use the competing style rather than accommodation or avoiding styles (Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002). Extraversion is a personality trait that is exhibited by individuals who are oriented toward working within groups, express assertiveness and dominance, and tend to be more forceful in communicating their opinions (McCrae & Costa, 1997). The current study did not agree with Olekalns and Smith (1999) study that argued that individuals with high extraversion tend to possess high pro-social orientation, which leads to high concern for others, and hence they are more inclined toward integrating and compromising styles while handling conflicts (Olekalns & Smith, 1999).

The current study indicated that Agreeableness was statistically significant to Competing and Accommodating styles. This finding concurs with Kilpatrick and Johnson's, (2001) study that reasoned that agreeableness is characterized by a strong motivation to maintain positive relationships with other people involved in a conflict. Agreeable persons experience more positive feelings when they get involved in cooperative behaviors rather than those that are competing. Agreeableness personality is positively characterized by preferences for cooperation rather than competition (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Persons high in agreeableness tend to demonstrate sympathy and help other people. Antonioni (1998) indicated that agreeableness is positively related to integrating and avoiding, however negatively related to dominating. The current study did not show a significant impact of agreeableness on avoiding and hence does not agree with Antonioni's (1998) study.

People who are high in openness are likely to value competitiveness and tend to use a direct approach when resolving conflicts (Barbuto et al., 2009). Openness individuals tend to have positive relationships with the dominating style and are usually associated with open-mindedness and reflectivity. They take other people into consideration and engage in greater divergent thinking to come up with creative solutions to the conflict (Judge et al., 2002). Antonioni (1998) reported a positive relationship between the trait of openness and integrating styles, but a negative relationship with avoiding styles. Moberg (2001) reported positive relationships between openness to both confrontation and compromise styles. The current study results indicated no impact of openness on competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating styles.



### **Influence of family conflict resolution on MODE conflict handling styles**

**H 2.** There is a statistically significant difference in how students' family conflict resolution as measured by Family Conflict Resolution scale influence conflict handling styles as measured by Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE Instrument.

**H<sub>0</sub>2.** There is no statistically significant difference in how students' family conflict resolution as measured by Family Conflict Resolution scale influence conflict handling styles as measured by the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

Results of the one way ANOVA showed no statistically significant difference on how participants family conflict resolution impacted conflict MODE handling styles an all the subscales. This indicated that all participants regardless of their age, ethnicity or year of study all indicated no significant difference on how their family influences their MODE of conflict handling, thus failing to reject Null hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>2.

The result showed that conflict MODE handling styles was not influenced by the Family Conflict resolution Scale (FCRS). The Conflict MODE handling styles instrument has five subscales (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating). The researcher expected participants with a high score on the family conflict resolution scale (FCRS) to score high on the conflict MODE handling styles in the areas of cooperativeness such as Compromising and Collaborating. The results defy the Social learning theory and the coercion theory that predicts an association between conflicts within the family and dysfunctional conflicts in young-adult relationships. Social learning theory predicts that behavior patterns learned in the family are practiced in young adulthood (Andrews, Foster, Capaldi, & Hops, 2000). Coercion theory predicts that infective parental conflict management styles will produce

coercive, unskilled responses to family, young adult, and peer relationships (Andrews et al., 2000).

Amett (1999) noted that intergenerational family conflict between parents and children is usually on the rise during early adolescence and declines by late adolescence and young adulthood. The sample of this study was mainly composed of young adults who might have changed their perceptions of family conflict that they had when they were adolescents. The mean age of the sample was 22.06 years with a mode of 20 and a range of 58.

The movement from home to college leads to further loosened parental control, and this results in a decrease in overall family conflict (Lee, Su, & Yoshida, 2005). The movement from home to college may have contributed to the change in perspective of the family of origin conflict. College students may be dealing with other types of family conflict such as marriage conflict, cohabiting issues and conflict of starting families of their own. Such may make conflict of their family of origin of less significant at this stage of their life.

Another possible explanation for the result was that Conflict MODE handling styles had low reliability in all five of the subscales. The instrument had 30 questions and every question had only two choices for the respondent to choose from. This limited the variances of the responses of the participants.

## **Research Question 2**

RQ 2. Is there a statistically significant difference in individual conflict handling styles as measured by the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode instrument and conflict orientation between pre-test and post-test after video training on conflict handling?

Research question 2 was the basis for H3, H<sub>03</sub>, H4 and H<sub>04</sub>

### **Impact of conflict handling video training on MODE conflict handling styles**

**H 3.** There is a statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles as measured by the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode instrument between experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-test and post-test for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

**H<sub>03</sub>** There is no statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles as measured by the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode instrument between experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-test and post-test for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

The results of the paired sample t-test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in conflict handling styles on all five subscales on Conflict MODE handling even after the video training on conflict handling. The subscale of competing indicated that the results were explicitly the same for both pre-test and post-test. Thus failing to reject the null hypothesis H<sub>03</sub>.

The result defied other studies and the expectation of the researcher. The researcher expected the post score of the group that underwent conflict resolution to be different for the control group. The results indicated that in both the experimental and control groups, the score for pre-test and post-test were similar in all the subscales of the conflict MODE handling styles instrument.

Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Brynt-Edward, and Hetherington (2002) carried out a study on a conflict resolution skills-training program that offered an alternative to out-of-school suspension. The finding showed that conflict resolution training was effective in reducing acts of violence among high school students. The study results of pre- and post-intervention indicated that the

group that received the training had no expulsions from school from the time they received the training and in the period that followed. At post-intervention, all students who received the program were four times less likely to receive another out-of-school suspension for fighting (Breunlin, et al., 2002). Also, the group that went through the training experienced fewer post-intervention disciplinary actions from the school than those students who did not go through the conflict resolution training program (Breunlin, et al., 2002).

Several reasons can be attributed to the results of this study. First, the period between the pre-test and post-test was too short. There was only one week interval between the two tests and this might have made participants to be intelligent test takers who duplicated what they did one week ago. An example was evident on those who recorded no change on every subscale: On collaborating trained group 72% recorded no change, No training group 71% recorded no change and this pattern was repeated in all the subscales.

The nature of the instrument used in this study contributed to the results. There were only two choices to the questions that left participant with little room for variances of their responses. Below is an example of one of the questions in the instrument. There is higher possibility that one will not change his/her choice regardless of the training on the same items.

2.     A.     I try to meet the other person half way when attempting to bring about a solution.
- B.     I attempt to deal with all of the other person's problems plus my own

The nature of the training may have contributed to the results. A recorded video training was used to train the experimental group on conflict handling styles. The traditional training with the instructor might have yielded different results. The participants might have needed some clarification that the instructor could have been in a position to respond unlike the video.

However, learning to avoid and resolve conflicts is an important part of becoming a productive member of society. Goldsworthy, Schwartz, Barab, and Landa (2007) noted that conflict resolution curricula should provide opportunities for learners to apply skills in a variety of settings and enable ongoing reflection. This will enable the learners to appreciate the value of the acquired conflict resolution skills. Programs addressing conflict resolution and violence prevention should be integrated into classrooms and schools as a whole (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Mitchell, & Fredrickson, 1997). Some of the goals of conflict resolution training should be to change student attitudes and foster education that will help students deal with daily challenges when confronted with conflicts (Goldsworthy, et al., 2007).

#### **Impact of conflict handling video training on Conflict Orientation**

**H4.** There is a statistically significant difference in conflict orientation as measured by conflict orientation survey instrument between the experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-tests and post-tests for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

**H<sub>0</sub>4.** There is no statistically significant difference in conflict orientation as measured by conflict orientation survey instrument between the experimental and control groups as reflected by the pre-tests and post-tests for conflict resolution after video training on conflict handling.

The paired samples T- test was conducted to compare the mean differences between the Conflict orientation totals before and after conflict handling video training. There was a one week interval between the pre and post testing. The conflict handling video training was shown to the experimental group only, while the control group did not receive any video training.

A paired sample t-test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in both experimental and control groups after the post-test. The mean of the experimental group decreased significantly from 3.929 during pre-test to 3.598 after post-test. The mean of the control group also decreased significantly from 4.00 during pre-test to 3.602 after Post-test.

Both groups registered a decrease in conflict orientation that was almost the same regardless of the training. Since the decrease was in both the experimental and control group the decrease cannot be ascribed to the training. Experimental group showed a decrease of 85.6% in conflict orientation during the post test, while the control group showed a decrease of 87.3% in conflict orientation after post-test. The Experimental group indicated an increase of 9.8% in conflict orientation while control group indicated an increase of 6.7% in conflict orientation. About 4% indicated no change in conflict orientation on experimental group compared to 6% on control group after the post-test.

It appears that training related to conflict resolution needs to be planned for various levels of competence in conflict management for it to be effective (Deen, 2000). Positive conflict resolution is a skill learned only through practice (Drew, 1987) trainings need to be taught experientially. Experiential learning occurs when there are changes in judgments, feelings, knowledge or skills that result from involvement in an activity or event over a period of time (Deen, 2000). The video training in this study was not effective because it was training that took place one time for short period of time.

Secondly, the evidence of this study implies that formal training may not be the only way for adults to learn conflict resolution skills (Deen, 2000). Adults might have acquired their own conflict management skills through diverse life experiences and therefore they might not be

flexible to any other form of training on conflict resolution skills. The respondents who had received conflict resolution training, they did not appear to have difference in skill level from the group of respondents who did not receive any training in conflict resolution handling skills. The results indicated there was a significant decrease in both groups conflict orientation regardless of the training.

Morrison, et al., (2011) reviewed training programs that were likely to utilize constructive responses to conflict and demonstrate problem-solving behaviors that would replace destructive or conflict-escalating behaviors among students. Students who participated in the workshops seemed to be more positive about their ability to create change for themselves and the world around them. At the heart of every conflict can be misunderstandings, differing perceptions, wants and needs, and therefore conflict can be an opportunity for growth and problem solving among all those who are concerned (Morrison, et al., 2011).

Bush and Floger (1994) noted that one's orientation toward conflict has a direct correlation to how it is handled and its general outcome. An individual's orientation toward conflict gives him/her a sense of what conflict entails, enables one to explain, and identifies the process of seeking a resolution. Second, it gives the person concerned the view of what the ideal response to the conflict should be and prescribes how to reach a successful conflict resolution (Bush & Floger, 1994).

### **Recommendation and Further Research**

The review of literature and the finding of this study provide the basis for recommendations. The recommendations relate to training in conflict handling and conflict orientation, instruments used in the study, and further research in conflict handling styles.

### **Training on conflict handling styles**

Managing conflicts in a constructive manner is one of the most important competencies that students need to master. Such skills will minimize the occurrence and destruction of interpersonal conflict among students in schools and colleges (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). A change in attitude can take place through consultative meetings, problem-solving workshops, conflict resolution training at communal levels, and developing dispute resolution systems that are applicable when considering the cultures and norms of the parties involved (Babbitt, 2006).

Conflict management has continued to receive significant attention in college courses, in management training sessions, and in academics (Rahim, 2000). The growth in organizational interdependence, shift to collaborative team-based structures, increased diversity, and environmental uncertainty are all factors that can lead to higher degrees of organizational conflict (Callanan & Perri, 2006). Conflict can help in calling attention to search for solutions and improvement that can cause fundamental changes for the welfare of the organization or the parties involved (Pondy, 2002). It has been noted that individuals can have preferences for particular conflict handling styles depending on the nature and the context of the disagreement (Callanan & Perri, 2002). It is assumed that collaborating, or integrating, styles is a better method for responding to conflict, and individuals should be trained to strive for collaboration when confronted by a conflicting situation (Weingart & Jehn, 2000).

This study would recommend that any conflict training session would be designed with consideration of the audience being trained on basis of their age, life experiences, nature of the conflict and the duration of the training. The duration of conflict handling training in this study was too short for the participants to record any statistically significant difference after the



training. The researcher would recommend further study where the training session of conflict handling style would be incorporated in the course of study in school. Training may also be carried out over an extended period of time which would afford the researcher the opportunity to measure the significant difference among the participants.

### ***Training on conflict orientation***

It appears that training related to conflict resolution needs to be planned for various levels of competence in conflict management for it to be effective (Deen, 2000). Positive conflict resolution is a skill learned only through practice (Drew, 1987) trainings need to be taught experientially. Experiential learning occurs when there are changes in judgments, feelings, knowledge or skills that result from involvement in an activity or event over a period of time (Deen, 2000). `

The researcher would recommend further study on conflict orientation in groups that are classified according to gender, ethnicity, age and life experiences .This will give a balanced view of how different groups of people are oriented to conflict. Conflict orientation training sessions should cover an extended period of time with opportunities to practice the skills.

### **Instrument Recommendation**

#### ***Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Handling MODE Instrument***

The instrument format, especially of two multiple choice per item may limit the choice of individual with other styles of handling conflict. For instance, multiple choice encourages an attempt to confirm only one style by eliminating all other styles. Thus, different format like open-end questions might give diverse styles of handling conflict. Conflict resolution practitioners must be prepared to deal with many problems and a diverse body of people in

conflict resolution. Numerous studies have shown that Americans from diverse racial and ethnic groups experience conflict differently from each other and from members of outer groups (Bresnahan, Donohue, Shearman, & Guan, 2009).

The instrument also had low reliability in four of the five subscales. The researcher would have preferred higher reliability in all the subscales of the instrument.

### **Further Research**

Future studies could be repeated with a conflict handling style instrument with high reliability and conflict training sections that are carried out over an extended period of time. Conflict training sessions should also be tailored to match the group diverse needs of the participants in matter of age, ethnicity and life experience. The results might show a statistically significant influence of conflict resolution training on participant conflict handling style.

### **Conclusion**

MANOVA indicated that there was significant influence of two BFI personalities (Extraversion and Agreeableness) on the conflict handling styles as measured by the MODE instrument. ANOVA indicated there was no impact of family conflict resolution on conflict handling styles. Further, paired sample tests between the pre- and post-test indicated that conflict resolution skills training had no significant impact on conflict handling styles, and conflict orientation of the participants.

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**Liberty University IRB Approval Notice**

IRB Approval 1829.032714: Conflict Handling Styles among College Students: The Influence of Conflict Training, Personality, and Family Conflict Resolution

IRB, IRB <IRB@liberty.edu>

Thu 3/27/2014 3:47 PM

To:

Waithaka, Abel Gitimu;

Cc:

IRB, IRB;

Austin, Shante Moore (School of Education);

Garzon, Fernando (Center for Counseling and Family Studies);

Action Items

Dear Abel,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**

*Professor, IRB Chair*

**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**

**Youngstown State University IRB Study Approval Letter**

One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555  
Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs  
330.941.2377  
Fax 330.941.2705

December 19, 2013

Mr. Abel Gitimu Waithaka, Principal Investigator  
Dr. Shante Austin-Moore, Co-investigator  
Department of Human Ecology  
UNIVERSITY

RE: IRB Protocol Number: 075-2014  
Title: Conflict handling styles among college students: The influence of conflict training, personality and family conflict resolution

Dear Mr. Waithaka and Ms. Austin-Moore:

The Institutional Review Board of Youngstown State University has reviewed the aforementioned Protocol via expedited review, and it has been approved with the condition that you maintain anonymity for students for whom you have grade authority, as outlined in an email of December 19, 2013 by IRB chair Cathy Bieber Parrott.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB. Best wishes in the conduct of your study.

Dr. Scott Martin  
Interim Associate Dean for Research  
Authorized Institutional Official

SCM:cc



c: Dr. Zara Rowlands, Chair  
Department of Human Ecology

www.ysu.edu 

Permission to use CPP Research Instrument  
(Thomas –Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument)

Morning Abel,

I've received from Nancy (see below) your support from CPP Research. I'll need a shipping address to send the product to you also when do you need to receive the shipment and do you want all 220 copies on the first order.

Thank you,

Duffey Cochrane  
CPP Customer Relations Advisor

**From:** Strong Research  
**Sent:** Monday, July 01, 2013 7:25 AM  
**To:** Duffey Cochrane  
**Subject:** FW: Request for support in research

Hi Duffey,

Here's a research support person. The details of his offer are:

90% discount off pricing for up to 22 packages of 10 TKI Instruments (product code 4813), billed upon request for shipping. Taxes and shipping charges may apply.

By the way, I'll be on vacation July 2-15. If you need anything during this time, Mike would probably be the best person to contact.

Thanks,

**Permission to use Family conflict resolution Instrument**

P. Tyler Roskos <>

Thu 3/21/2013 9:24 AM

Inbox

To:

Waithaka, Abel Gitimu;

Cc:

Megan Ubinger <>;

You replied on 3/31/2013 10:02 AM.

Abel,

You are most welcome to use the measure. I can tell you that Dr. Megan Ubinger has done more recent work with it, and has an updated version. I have copied her on this message, and she may be able to provide you with the most recent version, validated in adolescents. Please let me know if you need anything from me, or have questions.

Tyler Roskos

P. Tyler Roskos, PhD, ABPP

Board Certified in Clinical Neuropsychology

Department of Neurological Surgery & Department of Psychology

Saint Louis University School of Medicine

1320 South Grand Blvd.

O'Donnell Hall - 1st Floor

St. Louis, MO 63104

**Permission to use Conflict Orientation resolution survey**

Abel,

You are very welcome to use any of the instruments in our campus conflict resolution evaluation packet found here:

If I understood your request, you specifically were interested in the Conflict Orientation Survey, which can be found beginning on page 55 of the packet.

Please be sure to acknowledge the project in your write up of the results.

Best regards,

Bill Warters

Director, Conflict Management in Higher Education Resource Center

For your convenience, I've also attached the document here.

### The Big Five Inventory Frequently Asked Questions

The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a self-report inventory designed to measure the Big Five dimensions. It is quite brief for a multidimensional personality inventory (44 items total), and consists of short phrases with relatively accessible vocabulary.

Is the Big Five Inventory (BFI) in the public domain and available for use?

I hold the copyright to the BFI and it is not in the public domain per se. However, it is freely available for researchers to use for *non-commercial research purposes*. Please keep us posted on your findings.