

# **The Tipping Point:**

## **The Role of Autonomy and Affiliation in Negotiation Breakdown**

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*Insight Fellowship 2005-2006*

What is happening when a negotiation breaks down? What emotional motivations are at play when someone walks away from the hours, days or even months of hard work they've invested into reaching an agreement? This paper examines the role emotions (primarily frustration) play at the point where we abandon potential agreements and walk away from the negotiating table.

To understand the breakdown of negotiations, we need to understand the role emotions play. Emotions are not by-products of human interaction; they serve a purpose. The role of an emotion is to alert us that something important is happening to us. Emotions tell us that one of our fundamental human needs is or is not being met. Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro (2005) identify five universal needs that they call "core concerns" that can stimulate emotions before, during or after a negotiation takes place. This paper examines two core concerns during negotiation: autonomy and affiliation and the interplay between them at the *tipping point* where negotiations break down.

I will argue that as the concern for autonomy is negatively affected during a negotiation we run the risk of experiencing an unforeseen and unintended reduction in feelings of affiliation with our negotiating counterpart. The result of this interplay can have consequences severe enough to ruin agreements, damage relationships and dramatically reduce our sense of subjective well-being. For people to maximize substance and improve relationships they must recognize and learn how to handle the interplay between autonomy and affiliation while negotiating with others. The conclusions presented here were derived from a research study where 63 participants were interviewed about frustrating negotiating experiences.

For the purposes of this paper, and building on the work of Fisher and Shapiro (2005) and Deci and Flaste (1995), 'autonomy' will be defined as the extent to which an individual feels free to make or affect a decision of their own volition, 'affiliation' will be defined as the degree to which we feel emotionally close to another party, and 'negotiation' will be thought of as any interaction in which you are trying to influence someone or they are trying to influence you (Ibid.).

The paper has been broken down into 6 different sections:

1. A brief overview of Dan Shapiro and Roger Fisher's concept of Core Concerns;

2. An explanation of the concern for autonomy;
3. A description of our need for affiliation;
4. A look at how autonomy and affiliation interplay in the context of negotiation;
5. An offering of some prescriptive advice on how to deal with the interplay between our needs for autonomy and affiliation; and
6. Conclusions

The purview of this paper is to coalesce different parts of a growing body of research about the role of emotion in negotiation and provide additional hypotheses based on the aforementioned research study. It is not intended to be a thorough account of all relevant material in the field of emotion, negotiation, or emotions in negotiation. Prescriptions made have been developed based on a mixture of proven and documented negotiation methodologies and psychological theory (Fisher and Ury 1991; Stone, Patton and Heen, 1991; Fisher and Shapiro, 2005; Riskin, 2004; Lazarus 1991; Deci and Flaste 1995, Bazerman et al, 1994) and real world accounts of helpful means of settling disputes.

### 1. A Brief Overview of Dan Shapiro and Roger Fisher's Concept of Core Concerns:

Building on the work of Lazarus (1991) and Parkinson (1995), Shapiro (2002) argues that emotion is not simply a reaction to passing phenomena but a forward-looking device used to communicate an imperative notion about what in later writings he defines as a 'core concern' (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005). Emotion does not arise as a byproduct of human interaction but serves a purpose, which is to tell us that one of these core concerns is or is not being met. For example, anger that arises when a coworker belittles me in front of others may actually be communicating my desire to be treated seriously or with respect. In other words, the anger is a signal alerting me to my need for appreciation or a recognition of my status. The core concerns thus stimulate our emotions when they are affected by our interactions with the world. Fisher and Shapiro identify five core concerns: appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status and role (ibid.).

Understanding our core concerns can help us make sense of emotional outbursts during negotiations and aid in our understanding of the precise point where negotiations break down.

Additionally, knowledge of our core concerns prepares negotiators to deal with the emotional aspect of negotiation. When a negotiation becomes slightly adversarial, for example, merely expressing *appreciation* for someone's hard work is often enough to change the atmosphere between the negotiating parties and to foster a more collaborative environment (Ibid.). Used this way, an understanding of our core concerns can help us address harmful or destructive emotional outbursts and stimulate positive emotions. Doing this during negotiations can increase the quality of agreements and build constructive working relationships. Looking for ways to address our own and others' core concerns helps effectively address the root causes of emotions in negotiation. Only through understanding the reasons emotions manifest the way they do can we channel them into constructive outputs and prevent harmful emotional outbursts from ruining agreements, relationships and individuals' subjective sense of well-being.

This paper does not seek to catalogue, explain or examine the 5 Core Concerns as a whole. Instead, it seeks to examine our concerns of autonomy and affiliation and the interplay between them at the precise point where negotiations breakdown. By looking more deeply at how our concern for autonomy can elicit frustration and even damage relationships, we can begin to look for ways to engage with others in a more constructive, efficient and meaningful way.

## 2. An Explanation of the Concern for Autonomy:

Autonomy can be thought of as the extent to which an individual feels free to make or affect a decision (Shapiro, 2002). All negotiators crave some degree of autonomy in virtually every negotiation so we often feel we are fighting an uphill battle in our quest to assert or expand our sense of autonomy. There are a number of reasons why we can find it difficult to assert our autonomy in a negotiation. For one, while our notion of autonomy rests in our perceived level of freedom in the decision making process, it is not the case that someone has to be seen as controlling to impinge on our autonomy. People often impinge upon others' autonomy without intending to and without actually realizing it. Something as seemingly trivial as suggesting a standard company contract can elicit an emotional response strong enough to derail a negotiation if the other party feels they have no say in the process. This type of unilateral action has the

potential to ruin agreements and even damage relationships by negatively affecting another's sense of autonomy (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005).

Even when someone does realize they are using somewhat controlling language, however, they often fail to realize the impact their words have on others. In one study on emotional triggers, the overwhelming majority of subjects believed they were more likely to have their emotions triggered by being told what to do than they believed others would be affected if they told them what to do (Schroth et al, 2005). Similarly, most negotiators tend to believe that their negotiating counterpart's emotions are most likely to be triggered by labeling them negatively but admit that their own emotions are more likely to be triggered if another party tells them what to do (Ibid.). This suggests that we can tend to be more emotionally sensitive about our own concern for autonomy than we perceive others will be about theirs.

Despite this sensitivity, however, most negotiators don't usually need or even want absolute autonomy in every negotiation. What every negotiator wants is an appropriate degree of autonomy given the particulars of the situation, the parties involved, the history of the relationship, and the importance of the issues (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005). The problem is, we usually don't know what level of autonomy is appropriate for each party in every negotiation. If we don't know *a priori* what another negotiator's need for autonomy is in a particular situation, how can we find out how to address it? Fortunately, the way people interact can give us clues as to their relative needs for their core concerns. As Shapiro (2002) says, emotions are a communicative device. So what we need to do is find out what certain emotional responses are trying to communicate. Feelings of frustration are often a sign that our sense of autonomy is being limited (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005; Deci and Flaste, 1995). So when our negotiating counterpart shows signs of being frustrated in a negotiation, we might want to ask ourselves if their emotional response is a symptom of a need for an increased sense of autonomy. Similarly, the choices people make are often telling of their want for autonomy (Deci and Flaste, 1995).

Consider one study that examined the choices people made when looking at job offers high in procedural justice versus those high in salary. The subjects of the study (second year MBA students) were given six job offers to assess. One group was given six offers to look at and choose from one at a time and a second group was given three pairs of job offers where they were presented with two offers to look at simultaneously (joint evaluation). The following pairs of job offers were given to the subjects of the study:

- Job A: The first offer is from Company 1 for \$60,000 a year.... New associates are given the opportunity to participate in decisions typically made by upper management... New associates are allowed to voice their preferences regarding client and project assignments... The firm encourages all consultants, both junior and senior to voice their opinions for changes and improvements to the company's policies...
- Job B: The second offer is from Company 2, for \$75,000 a year... New associates are assigned by senior partners to specific clients, projects and engagement teams in which a senior partner is in charge, and they are not allowed to request changes. Decisions involving company policies including MBA training, job objectives, career advancement and salary increases are made by senior management. The new MBAs are not encouraged to voice their opinions or objectives.... (Bazerman et al., 1998; p. 231)

When asked to evaluate these two job offers separately, out of the 40 who accepted one of the two jobs opted for job A, whereas only 11 accepted job B. However, when subjects were given the offers jointly, of the 37 who accepted one of the two jobs offers, only 14 accepted job A while 23 accepted job B (Bazerman et al, 1998). In other words, when only given one option to choose from, 72% of the subjects showed a preference for a job with more ability to participate in decisions, voice preferences and influence company policies. When given two job offers to consider simultaneously, only 35% of subjects showed a preference for the job involving more choice and influence, while 65% opted for the job offering a higher salary.

Bazerman et al argue the subjects made choices based on what they wanted (procedural justice) when given only one option and made choices based on the option they believed they should take (higher salary) when presented with multiple options. This suggests that when given only one option to chose from (or reject), individuals are more prone to making decisions based on what they 'want', whereas when they are given multiple options to chose from, individuals are more likely to act in accordance with what they feel they 'should' do (Ibid.).

I believe that the results of this study can be further understood by looking at the core concern for autonomy. Bazerman et al. explain the "want" in this study to be for procedural

justice whereas on closer inspection of the characteristics of job A, choosing this option seems to be more indicative of the want for autonomy. For example, a strong preference for the ability to participate in decisions, voice preferences and concerns and influence company policies not only seems to be indicative of a want for procedural justice but more fittingly of the need for autonomy (Deci and Flaste, 1995; Schroth et al, 2004).

The results of the survey suggest that when presented with multiple options vs. a single one, we will be more likely to make rational choices (i.e.- based on options we think we should take) more often than emotional ones (i.e.- based on options we simply want to take).

However it would appear that the reason people respond less emotionally and more rationally when presented with multiple options is because their concern for autonomy is being met, thereby addressing the purpose of the emotion before it manifests. Recall that emotion serves the function of a communicative device, pointing towards our need for the core concerns. In this case, giving someone multiple options, has increased their sense of autonomy. Having addressed their sense of autonomy before asking them to make a choice, subjects showed a higher instance of making rational decisions (based on what they felt they should do), rather than emotional ones (based on what they wanted). This suggests that providing subjects with multiple choices addresses their sense of autonomy and influences them to make decisions more rationally as opposed to emotionally.

As a negotiating strategy, offering a number of different options to a fellow negotiator, rather than one offer, can be an affective means of addressing his need for autonomy. This can therefore increase his willingness to accept proposals and ideas based on rational thought, rather than emotional attachment.

An even more effective approach than unilaterally presenting someone with multiple options that satisfy both your and their interests is to conduct a joint brainstorming session where you work together to find an array of mutually beneficial or at least acceptable options. This will not only build a sense of autonomy but can also build affiliation levels as you work together towards a mutually agreeable solution (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005). Building autonomy and affiliation simultaneously is a very powerful negotiation strategy and will be discussed more later on.

To recap, autonomy involves the ability to make or affect decisions. People often limit our autonomy without even realizing it. We don't need an absolute degree of autonomy in a

negotiation, only an appropriate degree. Providing that appropriate degree of autonomy has to do with moderating the use of language and increasing the number of options (ideally, mutually) others or we have to choose from in a negotiation. Doing this can expand our own or others' autonomy and lead to a decrease in feelings of alienation with respect to the other negotiator(s).

### 3. A Description of our Need for Affiliation:

Affiliation is the degree to which we feel emotionally close to another party in a negotiation (Shapiro, 2002). Whether we love, hate, like, dislike or feel indifferent towards the party we are negotiating with is not only going to make a difference in the way we negotiate, it is going to influence the way we feel, speak, listen, act and react to the other side. The need for affiliation can be satisfied through forming or ameliorating cooperative relationships with the other negotiating party (Ibid.).

All too often the process of negotiation itself can cause people to distance themselves from a fellow negotiator. An implicit win-lose mentality held by a negotiator can cause a resistance to see the other side as an ally. Strong or misunderstood emotions can cause us to view the person sitting across from us as an obstacle to getting our interests met, rather than an asset. This can drastically reduce the likelihood of collaboration, cooperation and reaching a mutually beneficial agreement. Effective negotiation involves working together, creating a synergy with negotiators' joint brainpower to reach a win-win, mutually beneficial agreement (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005; Fisher and Ury, 1991).

More often than not it is in our substantive interests to strive towards having a good relationship and a high level of affiliation with the person we are negotiating with (Fisher and Ury, 1991; Fisher and Shapiro, 2005). High affiliation levels often result in less resistance to new ideas and more openness to the possibility of changing initial positions (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005). Furthermore, in building affiliation levels, we can induce others to be in positive affective states. Research suggests that positive moods, emotions and affective states increase an individuals' motivation to help others, be sociable and act in a benevolent manner (Deci and Flaste, 1995). All things being equal, it's fairly hard to imagine how an increase in both parties' sociability and benevolence won't lead to an increase in the quality of negotiated agreements.



So, if we concede that increasing affiliation with your negotiating counterpart can yield positive affect and mutually beneficial outcomes, why is it often difficult to increase our affiliation in the middle of a negotiation? There may be any number of reasons why we often find this difficult and they vary from person to person and situation to situation. For one, we often project what we don't like about ourselves onto others not only in tough negotiations, but also in many difficult conversations. If we see another person, for example, becoming angry when negotiating we may label them (or even call them) belligerent. This can happen because when we see someone becoming angry, we may actually be seeing similarities in the way we act when we are angry. If we think of ourselves as belligerent when we act in that manner, then what we may actually be saying is that we don't like ourselves when we are angry because it can be seen as belligerent. Without being cognizant of the fact that we often project a negative side of ourselves when looking at an emotional negotiator, it can be very difficult to stop a brewing conflict from escalating and lead us to try controlling the other person's behavior (Gray, 2004). This does not make the process of negotiation any easier. Emotions aroused by what is said between two negotiators can be very powerful. In fact, emotions aroused by what is said between two people are usually far more intense than emotions aroused by outcomes such as an acceptable or unacceptable proposition or agreement (Kumar, 1997). Therefore, recognizing the existence of a disturbing emotion as it emerges in the process of a negotiation is something we need to pay particular attention to. Dealing with it effectively is another task and should often be given a very high priority, lest we be willing to accept the consequences. As we will see, dealing with disturbing or distracting emotions like frustration largely involves addressing our core concerns. Alternatively, eliciting *positive* emotions also involves building affiliation, expanding a person's sense of autonomy or addressing the other core concerns.

*Building* affiliation is largely about finding or building connections with your fellow negotiator. It is difficult to build connections with another person if the only thing we think we have in common is what we don't like about ourselves. Sometimes we need to build new connections through proactive gestures of goodwill and sometimes we simply need to highlight the numerous positive connections that already exist between us. We often have structural connections that exist at a macro level. For example, maybe we are both nationals of the same country or maybe we come from the same or neighboring cities. Identifying with another person based on your membership in a common group can build a sense of affiliation. Perhaps we have

both been sent by our superiors or constituents to get a deal done with the other side. Simply stating our shared or similar roles at the negotiating table is a way that we can increase our affiliation with the other side and facilitate the process of working together. Pointing this out in combination with something more specific or personal may seem like a distracting truism, but in reality it can often help to humanize us in the eyes of another negotiator (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005).

Building or highlighting personal ties to a fellow negotiator can also be a very powerful way to build affiliation and get you working together. Sharing a story about your family or talking about a personal problem (if appropriate) can be a way to increase the amount of emotional closeness between two sides (Ibid.).

However, there is often a danger that sharing personal information or building affiliation can get you taken advantage of. In fact, some people may actively try to manipulate you by building affiliation in order to pursue their own selfish gains (Shapiro, 2002). What I am advocating, however, is not a Machiavellian approach to negotiation. At its core, the process of building affiliation involves open and honest communication and most importantly, a genuine regard for the other's well being, not a manipulation of your own or someone else's emotional state for selfish or malevolent ends (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005).

#### 4. A Look at How Autonomy and Affiliation Interplay in the Context of Negotiation:

It is not news to hear that many negotiators don't always have the amount of autonomy or affiliation they want in a particular negotiation. What negotiators might not realize is that the amount of autonomy and affiliation they want or need is not constant and changes drastically as their roles in society change (Shapiro, 2002). For example, a private in the United States Army may play a number of roles in his life. When in service he may play the role of gunner or soldier; at home he might play the roles of husband and father and when hanging out with friends he may play the roles of companion, role model, etc. It is important to realize that as his roles change from day to day, hour-to-hour or minute-to-minute, his need for autonomy and affiliation can also change. When playing the role of soldier, he may have a very low need for autonomy but a high need for affiliation. When interacting in the role of role model, he may have a high need for autonomy and not such a high need for affiliation. When playing the role of father, he may

exhibit a relatively high need for both. As our needs for autonomy and affiliation change, our emotional responses will differ to similar or even the same phenomena (Lazarus, 1991; Shapiro, 2002). It is often helpful to realize that a negotiator's needs change based on what role they are playing. However, the role negotiators play in any given negotiation is often unknown to us and frequently unknown to them. While we may not be able to find out what role a negotiator is playing and remain sensitive to it, being aware of the fact that roles and needs do change can help us in our interactions with other negotiators. Realizing this can help us to search for clues as to what types of core concerns people value most in *each* interaction or negotiation. This is much more constructive than maintaining a more static view of how much autonomy person (x) needs and how much affiliation person (y) needs.

Autonomy and affiliation are more intertwined than most people realize. When we do something that affects someone's need for one, we are often indirectly affecting their need for the other. For example, not inviting a colleague to an important meeting may decrease their feeling of affiliation towards us because we are excluding them. While we may realize this, we might not realize how our decision to exclude them can also drastically affect their sense of autonomy. If you exclude someone from a key meeting, not only are they likely to feel a decrease in their level of affiliation with you, they may also feel a major drop in their autonomy because they are no longer part of the decision making process. A minor hit to our or another's sense of autonomy or affiliation may amount to an acceptable outcome when measured in terms of immediate cost-benefit to the relationship or to a potential agreement formation. But, when an action impinges on more than one core concern, namely autonomy **and** affiliation, the result can be an emotional outburst far more severe than we had originally thought and far more damaging than we would be willing to accept. What's worse, I believe that when someone's need for autonomy is underserved to a certain point, there tends to be a correlated (and often unintended) affect on their feelings of affiliation with their negotiating counterpart. Understanding this process requires us to look at the way emotions are experienced during negotiation.

Understanding emotions and emotional outbursts is a good way to recognize whether or not a negotiator's need for autonomy or affiliation is being met. Consider the case of frustration. On the surface, frustration appears to be one of the more docile expressions of having disturbed the emotions or affected a fellow negotiator's core concern. However, in line with Shapiro's notion of emotion as a forward-looking device, I believe that frustration acts as an important

signal whose significance is generally undervalued and misunderstood in negotiations. After conducting a study with 63 subjects, collecting stories about frustrating negotiating experiences, I have seen a pattern in the way frustration develops and the consequences it brings about. Frustration very often acts as a signal, telling us that our core concern of autonomy is not being met, which if left unaddressed, can have devastating effects on affiliation levels in negotiation, ruining relationships and potential agreements.

A case in point involves ‘Marc’<sup>1</sup> one of the 63 subjects interviewed for the research in this paper, a homeowner with a property dispute.

*I had been having a disagreement with a longtime neighbor and friend of mine for quite some time. For some reason, one day he decided that the property line was not being respected and that my driveway was actually on his land. He had put a few objects marking what he felt was the original property line, which blocked my access to the driveway a few weeks prior to our final conversation. I had looked at my initial lease agreement with the city and could see that the property line was in fact situated in my favor. When I showed this to him he ignored it and said that I could “take him to court” if I was that sure I was right. I kept on presenting him with evidence that showed the true nature of the property line and he kept ignoring its significance. He even said I should be grateful that he let me use “his” property for so long.*

*Having been neighbors for so long, I really didn’t want to ruin our relationship with a messy court case so I eventually offered to pay him for the land. He rejected what I felt was a reasonable offer and soon after he planted trees across the “property line” and began parking his own car there. I proceeded to buy another neighboring piece of land to use as my driveway and promptly filed a lawsuit. We’re still in court today.*

What’s interesting about this story is not the amount of patience and due process Marc showed in dealing with a seemingly unreasonable neighbor, but his emotional response to his neighbor’s actions. Throughout the negotiation process Marc reported feeling frustrated. Sensing his growing frustration and the potential threat to a once amicable relationship, Marc continued

to negotiate “rationally” by presenting evidence and making very generous offers. Despite his perception that his neighbor was negotiating in extremely “bad faith”, he was able to remain feeling a high level of affiliation towards him, for a while. When asked at what point the relationship was actually damaged, he explained that the act of planting trees across the property line immediately elicited feelings of immense frustration, anger and resentment towards the neighbor that had not arisen prior to that point. When asked what that action represented, he responded by saying that it was a signal telling him he was never going to get his driveway back. The existence of a permanent physical barrier was a sign that no matter what evidence he presented, getting a legally enforced change to the property line was going to be way more hassle than it was worth. At that point, he “knew” he could do nothing to affect his neighbor’s decision. He eventually instigated legal action more as a retributive action to seek compensation than as a negotiating strategy.

Looking at this negotiation through the lens of the core concerns, we can understand Marc’s emotional reaction as a product of the interplay between autonomy and affiliation. Throughout the negotiation, there was a pattern of autonomy assertion and autonomy infringement. By failing to listen to Marc’s initial argument, Marc’s neighbor was limiting his autonomy, resulting in Marc’s feelings of frustration. In response to this perceived assault on his autonomy, Marc attempted to expand his autonomy by increasing the pool of information available to his neighbor through showing a lease agreement that depicted the property line in his favor. When the neighbor refused to listen to these additional arguments, he further impacted Marc’s autonomy causing Marc to feel even higher levels of frustration. After that Marc again attempted to expand his autonomy by offering to buy the property.

Clearly, Marc’s sense of control over the situation was decreasing. When his neighbor said things like “you can take me to court”, Marc told me that he felt as if his neighbor was actually saying “I don’t feel close to you”. Despite a series of these types of comments, Marc still maintained a certain level of perceived affiliation. It wasn’t until his neighbor planted the trees across the driveway that his sense of affiliation plummeted and the relationship was ruined. Interestingly, this is the exact point where Marc felt he lost his sense of autonomy in the negotiation.

Recall, the power of autonomy lies in our ability to not only make decisions but to affect decisions that others make. When his neighbor planted the trees across the property line, in effect

what he said was, “this negotiation is over”. This removed all traces of Marc’s perceived autonomy in the negotiation. Before that point Marc reported feeling a certain sense of autonomy in that he had the ability to change his neighbor’s position or at least get some of his interests met through negotiation. This is why he kept presenting his neighbor with evidence to support his case. Until he felt he no longer had any influence in the negotiation the relationship remained relatively undamaged and their level of affiliation remained reasonably high. The exact moment when Marc lost all of his felt autonomy, he reported feeling his affiliation levels plummet, believing the relationship to be ruined.

This story suggests a number of things. Firstly, Marc’s feelings of frustration rose each time his neighbor acted in a way that he felt would reduce his ability to get his driveway back. In other words, frustration arose as a signal alerting him to his need for autonomy. Secondly, when his autonomy was so limited that he reported feeling *no* ability to affect his neighbor’s decision, his sense of affiliation with the neighbor, which had remained relatively constant throughout the negotiation, plummeted immediately. Thirdly, once he reached this “tipping point” where his feelings of autonomy and affiliation plummeted, the negotiation effectively broke down.

Similarly, let’s look at another of the 63 subjects, ‘Dorothy’, as she recalls a sale that went wrong:

*I used to be in sales for small company that sold an array of plastic containers. My job required me to visit shops, markets or any place that people might have a need for our products. One time I remember talking with a shop owner in a large fruit market. This particular shop owner seemed very interested in one line of our products so I spent a little more time explaining the pricing, payment programs and general benefits to buying from us. The more I talked the more interested she became so I was sure I was going to make a sale; I just needed to close it.*

*When I finally asked her what kind of order she would like to make, she informed me that she already had a supplier for all of her containers and store appliances and therefore couldn’t buy anything from me. I couldn’t believe it! I could barely stop myself from shouting and insulting her. I left the shop extremely frustrated, dejected and angry with the customer for wasting my time.*

What happened here? Why was Dorothy's emotional reaction so strong to the simple loss of a sale? Surely she had come close to closing a deal before only to have it fall apart at the last second. Why did this experience leave her feeling so unusually emotional and angry with the potential customer? Again, we can understand this interaction through our lens of the core concerns.

We can see that throughout her interaction with the shop owner, Dorothy felt a sense of autonomy. She viewed the interaction as a negotiation in which she was explaining the benefits of the product in an effort to influence the prospective client to enter into a mutually beneficial agreement. As the customer's interest in the product grew, Dorothy reports having felt a certain degree of fondness towards her. In other words, the two slowly began building affiliation. So why did she report feeling resentment or an extremely low sense of affiliation with the shop owner by the end of the transaction? While some people may argue that it was the failure to reach a negotiated agreement that caused the feelings of frustration and resentment, Dorothy's explanation leads us to believe otherwise.

*She seemed interested the whole time so I was really sure I was going to make the sale. Finally, after she had listened to my whole sales pitch, I found out about her existing deal with the other supplier so I realized had NO chance of closing the deal. If she had told me up front about the supplier it wouldn't have been so bad. Even if she had said she didn't want to buy them (the containers) for some other reason, I wouldn't have been so frustrated. But I had spent all that time for nothing, when I could have been talking to other customers where I would have at least had the chance of selling something.*

Dorothy stresses the fact that her feelings of frustration and resentment stemmed from the realization that she had "no chance" of reaching an agreement, not out of the failure to reach an agreement itself. The awareness that she had "no chance" of influencing the prospective buyer's decision was actually a realization that she had lost all of her autonomy in this transaction, namely her ability to affect the customer's decision. With the sudden drop in her perceived autonomy she reported feeling frustration and also a resentment towards the customer (i.e., a

drop in affiliation). Dorothy admits that if the customer had rejected her offer on other grounds (e.g., price, preference for competing products, etc.) she wouldn't have experienced such a high level of frustration and resentment. If the reason were price, for example, she would have known that she could have sold the product if she wanted to, but if she didn't, it was because she wasn't willing to because of the desire to make higher profits for herself. The customer's existing deal with another supplier meant that no matter what Dorothy did, she would be unable to affect the customer's decision to buy her product, therefore, she suddenly felt she had no autonomy in the interaction. As soon as she realized that her perceived autonomy had been so drastically out of synch with the autonomy she actually had, she reported feeling anger, or a drop in her affiliation with the customer and abandoned the negotiation.

Like Marc's situation, this case highlights the effects that a drop in perceived autonomy can have on affiliation levels. It gives us a window into the *tipping point* where the negotiation broke down. Dorothy clearly explains that if her autonomy had not been so drastically reduced, she believes she would not have felt such resentment towards, or decreases in affiliation with, the potential customer. Furthermore, the timing of the drop in affiliation levels is significant. It was at the precise moment that she realized she had "no chance" of affecting the customer's decision, or no autonomy in the negotiation, that her feelings of affiliation with the prospective customer deteriorated and the negotiation broke down.

These two stories represent a pattern that emerged throughout the duration of the study in question. When peoples' sense of autonomy is impinged upon they frequently reported feeling frustrated. When that level of autonomy reached a level the subject believed was unacceptable with respect to the role they are playing (or when it became non existent), they reported feeling a very significant and immediate drop in affiliation levels with their negotiating counterpart. It is at this precise moment that many negotiations breakdown and relationships become damaged or destroyed.

It is interesting to note that many times, subjects even reported consciously limiting their own autonomy for fear that asserting it would affect the relationship, or cause a drop in affiliation levels between the two parties. However, when an individual's autonomy was affected to a certain point, it almost always led to an unexpected and undesired drop in affiliation levels despite the subject's initial attempt to sacrifice his or her own autonomy in favor of higher affiliation. In other words, when the study subjects' concern for autonomy became too threatened



or too underserved, affiliation levels, relationships and negotiations always took a turn for the worse.

These findings suggest that we need to pay careful attention to feelings of frustration and negotiators' desired levels of autonomy if we want to maintain relationships and reach agreements.

So if we realize that reduced autonomy in a negotiation can have dramatic consequences on affiliation levels and agreement formation, how do we know when an action is impinging on someone's autonomy? For one, the use of certain language can alert us to the possibility that we might be experiencing a blow to our perceived autonomy.

The use of controlling language should act as a flag, informing us that our autonomy might be affected. Controlling language, as in telling someone what they 'ought' to do is more likely to result in frustration than anger, and frustration is often a sign that one's autonomy is being impinged upon. So, when you hear someone using language that you perceive to be somewhat controlling, you might want to look for ways to expand your autonomy even before it is affected. Then again, words and phrases tend to have different effects in a negotiation depending on circumstances and norms (Schroth et al, 2005). For example, in a rigid, hierarchical organization it may be normal to use normative or controlling language when negotiating with coworkers and subordinates and therefore may not be perceived as an emotional trigger or a limitation of our felt autonomy. Research shows that controlling language tends to evoke more frustration in personal conflicts than in work related ones. In work related conflicts the use of such controlling words (i.e., ought to, should etc.) tends to evoke more surprise (Ibid.). Despite these exceptions, the use of controlling language should raise a flag in a negotiator's head, telling her to mind her sense of autonomy. If ignored, she runs the risk of experiencing disturbing or distracting emotions such as frustration and an eventual decrease in feelings of affiliation.

##### 5. An Offering of Some Prescriptive Advice on How to Deal with the Interplay Between Our Needs for Autonomy and Affiliation:

Now that we have looked at the relationship between our needs for autonomy and affiliation in negotiation we have to look beyond mere positive statements in search of some

helpful ways of noticing and dealing with them in the moment. After all, pointing out there is a potential problem is only half of the battle.

First of all, one might be asking if it is possible to mediate our emotional responses to environmental stimuli. To understand if emotions can be mediated, let's first look at the nature and role of emotion. Lazarus (1991) explains how thought causally precedes feelings of emotion and that subsequent thought is then affected by that emotion. Furthermore, emotion is forward looking and used as a communicative device to direct attention towards a core concern (Shapiro, 2002; Fisher and Shapiro, 2005). If emotion serves a purpose, that is, to direct our attention to one of our core concerns, and cognitive thought precedes that emotion, then in theory we can learn to think both prior to and after the experience of emotion, in a way that effectively furthers the goal of that emotion, or satisfies our core concerns.

Negotiators *can* manipulate their and others' emotions during a negotiation for the purposes of strategic gain and creating mutually beneficial outcomes (Shapiro, 2002; Kumar, 1997). Merely by learning what triggers emotional outbursts we can learn to avoid using these triggers before, during and prior to forming a negotiated agreement (Schroth et al, 2005). In other words simply realizing that people have the core concerns of autonomy and affiliation and that a decrease in felt autonomy often has negative effects of affiliation levels and the quality of agreements can lead to avoiding unilateral decision-making provoking harmful emotional outbursts in others. Also, looking at—or under—our emotions by using the core concerns framework can give us a certain sense of detachment from the emotions *we* are experiencing, which can be a good way to regulate the degree of the emotion felt (Lazarus, 1991). In other words, simply realizing that you have the need for a certain degree of autonomy and affiliation may mediate your reaction to an impingement of one or the other.

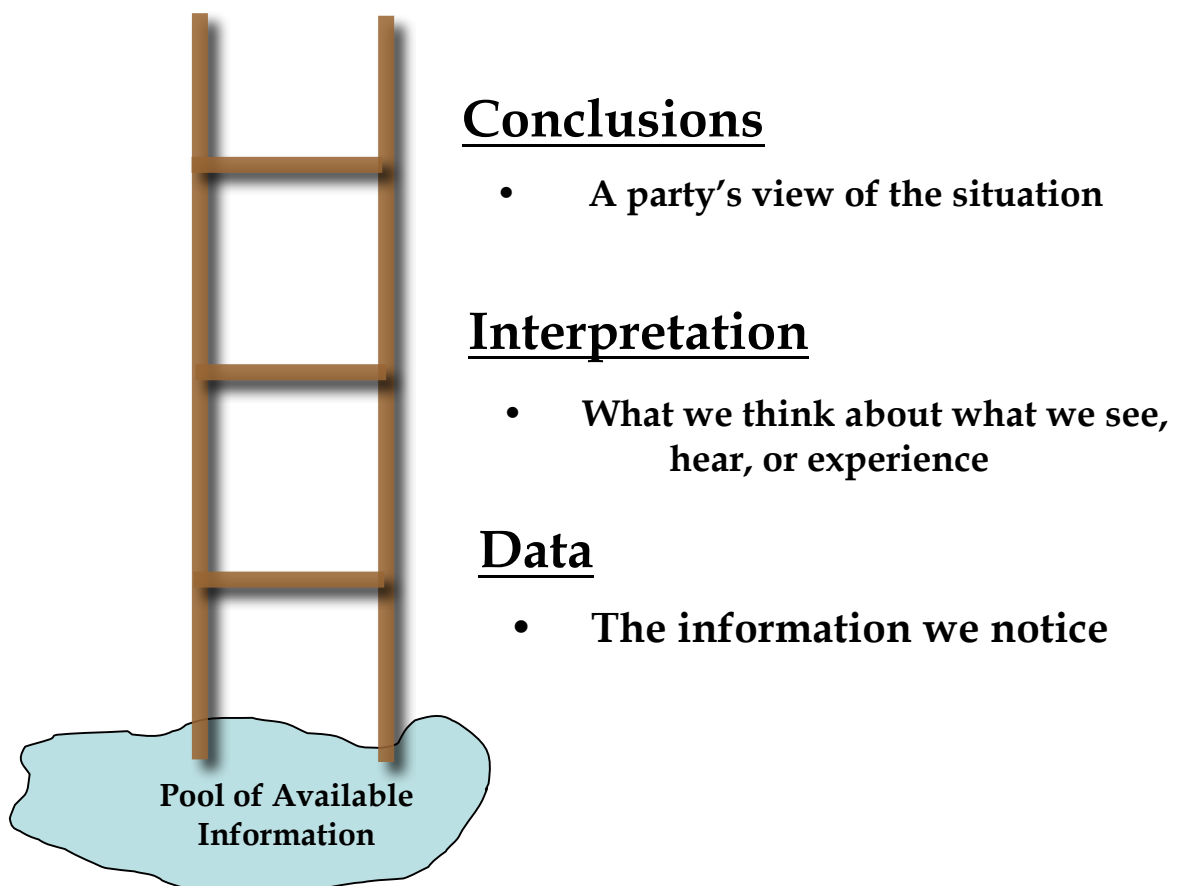
However, assuming that after putting down this paper you do start to notice the way your concerns for autonomy and affiliation are affected in a negotiation and you still experience extremely strong destructive emotions. What then? How can we deal with our emotions in a way that addresses our need for autonomy and our need for affiliation at the same time? Above all, how can we do this while reaching a mutually beneficial agreement?

As we have seen, negotiators often impinge upon others' autonomy without even realizing it. In this case, it can be helpful to share your concern with your negotiating counterpart to alert them of the impact their behavior is having on you. But how do you do that? First of all,

the chances are that the person you are negotiating with has no idea what a core concern is and even if they do, they are not likely to change their behavior based on a statement like “You are limiting my autonomy”, “I don’t feel like I have a say in this process” or even “I think I’m going to need to give more input before I’m ready to accept this proposal”. Messages like that are not particularly constructive even when dealing with the most collaborative negotiator, let alone the hard bargainer. Communicating your need for the expression of autonomy or an increase in affiliation is a subtle process that requires a certain amount of priming your fellow negotiator.

One tool that can be of tremendous help when trying to communicate something important to you is called the ladder of inference (Stone, Patton and Heen, 1999). The ladder of inference illustrates the way we formulate conclusions in everyday conversation and in negotiation. Depicted in the figure below, the ladder shows each step we take in formulating a thought about a given phenomenon.

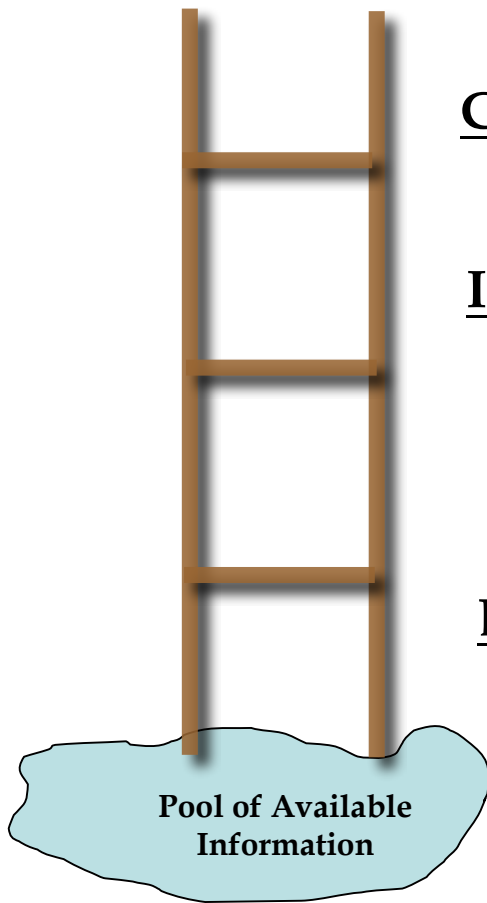
Figure 1.



\* Figure 1 taken from 2005 Insight Partners Open Enrollment Negotiation Workshop Training Materials, based on Argyris, *Action Science*.

Working your way up the rungs of the ladder in a conversation is a good way to explain your feelings, point of view, etc., to your fellow negotiator. At the bottom of the ladder exists the pool of data from which we select pieces that are relevant to us in any given moment. In other words, it is all the information that is available to us. From the pool of information that is available to us, we select certain pieces of data we believe to be relevant based on the context. Moving up the ladder, we then interpret the data that we have selected or noticed. In other words, we interpret an occurrence to mean something to us. After that, we form a conclusion based on our interpretation of the data. Most human interaction occurs at the top of the ladder, where people fire conclusions back and forth at one another. The problem is, it is difficult to listen to another person's conclusion when you don't know the rest of their ladder. While we all subconsciously know our own ladders, most of the time we run up to the top in a conversation so quickly that we don't realize we are doing it. The entire content of our message to another negotiator is often only one part of the ladder or the final result of a complex process of deductive or inductive reasoning (Ibid.).

There are a number of ways this relates to frustration and autonomy. For one, by being clear about, and explaining, the causes of our frustration in a negotiation, we can begin to look for signs that tell us our autonomy is being limited. For example, let's take a conclusion that someone might come to in the middle of a negotiation or conflict with their boss. It is not uncommon for someone to come to the simple conclusion that their boss is bad manager. If we only articulate this surface level conclusion not only will we find it difficult to understand why we are getting so frustrated and emotional, we will find it almost impossible to realize how our frustration is resulting from an affected core concern. Consciously thinking about each rung of the ladder below a conclusion can give us clues about the messages our emotions are sending and how they may be trying to tell us about our need for a core concern. That might look something like this:



## Conclusions

- This person is a bad manager.

## Interpretation

- This person is a micromanager and micromanagers are bad managers.
- People who constantly check in on you, frequently modify minor details on your work and have a lot of rules are micro managers.

## Data

- This person comes into my office every hour to check on my progress.
- This person has made modifications on 4 of my last 5 projects.
- This person has more “rules” for standard tasks than anyone else in the company.

By looking at the contents of our ‘ladder’ when we are in a frustrating situation, we can start to notice how our core concerns may be motivating our emotional reactions and conclusions. In the previous example, we might look at what the pieces of data we selected have in common and why we are frustrated by them. Looking at our filter we can start to see that ‘micro managing’ is the major issue. When we ask ourselves what it is we don’t like about micro managers, we might find that we think they are overly controlling, bossy, etc. Noticing this, we can look at which one of our concerns is being impinged upon. In this case, the fact that we don’t like micro managers or controlling bosses suggests that our need for autonomy may not be as high as we would like when we interact with them.

Once we realize this, we can even use the ladder to explain to our boss why we are finding things difficult, thus alerting him or her to the problem. Doing this is far more constructive than saying “I don’t like working for you” because it *explains* your underlying

feelings, intentions and thoughts. Using the ladder of inference, you can respond to your own emotional reaction by legitimizing your feelings and clarifying your motives in the eyes of the other negotiator (Stone, Patton, Heen, 1999; Gray, 2003). If your fellow negotiator was not actually trying to control the situation or limit your autonomy, simply communicating the impact his actions are having on you is often enough get him to stop acting in a way that is detrimental to your need for autonomy. If the other negotiator responds negatively, you might consider getting him to explain why he feels he is concerns are more legitimate than yours. Having to answer by citing external standards of legitimacy, or benchmarks, is a good way to influence a person making decisions that don't seem fair (Fisher and Ury, 1991).<sup>ii</sup>

Fisher and Shapiro (2005) stress the importance of not impinging on another's autonomy and offer a few interesting ideas for how to go about making decisions with that in mind. One helpful suggestion is to Always Consult Before Deciding (ACBD) or at least Consider Consulting Before Deciding (CCBD). They explain how often people unilaterally make decisions that may seem trivial but may actually deeply affect other people. Just by considering what other people should be consulted before you make a decision can save you from unknowingly affecting someone's autonomy. Another tool called "Inform- Consult- Negotiate" (I-C-N), offers a structured way of deciding who should have what role in the decision making process before it begins.<sup>iii</sup> This approach can also save you the embarrassment and hassle of negatively impacting someone's core concerns (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005).

Sometimes, despite our best efforts to expand our own autonomy and avoid impinging on others' in a negotiation, another negotiator will knowingly or unknowingly limit or reduce our level of autonomy. The question now becomes: can we avoid the damage that a negatively affected sense of autonomy brings about? The case of 'Brendan', a third subject taken from the survey, shows how we can respond to an impinged autonomy, feelings of frustration and minimize the effects on affiliation levels and agreement formation. As Brendan recalls:

*I was once selling some of my personal property to a lady whom I had met a few times before. We agreed to a deal but she admitted that she didn't have the money up front. I told her that if she could pay me one week after she picked them up that would be fine. When the one-week was up she only paid me half of the money we had agreed upon. I was extremely frustrated so I went to her house and*

*told her that if she didn't want to pay the full amount I would be happy to take the items back, refund her money and sell them to someone else. I didn't actually want to go through all that hassle but I could tell she didn't want to part with the items at this point so I felt she would be more motivated to get me the money quickly if there was a chance I would take them back. She apologized, asked for one more week to pay the final amount and I agreed.*

*When the next week came around, I visited her house and she still didn't have the entire sum we had originally agreed upon. Now I was extremely frustrated and could feel myself getting angry at her. I realized that this was becoming more trouble than it was worth so I asked her to pick a date she thought she would have the money by and put in writing that she would have the entire sum then. She picked a date two weeks from that visit so when I left her house I was still feeling a little frustrated but confident that the situation would soon be resolved. When the date came, she finally paid the entire sum and my feelings of frustration and resentment were gone.”*

What happened here? After Brendan sold the woman his personal items, they had an agreement that she would pay within one week. When she failed to pay at the end of that week, instead of having to sit idly for another week, Brendan expanded his autonomy in the process by threatening to take back the items and resort to his Best Alternative to the Negotiated Agreement or BATNA (Fisher and Ury, 1991). Even though he didn't actually want to resort to his BATNA, Brendan revealed his BATNA as a strategic means of expanding his autonomy. By offering to take the items back and refund her money, Brendan felt he was motivating the customer to pay him or affecting her decision of how and when to pay him, thus increasing his perceived autonomy. While this didn't actually result in any immediate gain for him, it minimized his frustration by making him feel that he was doing something to influence the process (i.e., expanding his autonomy). Brendan later confided that had he not done this, the customer's additional delay of one week would most likely have left him feeling much more frustrated than it did in this case. When the second week came, and the customer failed to produce the agreed upon payment, Brendan reports feeling rising frustration levels and growing resentment towards the customer. In response to this, he expanded his autonomy again by suggesting a formal

contract. In addition to this, he expanded the customer's autonomy by allowing her to choose the final date of payment. While this action surely contributed to payment finally being made, it also increased *both* parties felt autonomy, limited feelings of frustration and prevented further damage to affiliation levels and the negotiated agreement.

In fact, Brendan explains that had he simply had to wait for the entire month for the payment, without taking action in the way he did, he would have felt way more frustrated and significantly more angry at the customer, perhaps causing him to back out of the deal and forcefully take back his property. So while his attempts to expand his autonomy did not immediately satisfy his interests, it unquestionably mediated the feelings of disturbing emotions and contributed to a much more constructive working relationship with the other party.

This story, along with the account of 'Marc' and his property dispute, highlight a few ways that we can increase our own sense of autonomy in a negotiation. Should you feel yourself becoming frustrated in a negotiation, and realize your emotion is stemming out of a desire for more felt autonomy, a few ways to mediate your emotions and increase your autonomy are to:

- Suggest or recommend a few additional options to the ones being considered.
- Engage in joint brainstorming.
- Consider revealing your best alternative (BATNA).
- Increase the pool of information available to the other negotiator.
- Insist on using standards of legitimacy.

In addition to not limiting others' felt autonomy and expanding our own, you might want to consider how you can actually help your negotiating counterpart(s) expand their autonomy. If we often find it difficult to realize when we want autonomy and how to expand it, it is extremely likely that the person sitting across from us is also struggling with the same issues. However, sometimes the person we are negotiating with will attempt to expand their autonomy in a way that is not particularly constructive or conducive to the formation of a mutually acceptable agreement. When people are attempting to satisfy their need for autonomy in a way that is impinging on our autonomy or is contrary to our substantive interests, it can be helpful to suggest a few ways that they can expand their autonomy in a way that is more constructive or at least less



destructive. Good corporate managers often use this technique. Consider the example I witnessed in a medium size PC sales company.

'Mike' was a senior manager in the firm, responsible for meeting his quarterly quotas, which required a very high volume of sales from his more junior staff. Mike had a strong interest in increasing overall revenue and profits from his department. Instead of simply telling his subordinates that they would have to produce (x) number of sales or be fired, which would have severely reduced their felt autonomy and company morale, Mike took a different approach. Looking into what variables resulted in high sales numbers, Mike presented his staff with a range of performance criteria including total number of sales calls, total talk time, average talk time, margin levels, number of sales etc. He then offered an incentive program for the people who exhibited the best performance based on any combination of variables they saw fit (provided, of course, their sales numbers did not drop significantly). This gave them, as employees, the freedom to choose which of the variables they were going to focus on most and pursue them accordingly.

Two months after he had established this structure of performance outcomes, the department had increased its total sales by roughly 10X! Weekly targets soon became daily targets, monthly targets became the new weekly targets and the existing quarterly target system had to be completely restructured due to the dramatically increased performance levels.

What accounted for this unprecedented growth in productivity? Firstly, each employee was given the freedom to work hardest on the performance variables of his or her choice. Not only did this give the employees a feeling of autonomy in their work that they had never felt before, it gave them the opportunity to pursue what they liked most and consequently, were most productive at. Secondly, the increased satisfaction caused by increased perceived autonomy led to a huge boost in company morale, employee motivation and overall performance levels. I remember witnessing two employees staying late one night to see who could field the most calls while maintaining a certain level of average talk time.

It is important to realize that Mike's attempt to bolster his employees' sense of felt autonomy was not a blanket approach of telling them they could do whatever they wanted. What was especially effective was his use of information. Mike gave limits to their degree of autonomy and provided them with the necessary information to make effective use of that

autonomy (by highlighting variables that would lead to increasing sales). Simply giving someone unbridled autonomy without enough information can often have negative effects. Too much choice without any information can simply be a burden, not a way to increase your autonomy (Deci and Flaste, 1995). Through structuring this system using variables that he knew would lead to an increase in profits, not only was the increase in employees' autonomy not undermining Mike's interests, it was satisfying them.

Setting limits is a tricky process when we are trying not to step on someone's toes, let alone when we try to increase their sense of autonomy. If the limits are too narrow, others may feel their sense of autonomy is being curtailed rather than expanded. Setting them too wide may leave you vulnerable by giving another party the opportunity to make decisions that run contrary to your interests or even limit *your* autonomy. When offering choices to a fellow negotiator in a way that involves setting certain limitations, effectively explaining the reason limits are being set is necessary to reduce the possibility of negatively affecting someone's sense of autonomy. Consequently, the added information can increase the two parties' sense of affiliation with each other by opening an added communication pathway that connects them in a different way. The key is to provide limits that are wide enough to allow enough choice within them to actually increase someone's felt autonomy while ensuring that they are narrow enough to make sure the choices they make won't damage your or their own goals, wants or needs. It is important to note here that this type of limit setting when attempting to allow others to expand their autonomy is easiest in one-down negotiations, or when dealing with people who work under you (Deci and Flaste, 1995).

Up until now all the suggestions given have relied on our ability to calmly and rationally think through our emotional reactions to manage them in a more constructive way. What about the times when we react emotionally to a decrease in our felt autonomy before we can even think of the potential harm that reaction is causing? Is there any way to stop doing that? One means of controlling or channeling your emotions in a negotiation that is getting more attention these days is the age-old practice of mindfulness meditation.

In contrast to mindlessness where we are simply acting and reacting on autopilot, without actually being present in the moment, mindfulness is a means of focusing attention on the present by cultivating a sense of self awareness, self-regulation, motivation and empathy through the practice of meditation. Our minds have a tendency to wander on their own, usually dwelling in

the past or future (Riskin, 2004). When we are negotiating, it can be difficult to process information and clues your fellow negotiator is trying to get across or handle any display of emotion (ours or theirs) if we are still thinking about the last point he or she made or trying to think of what we are going to say next. The process of mindfulness meditation can help bring you back into the present, focus on the content of what the other person is saying and help you regulate your response to that information all at once by removing the obstacles of disturbing emotions. Mindfulness meditation can lead to the ability to notice or at least ask questions like:

- What is going on in my body?
- What are these feelings or sensations indicative of?
- What assumptions are these things based on? (Fisher, 2004)

Doing this in real time allows a negotiator to notice and understand her emotional responses as they unfold. In other words, it can “insert a wedge of awareness” into a situation where we feel an impulsive urge to react to what is said or retaliate to an attack on our core concerns (Riskin, 2004). When we insert a certain wedge of awareness into a moment after we receive an emotionally triggering piece of data or language, we can gain enough time to realize which of our core concerns has been affected. Looking at physiological symptoms is a good way of investigating the source of a distracting or disturbing emotion. If we realize that we are feeling tension in our shoulders and neck, notice that as a result of a feeling of frustration and discover the source of frustration to be resulting from a drop in our level of felt autonomy, we can turn to a few of the aforementioned ways to boost our own autonomy therefore avoiding the potential drop in affiliation that may have otherwise resulted. Mindfulness meditation gives us the ability to recognize the physiological symptoms of disturbing emotions in real time, in the heat of an important negotiation and deal with them effectively.

The study of mindfulness meditation as a means of becoming better negotiators and mediators is steadily growing both in the legal profession and western society at large (Riskin, 2004).<sup>iv</sup>

Using these and other techniques you find helpful in a negotiation can make you more adept at understanding and dealing with your own emotions. Understanding and being able to channel the emotions experienced during a negotiation (by addressing your core concerns)

increases the likelihood of being able to make strategic use of the emotional dimension of negotiation (Fulmer and Barry, 2004). As we have seen, the benefits of this are numerous.

## 6. Conclusions

Understanding emotions in negotiation is a difficult task. Channeling them into constructive means of settling disputes and forming win-win agreements is something that takes patience, understanding and lots of practice. Up until very recently most people have advocated “leaving emotions out of it”, when referring to negotiation best practice advice. As we have seen, we can’t help but have emotions and ignoring them or attempting to ‘leave them out’ of the process of negotiation can have drastic consequences. Looking under the surface of our emotional responses, we can see that they are signals alerting us to our need for a fundamental core concern. Understanding our core concerns can help us form agreements and relationships and maximize value at the negotiating table. Ignoring our core concerns can get us into trouble. By failing to address the relationship between our needs for autonomy and affiliation, we run the risk of damaging relationships and failing to reach agreements in negotiation. The relationship between autonomy and affiliation helps explain why we often become frustrated and even damage relationships during negotiations. For negotiators to maximize substance and improve relationships, they must recognize and learn to handle the interplay between autonomy and affiliation.

The field of emotions in negotiation would be hugely benefited by further research into the concept of core concerns. Further study about the interplay between autonomy and affiliation would benefit all negotiators by examining the causes of negative or destructive emotions and offering ways to deal with the clash between a negatively affected sense of autonomy and its impact on affiliation. I intend to continue my study into this fascinating and important area of conflict resolution over the next few years in the course of my graduate studies.

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\* Full Bibliography Appended

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<sup>i</sup> The names of people documented in this paper have been changed to ensure their confidentiality.

<sup>ii</sup> For more information on the use of standards of legitimacy, see *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving in* (Fisher and Ury, 1991)

<sup>iii</sup> For further information on the I-C-N tool, please see *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* (Fisher and Ury, 1991) and *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as you Negotiate* (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005).

<sup>iv</sup> For further information on the practice of mindfulness meditation please visit

<http://www.pon.harvard.edu/research/projects/hnii.php>