**Theory One: Structural Violence (inequalities)**

Johann Galtung says that some conflict comes from *inequalities embedded in the social system*. In broader terms, anything that stops a person from achieving their full potential in life is violence, and can create conflict. He writes “Anything between the *actual* and the *potential* is violence.”

If inequalities are ingrained in society – in education, the job market, wealth distribution, welfare distribution, etc – then Galtung theorizes that conflict will always result, and cannot be resolved until the base inequalities are corrected.


**Theory Two: Human Needs**

John Burton theorizes that conflict stems from un-met human needs. He uses Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a base. There are basic needs - such as safety, shelter, food and water – that every human being must have met. Burton includes such needs as security, identity, recognition, autonomy, dignity and bonding in the list of needs that must be met.

According to this theory, frustration from not getting these needs met will lead to conflict. If humans cannot meet basic needs by non-violent means, they will fulfill these needs by violent means.


**Theory Three: the Function of Conflict**

Lewis Coser theorizes that all conflict fulfills a social function, and is therefore inevitable and necessary. Wars for independence, for example, fulfill a social need by granting (or denying) independence to the warring parties. Conflict in the workplace fulfills the social need of creating a hierarchy. In other words, conflict generates new norms and new institutions. In addition, it can be directly stimulating in the economic and technological realm.

The question raised, then, is if conflict should be solved. If conflict starts in order to fill a necessary social function, should conflict be resolved?


**Theory Four: Relative Deprivation**

Ted Robert Gurr theorizes that some conflict stems from *relative deprivation*. In contrast with the theory of structural violence, which is based on actual inequalities, relative deprivation is based on *perceived inequalities*, which may or may not be accurate.

Relative deprivation says that if I judge the quality of my life as inadequate based on specific standard, I will use conflict to increase the quality of my life. Specifically, if my expectations do not meet actuality, conflict will result.